

SOME SNAKE HANDLING GUIDELINES FOR BEGINNERS

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This information is intended to help beginning herp enthusiasts as they roam the wild in search of native Virginia snakes. However, the handling guidelines are also appropriate for both native and exotic species in captivity.

Know your snake.

- Do not handle a venomous snake. If you are not sure whether or not the snake is venomous, leave it alone and back away.
- Most snakes are not venomous. However, some species will usually bite in self-defense (e.g. racers, water snakes). Other species rarely if ever bite (e.g. worm snakes, earth snakes). Many species will sometimes bite when first caught, but will tame quickly if handled properly (e.g. rat snakes, king snakes). So, it is important to know your snake.

Proper Handling.

- Slow and steady movements help calm the snake.
- Pick the snake up mid-body if possible.
- Gently support the snake to reduce its fear of falling.
- Allow the snake to crawl from hand to hand.
- Avoid gripping the snake behind its head if possible. If you must grip, use all your fingers and avoid choking.
- Avoid picking up the snake by the tail. This can sometimes cause damage to the snake. Some snakes twirl to escape when dangling, causing additional damage.

Other precautions.

- Do not handle a snake that has recently eaten or it might regurgitate its meal.
- Excited snakes often exude a musky concoction of feces and uric acid when grabbed.
- Non-venomous snake-bites usually bleed freely, which is a good thing. Wash, apply antiseptic & bandage if needed.

Tools

- Snake Hooks are valuable tools used to safely investigate the places where snakes hide in the wild, and sometimes to manipulate a newly discovered snake. A variety of commercial snake hooks are available, or you can make your own from a garden hoe.
- Snake Tongs are also available commercially and are most valuable in the handling of venomous species. Be careful in using tongs to avoid injury to the snake.
- Pillow cases are useful in capturing non-venomous snakes that are likely to bite. With your arm protected inside the case, grasp the snake and pull the case inside-out around the snake and tie it off.