

## Amazon Tree Boa Garden Phase

**How do I know which phase of Amazon tree boa is the “garden phase”?**

*By Bill Love*

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No single photo can capture all the variations of the “garden phase” Amazon tree boa (*Corallus hortulanus*), but this one shows three of them. Photo by Bill Love / Snakes Courtesy Mike Heinrich.

Q. How do I know which phase of Amazon tree boa is the “garden phase”? There are many different colors and patterns. No two sources agree on which of them it is.

Charly Carrino  
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A. “Garden phase” is a phrase used interchangeably with any variation of the Amazon tree boa (*Corallus hortulanus*) not primarily yellow, orange or red. These attractively camouflaged snakes represent roughly 90 to 95 percent of those imported from Suriname and Guyana.

Imported specimens of all the myriad color and pattern phases tend to be hardy captives, but that hardiness comes with a price: These Amazon tree boas tend to be spirited captives. OK, I’m being too kind. The truth is that they are affectionately known as “face-eaters.” Most freshly imported adult Amazon tree boas lunge at your face if you let them within a couple feet. Look at the good side of that behavior: They’re aggressive feeders on rodents and birds.

People who love these snakes set them up in tall, multibranching vivaria for maximum viewing pleasure, and they never expect them to fill the role of a hands-on pet (like a boa constrictor might), so their tempers are seldom a concern. Amazon tree boas are best appreciated like tropical fish; view them in naturalistic habitats, but don’t touch.

Demand for the more colorful varieties of this 4- to 7-foot-long arboreal specialist has far outstripped that for the more cryptic Amazon tree boas in the pet trade. There is, though, a smaller, dedicated cult of loyal followers that admire, keep and breed the typical brown, tan and gray phases.

My wife breeds Amazon tree boas and insists that they calm down somewhat with patient handling, but this technique is especially effective with captive-born juveniles handled from birth. I’ve witnessed this personally and can attest it’s true. Increasingly abundant generations of captive-bred specimens, including many flashy new morphs, will hopefully help erase the bad reputation that decades of imports have infused upon the minds of some herpers.

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