

Advantages for Herptiles and Their Owners of Feeding Thawed Frozen Rodents

1. The herp can't be bitten or scratched (live rodents often injure and sometimes kill herps)
2. The owner can't be bitten or scratched
3. Freezing kills parasites that can infest your herp
4. More economical
5. More convenient
6. Steady availability
7. The rodent can't escape into your home
8. More sanitary; no urine or feces
9. Supplements can be inserted inside the rodent

Training Reptiles to Eat Thawed Frozen Rodents

Almost all carnivorous reptiles can be trained to eat thawed frozen prey.

Tub Feeding

One of the best ways to train a snake to eat is to use the tub feeding method. The snake is removed from its habitat and placed in a large rubber tub for feeding. There are several benefits of tub feeding:

1. The snake is conditioned to eat promptly
2. No chance of the snake ingesting substrate (which can be deadly)
3. Less biting—the snake does not see a human hand in habitat as prey
4. The decorations in the habitat are undisturbed

Reasons a Snake Might Refuse to Eat

1. Incorrect environmental conditions
2. Feeding too often
3. Incorrect food item size
4. Snake is about to shed
5. Illness

Feeding Thawed Frozen Rodents to Herptiles

Defrosting Frozen Rodents

For a snake, choose a rodent with a girth about equal to the widest mid-body girth of the snake. You can either soak the bagged frozen rodent in warm water, or leave in the refrigerator overnight to defrost, and then warm it up in warm water. Small pinkies can be quickly defrosted and warmed under warm running water.

Be sure the rodent is thoroughly defrosted and warmed to 90-100°F. You do not want your herp eating a cold rodent, and warming a rodent also makes it smell more strongly, making it more attractive to your herp. This is especially important when training snakes to eat thawed frozen rodents, or for reluctant feeders.

The Tub Feeding Method

Feeding a snake in a plastic tub, not in its habitat, has several benefits: it conditions the snake to eat promptly, prevents the snake from eating substrate (which is dangerous), reduces the chance the snake will see a human hand in the habitat as prey, and leaves the habitat decorations undisturbed.

Do not attempt to pick up any snake with the scent of other animals on your hands or clothing, as this may entice the snake to strike in hunger. With clean hands, remove the snake from its habitat and place it in the feeding tub. Once the snake is in the feeding tub, offer the thawed warmed rodent.

Training Snakes to Eat Thawed Frozen Rodents

Be sure the snake is hungry. Most snakes should be fed twice a week for juveniles and once a week for adults. Offer a thawed, warmed rodent dangled from tongs—never hold it in your fingers! You may need to move the rodent back and forth to catch the snake's attention. Be prepared for the strike and quickly release the rodent.

If the snake is not interested, pith (stick a pin or small nail into the brain at the back of the head) the dead rodent; this intensifies the scent and may encourage a reluctant feeder to eat.

You might need to offer three smaller rodents. First offer a stunned live rodent, followed immediately by one freshly killed, then a thawed frozen rodent. At the next feeding, start off with a freshly-killed rodent, followed immediately by a thawed, warmed frozen rodent. When these are easily taken, offer only a thawed, warmed frozen rodent at future feedings.

Converting Non-Rodent Eaters to Eating Rodents

For snakes that normally eat amphibians or lizards, obtain a frog or lizard and euthanize it for feeding. Then rub the lizard or frog all over a suitably-sized thawed, warmed rodent to scent it, then offer the rodent for feeding.

For other suggestions on how to train herptiles to eat thawed frozen rodents or to get reluctant feeders to eat, contact a company that sells frozen rodents, or your local herpetological society.

This information was gathered from the websites of Mice Direct, T-Rex, and CalZoo, by The Rat Assistance & Teaching Society, www.petrats.org, (530) 899-0605, 857 Lindo Lane, Chico, CA 95973.