SOFTWARE & TECH

Green Tree Python As Pet

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Introduction: The Allure of the Emerald Jewel

There are few reptiles that captivate the imagination quite like the green tree python (*Morelia viridis*). With its vibrant emerald scales, arboreal lifestyle, and striking yellow or white juveniles that morph into brilliant green adults, this snake is often described as the jewelry of the reptile world. For many keepers, the dream of owning a green tree python as a pet is driven by pure aesthetics and the challenge of caring for a truly exotic species. However, the leap from admiring these snakes in photographs to housing one in your home is significant. While undeniably beautiful, the green tree python is not a beginner snake. It requires specific environmental conditions, a respectful understanding of its temperament, and a commitment to providing a vertical, humidity-controlled habitat. This article provides a complete, honest, and detailed guide to the realities of keeping a green tree python as a pet, covering everything from enclosure setup and feeding to handling and health care.

Understanding the Green Tree Python: A Species Overview

Native to the rainforests of New Guinea, Indonesia, and the Cape York Peninsula of Australia, the green tree python is a true arboreal constrictor. In the wild, it spends almost its entire life coiled on branches, waiting to ambush prey such as small mammals, birds, and lizards. This ambush-predator lifestyle directly dictates how you must care for it in captivity.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this species is its ontogenetic color change. Hatchling green tree pythons are born either bright yellow, brick red, or occasionally blue or orange. They do not turn their iconic green color until they are between six months and two years old. This transformation is triggered by size and maturity, not age, and adds an extra layer of intrigue to raising a juvenile.

Size and Lifespan

When considering a green tree python as a pet, it is essential to understand their physical requirements. Adults typically reach between 4 and 6 feet (1.2 to 1.8 meters) in length. While they are not massive snakes like a reticulated python, their bodies are thick and muscular relative to their length. With proper care, these snakes are long-term commitments, often living 15 to 20 years in captivity, with some individuals exceeding 25 years.

Is the Green Tree Python the Right Pet for You?

Before purchasing any animal, you must assess your experience level. It is strongly recommended that you do not acquire a green tree python as a pet if you are a first-time snake owner. Here is why:

- Temperament: Green tree pythons are known for being defensive and nippy. While captive-bred individuals are calmer than wild-caught ones, they are still high-strung. They do not enjoy handling and will often bite out of fear or stress.
- Specific Husbandry: They require very precise temperature and humidity levels. Mistakes in husbandry

often lead to respiratory infections, scale rot, or regurgitation.

- Feeding Challenges: Juveniles can be notoriously picky eaters and may require specialized techniques like scenting or braining prey items.
- Cost: The initial setup for a green tree python is considerably more expensive than for a ball python or corn snake, primarily due to the need for a tall, well-ventilated enclosure with advanced misting systems.

Creating the Ideal Enclosure

Setting up the correct habitat is the single most important factor in successfully keeping a green tree python as a pet. Remember, these are arboreal animals. They need height, not necessarily floor space.

Enclosure Size and Type

For an adult green tree python, the minimum recommended enclosure size is 24 inches long, 24 inches deep, and 36 to 48 inches tall (60cm x 60cm x 90-120cm). PVC enclosures or front-opening glass terrariums are preferred over screen cages because they hold humidity much better. Screen cages can be used in very humid climates, but in most homes, they will cause the enclosure to dry out too quickly.

Temperature Gradient

Like all reptiles, green tree pythons require a thermal gradient to regulate their body temperature. You must provide a basking spot and a cool side.

- Basking Spot: 88-90°F (31-32°C) – This should be a warm branch located high in the enclosure.
- Ambient Warm Side: 82-85°F (28-29°C).
- Cool Side: 75-78°F (24-25°C).
- Nighttime Drop: A slight drop to 70-75°F (21-24°C) is acceptable and even beneficial.

Heating Methods: Use a radiant heat panel (RHP) or a ceramic heat emitter (CHE) connected to a thermostat. Never use heat rocks, as they cause severe burns. Overhead heating is best because it mimics the sun and allows the snake to warm its dorsal surface.

Humidity and Hydration

This is where many keepers fail. A green tree python needs humidity levels between 50% and 70%, with spikes to 90-100% after misting. Low humidity leads to dehydration and stuck sheds, while constant high humidity without ventilation causes scale rot and bacterial infections.

Best Practices for Humidity:

1. Use a quality hygrometer to monitor levels daily.
2. Mist the enclosure heavily once or twice a day. An automatic misting system (like MistKing) is highly recommended for consistency.
3. Provide a large water bowl. Not only does this provide drinking water, but evaporation from the bowl also helps maintain ambient humidity.
4. Use a substrate that holds moisture without becoming waterlogged, such as cypress mulch, orchid bark, or a bioactive soil mix. Avoid aspen or paper towels for long-term housing.

