

RAISING REPT

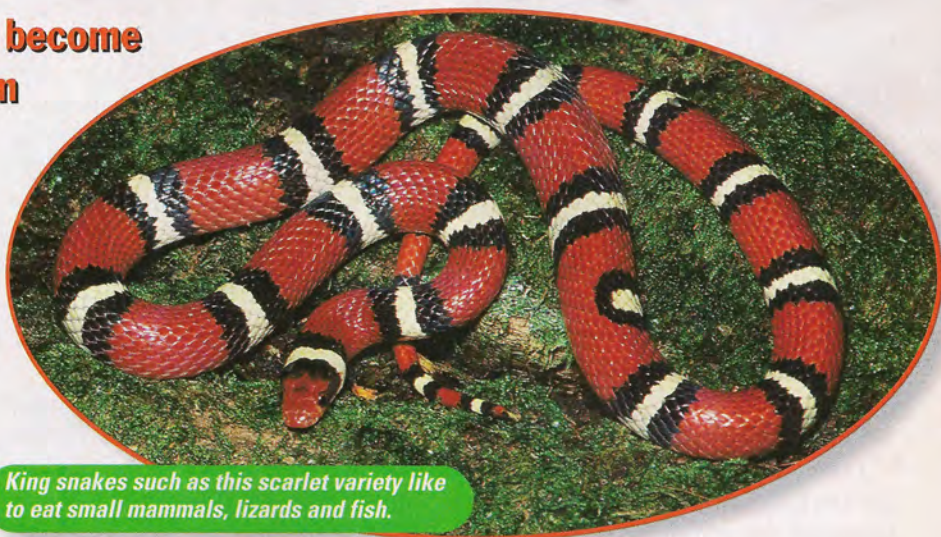
Cold-blooded creatures can become warm friends if you treat 'em right. Here's how.

Emmett the green iguana got a dozen crickets as a snack. But the reptile just watched them hop—out of his cage into the house.

Emmett's owners learned the hard way that iguanas are vegetarians. Now Emmett snacks on greens. And his owners don't chase crickets around the house.

Nearly 3 million American households have a snake, lizard or turtle as a pet. Yet raising reptiles is not simple; their habits can confuse.

For example, many lizards and turtles do eat insects. Most snakes eat rats and mice, but some eat fish or eggs.



King snakes such as this scarlet variety like to eat small mammals, lizards and fish.

Starting Out: Plan Ahead

You may want to buy a lizard or snake right away. But will you be able to feed your pet, play with it every day and clean its cage? Your

parents may need to help.

Learn about the animal you want. Read books and magazines. Go online. Talk to experts.

While a snake may cost, say, \$60,

HOW TO BUILD A SALAMANDER HANGOUT

Salamanders, or "sallies," are popular pets. It's fun to build an inexpensive terrarium (total cost: about \$100) for your sallie.

Now add your sallie (don't get a wild one, buy one from the pet store for about \$30) and enjoy!

—Colleen Messina

YOU'LL NEED

- ▶ a 10-gallon aquarium with a fluorescent light cover
- ▶ safety glass, 6-by-12-by- $\frac{1}{4}$ inches (pre-cut from an auto glass shop)
- ▶ an aquarium pump
- ▶ aquarium silicone glue
- ▶ an empty plastic container, such as a spaghetti sauce jar
- ▶ a hobby knife
- ▶ sand
- ▶ 20 lbs. aquarium gravel
- ▶ several big rocks
- ▶ artificial plants
- ▶ adult permission and help



- STEP 1** Place a 10-gallon aquarium on a level surface in a well-ventilated, well-lit place.
- STEP 2** Slide the pre-cut glass into the tank. Squeeze glue around the three edges that come in contact with the tank and smear smooth. Let it dry for 24 hours to test the water proof seal.
- STEP 3** Fill the "wet" section of the tank with water and let it sit for several hours to test the waterproof seal. After a successful test, empty tank.
- STEP 4** Cut the mouth off a plastic jar with a hobby knife (or ask an adult to do this for you). Then cut $\frac{1}{3}$ of the container off lengthwise.
- STEP 5** Move the tank to its permanent place, since it will be too heavy to move later. Fill the "dry" section of the terrarium with about four inches of sand.

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the tank and equipment it needs can cost more than \$200. Make sure you can afford it.

Picking a Pet

"King snakes, milk snakes, corn snakes and gopher snakes make wonderful pets," says reptile expert Melissa Kaplan. Ball pythons are good too.

Beginners should avoid some kinds of animals such as big pythons, big boas, anacondas, iguanas and large monitor lizards. Ms. Kaplan says they get huge and are hard to tame. Turtles' cages need almost daily cleaning. Stress and parasites make chameleons hard to keep. Captive-bred animals are usually healthier than reptiles caught in the wild.

Making a Home

Because they're cold-blooded, reptiles need heat lamps to stay warm. Ask a vet how warm the cage should be. Don't let your pet burn itself on the lamps.

Your pet may need rocks and branches for climbing and hiding. Make sure your pet can't wriggle out, and that other pets can't get in.

Feeding

Learn what your pet can eat. If it eats insects or vegetables, give it a variety. Make sure the food is small enough to swallow. Provide fresh drinking water.

Your new pet may have pests, a lack of calcium or an infection. Take it for a checkup first thing.

After your new pet gets used to its surroundings, play with it a little each day to tame it. And let it exer-



Salamanders such as this northern red variety like to eat crickets, mealworms and moths.

cise by climbing on you or exploring a safe area in your room.

Even healthy reptiles can carry salmonella, a germ that can make people ill. Wash your hands after handling your pet.

With planning and care, you can have a healthy, tame cold-blooded friend. ♣

—Casey Kelly Barton

•STEP 6 Hold the plastic container horizontally against the wall of the tank with its side resting on the layer of sand. With a bead of glue, attach container to the side of the tank

•STEP 7 Add three inches of gravel on top of the sand. Put some on top of and inside the container (the sallie "cave"). Add artificial plants.

•STEP 8 Put two inches of gravel in the water section of the terrarium. Stack your big rocks next to the safety glass so your sallie has a way to climb out of the water. Then add water and install the water pump. Welcome your salamander to its new home!

