

Reptiles for Beginners.

It can be difficult to decide just what kind of reptile is the best to buy when your knowledge on the subject is limited. No doubt, during the course of your research, you will have read many articles and found that sometimes information and advice given is contradictory. Pet shops that sell reptiles are one source of help, if you don't forget that the people working there make their living from selling. They may not always be totally objective. Likewise breeders might not always be as objective as they could, due to their obvious need to sell. The best advice by far would be that given by an experienced hobbyist or herpetologist, someone who has no vested interest in what animal you purchase; in other words, someone independent. Try herpetological clubs and societies if you are lucky enough to have one close to where you live. Above all, **take your time and consider carefully!**

With this sheet we are simply providing you with a brief list of what we consider to be appropriate reptile species for the beginner. They are all animals that we either keep, or have kept at some time. The list is not exhaustive and there are other species that would probably prove to be just as suitable.

The list includes a short description of the species and **our assessment** of their suitability for beginners. Take the assessment as you will.

Corn Snake (Genus – Elaphe)

These snakes have to be one of the most popular species kept by people who are new to the hobby. Good quality, captive bred specimens are readily available and



they are without doubt a very attractive species. They usually handle well and are a manageable size. There are several mutations and it can be very difficult to select an animal when you see the vast array of colours that are available. These snakes are also quite easy to breed under the right conditions.

Our assessment: This is an excellent choice for the beginner.

Kingsnake (Genus – Lampropeltis)



This is another very good snake for the beginner, with a wide variety of good captive bred animals to choose from and several different colour strains. These are normally quite good to handle but as with any snake, there are exceptions. It is important to know that these snakes are cannibals and will eat other snakes and reptiles so keep them apart! California Kingsnakes are recommended with many and varied colours mutations available. The Albino Kingsnakes can sometimes tend to be a little aggressive.

Our assessment: A very good choice.

Garter Snake (Genus – Thamnophis)

This species of snake was often said to be the typical 'first snake' for many new hobbyists. However, we are a little more cautious. There is no doubt that they are usually freely and widely available and in addition, fairly cheap to buy. Our experience has been that they can prove at times to be difficult feeders and moreover many suffer from skin disorders. It has been noted that many of this species have been wild caught specimens and as is often the case with wild animals of this type, not only do you purchase a snake, but you also inherit a significant parasite population.



Our assessment: Only recommended if the animal's history is known.

Western Hognose Snake (Genus – Heterodon)

Often overlooked, this particular species is a great little animal. They are a bulky snake but not very long, no more than around 40 inches fully grown. They have an unusual upturned snout giving them a 'character' of their own. In our experience they have



been easy to keep and have always fed well. Just a note of caution, they are a rear fanged species and carry a mild toxin in their saliva glands that is used to disable prey items and assist in digestion. People who are known to have allergic reactions should bear this in mind and use caution if handling.

Our assessment: Worthy of consideration if you are able to find them for sale

Royal Python (Genus – Python)

Can be seen in many pet shops and are often purchased by beginners. There is no doubt that the word 'python' and the striking look of this species attracts the new hobbyist. Beautifully marked and growing to a manageable size, they are certainly appealing. A word of caution, they have a reputation as problem feeders. Again, our experience is that they can occasionally be difficult, but will normally come around before serious concerns are raised.



Our assessment: Not a species we would particularly recommend as a **first** choice, but still very popular and worth the effort.

Bearded Dragon (Genus - Amphibolurus)

If you are looking for a lizard with attitude and a character to match, then this could be the one for you. They feed readily on insects and some fruit and vegetables. Rarely exceeding around 20 inches in length they are easily manageable. They have an odd defensive tactic of inflating their throats if they feel threatened in any way. However, they will rarely cause a handler any trouble.



Our assessment: Great lizard for a first time hobbyist.

Finally for now, we hope that the brief information given above will at least point you in the right direction in your quest for your first reptile. You would be wise to read up all you can about the species you are considering and get as much advice as is possible. Don't rely on one source, ask around, read books and magazines and don't

be pressured into buying an animal at first sight. **Go away and think about it.** Above all, ***please*** don't be persuaded to take on a large snake when you have no experience at all. You will certainly live to regret the decision sometime later. When you are absolutely certain of what you want, go get it and enjoy the start of what will prove to be a fascinating hobby.

Remember, if you want any further advice or assistance, contact us.