

Rough Green Snake Diet

What do you feed a rough green snake?

By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP

Hello Dr. Wissman, My name is Steven. I am going into grade 10, and have an active interest in birds and herps. A few days ago my parents allowed me to buy my first pet snake. He is a rough green snake (wild caught), over 2 feet, and supposedly feeds well on guppies. I've been told by the pet store he also may pick off the occasional cricket. Do you have any suggestions for feeding my rough green snake? He seems very uninterested in food, and just sits in his asparagus plant. What should I do if he doesn't eat after awhile? I have also noticed my snake appears to have an infected anus; it seems to be slightly enlarged, is red and a little scabbed over. Is there any way I can treat this wound? Thanks you very much for your help. - Steven

I'm glad you have an interest in herps and birds, and it's always exciting when you acquire your first pet snake. The snake that you now are caring for, however, does not have a great reputation for being an easy snake to keep. First, you must make sure that you have a secure cage and lid for your snake, as rough green snakes (*Opheodrys aestivus*) are so thin that they can easily slither out of narrow spaces.

The rough green snake is a very shy snake that is very easily stressed. Unfortunately for you, this snake is not one that you will be able to handle, for the sake of its health.

It is easy to maintain them at a temperature that makes them happy, which is between 77 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit during the day, and between 65 and 75 degrees at night. Make sure you have a couple of thermometers in the enclosure so that you can monitor the temperature. They like low humidity, but offer a water bowl so that your snake can soak. The best thing you can do is to provide lots of hiding places and branches for climbing.

You mention that you were told that your snake is feeding well on guppies; however, rough green snakes are insectivorous, preferring soft-bodied insects and spiders. Try offering it waxworms, moths or other soft insects instead of fish. An occasional gut-loaded cricket is okay, but if it ingests too many hard-bodied insects, it may end up regurgitating the exoskeletons. Also, try feeding it at night, and try to keep it in a quiet room, away from family activity. If the temperature is in the right range and your snake still doesn't want to eat, don't wait too long before seeking the assistance of a herp vet, especially since it seems to have a lesion at the cloaca.

The other reason why you should take your new pet in to a vet is because wild-caught herps often have a parasite load that can build up in captivity. Because your new snake is already adult size, it might be having a difficult time adjusting to captivity, and because it has a medical problem already, those are several good reasons to seek out veterinary assistance.

Unfortunately the photo isn't clear enough to allow me to see exactly what is going on with the vent area. But, find yourself a good herp vet in your area, and please make an appointment for your new pet to have these problems addressed and the vent lesion treated by a professional.

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Need a Herp Vet?

If you are looking for a herp-knowledgeable veterinarian in your area, a good place to start is by checking the list of members on the Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarian (ARAV) web site at www.arav.com. Look for DVMs who appear to maintain actual veterinary offices that you could contact.