

## Feeding Hognose Snakes

**Feeding hognose snakes amphibians and mice.**

*By Bill Love*

For years I've caught toads and frogs to feed my hognose snakes. It's easy to pick them up around neighborhood streetlights after dark. I find mostly common and oak toads, but a few spadefoot and gopher frogs too. My eastern hognoses like them all and have done well for more than a year on a diet of nothing else. Should I be trying to switch them to mice? How do I scent mice to best get the hognoses to think they're toads?

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Eastern hognose snakes (*Heterodon platirhinos*) are the most-confirmed toad-eaters of the three species in North America. Despite this tendency, even they can be persuaded to accept mice. Most eastern hognose snakekeepers have tried to get them on mice for ease of feeding. City dwellers find collecting toads a hassle, not to mention that the supply is tenuous during the colder months of the year. Some also believe they're avoiding parasites with mice, though freezing the toads first should largely overcome that worry.

In your situation, though, with an apparently ample supply of native food at your disposal, why try to switch? If your animals are thriving, don't try to fix a nonexistent problem. The anurans you've been using are normal prey items and are abundant enough to continue as prime food for your captives — with one exception.

I'd eliminate Florida gopher frogs (*Rana capito aesopus*) from your snakes' menus. Not because the snakes won't enjoy them, but because gopher frogs are getting scarcer for the same reason that their tortoise namesakes are declining: habitat destruction and alteration. They are listed as a "Species of Special Concern" in Florida, so it's technically illegal to collect them. Let southern toads (*Bufo terrestris*) and oak toads (*B. quersicus*) bear the brunt of supplying the dinner fare for your pets.