Perches and Foliage

Without proper perches, a green tree python will be stressed and may develop health issues. You must provide multiple horizontal branches of varying thicknesses (from finger-thick to wrist-thick) placed at different heights across the enclosure. These branches should be sturdy and secure. Many keepers use PVC pipes wrapped in cork bark or natural grapevine wood.

Foliage is equally important. Green tree pythons are ambush predators that feel secure when hidden. Use dense artificial or live plants (like pothos or snake plants) to create hiding spots. A stressed snake is a sick

snake, so providing ample cover reduces stress significantly.

Feeding Your Green Tree Python

Feeding is a topic of great importance when discussing the green tree python as a pet. Their diet in captivity consists entirely of appropriately sized rodents.

Prey Size and Schedule

- Hatchlings (0-6 months): Hoppers or fuzzy mice (1-2 per week). Hatchlings can be challenging; some will only accept scenting or live prey initially.
- Juveniles (6-18 months): Adult mice or small rats (every 7-10 days).
- Adults (18+ months): Medium to large rats (one appropriately sized prey item every 10-14 days).

Overfeeding is a major problem in captivity. A healthy green tree python has a diamond-shaped body, not a round one.

Frozen vs. Live Prey

It is always safer and more ethical to feed frozen-thawed rodents. Live prey can injure or kill your snake by biting and scratching. Almost all captive-bred green tree pythons can be transitioned to frozen-thawed food with patience. If you acquire a picky feeder, try techniques such as braining (piercing the skull of the rodent to release scent) or dipping the rodent in chicken broth.

Feeding Method

Green tree pythons are arboreal. They prefer to take prey from a perch rather than from the ground. Using long forceps, dangle the thawed rodent in front of the snake while it is sitting on its branch. This mimics their natural hunting behavior and stimulates a feeding response. Never leave a dead rodent in the enclosure if the snake refuses it, as it will rot quickly in the humid environment.

Handling and Temperament

If you are looking for a snake to handle frequently, a green tree python is likely not the best choice. These snakes are primarily display animals. They tolerate handling only very briefly and often show signs of stress, such as hissing, striking, or coiling into a tight defensive ball.

How to Handle Safely

1. Move slowly and deliberately. Fast movements trigger their feeding or defensive instincts.
2. Support the snake's body fully. Never grab them; instead, gently scoop them from underneath.
3. Keep handling sessions very short (5-10 minutes maximum) and infrequent (once a week or less).
4. Never handle a green tree python when it is in blue (about to shed) or after it has eaten (wait at least 48-72 hours).

Important Safety Note: While their bite is not venomous, green tree pythons have exceptionally long, sharp teeth. A bite can be painful and bloody. They often hold on and chew. Remain calm; running water or a drop of alcohol on their nose usually encourages them to release. Always wash the wound thoroughly.

Common Health Issues

Keeping a green tree python as a pet comes with specific health risks. Being proactive is the best medicine.

- Respiratory Infections (RI): Caused by low temperatures or excessive humidity. Symptoms include open-mouth breathing, wheezing, and bubbles of mucus. This is a veterinary emergency.
- Stuck Shed: Almost always due to low humidity. Soaking the snake in a shallow, lukewarm bath and providing a humid hide can help. Never peel stuck shed off with your fingers.

- Scale Rot: Caused by wet, dirty substrate. Prevent by spot-cleaning daily and using a well-draining substrate.
- Regurgitation: Usually caused by handling the snake too soon after feeding, or by the temperature being too low to allow digestion. Do not feed for 10-14 days after a regurgitation.
- Obesity & Hepatic Lipidosis: A common killer of pet green tree pythons. Feed less frequently, and do not power-feed. An obese snake has a round, bulging body and a thick neck.

Where to Acquire Your Green Tree Python

If you have decided that you can meet the challenges of keeping a green tree python as a pet, the next step is sourcing your animal responsibly. **Never** buy a wild-caught (WC) green tree python. WC animals are almost always heavily parasitized, dehydrated, and extremely stressed. They rarely adapt to captivity and often die.

Only purchase captive-bred (CB) animals from reputable breeders. A quality captive-bred green tree python will be:

- Feeding consistently on frozen-thawed rodents.
- Free of mites, ticks, and visible injuries.
- Alert with clear eyes and a clean vent.
- Properly identified by locality (e.g., Aru, Biak, Sorong, Manokwari). Different localities have different adult colors and temperaments.

Conclusion: A Display Pet for the Dedicated Hobbyist

Owning a green tree python as a pet is a deeply rewarding experience for the right keeper. It is a species that demands respect, patience, and a significant investment in time and equipment. You are not buying a cuddly companion; you are curating a living work of art that thrives on observation rather than interaction. If you can provide the stable humidity, vertical space, and hands-off approach this species requires, you will be rewarded with one of the most stunning reptiles on the planet. For the intermediate to advanced herpetoculturist, the green tree python remains a pinnacle species—challenging, beautiful, and endlessly fascinating.

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