Super Dwarf / Dwarf Reticulated Python Care Sheet by UK Exotics

Reticulated pythons (P. reticulatus) are known as retics. They originate from Thailand although as they are excellent swimmers retics have been reported far out at sea. This is how they colonised many small islands in the region such as, Sumatran, Honey island, Sulawesi, Java and many other surrounding islands. The specific name, reticulatus, is Latin meaning "net-like", or reticulated, and is a reference to the complex colour pattern.

Housing

Depending on the locality and percentage of super dwarf / dwarf most adult super dwarf / dwarf reticulated pythons can be kept in a viv 5ft x 3ft x 2ft. High percentage or pure locality Super Dwarf males may even only need a 4ft x 2ft x 2ft viv. Juvenile retics will climb so providing safe decor that they can explore can be a good idea but is not necessary for adults. We start our hatchlings in 18 litre Vision Racks and gradually move them up as they grow. A 2 year old high percentage super dwarf will still be happy housed in a 33 litre Really Useful Box set up with heat provided by a thermostatically controlled heat mat. At 3 years or older they move onto 3ft x 2ft x 2ft vivs. Heat in a viv is best provided by thermostatically controlled ceramic bulbs, these emit heat but no light so will not disturb snakes over night. Ensure that you always use a cage around any heat bulb that you install into a viv. If some lighting is required LED light is best this does not add any additional heat. Always use rubber glass wedges or glass locks to stop retics from nosing their way out as they are active and curious and will find a way out if they can! Also before you set up your snake get a spare piece of glass cut at a glass merchants (ensure that it is toughened) using one of the glass doors as a template because if you have a disaster when cleaning the glass and it shatters you will have a spare on hand and the snake will not need to be put into temporary accommodation while you replace the shattered door.
We provide hides for our snakes and the best hides we have found for adult retics are upturned plastic dog beds which come in various sizes and can easily be cleaned.

**Temperature/humidity**

We keep temperatures between 85F and 90F in the warm end, aiming for a gradient down to 75F in the cool end. A thermostat is a must and temperatures should be regularly checked - a laser infrared temperature gun is the simplest way to do this. Always be careful when using ceramic bulbs that you do check temperatures as these bulbs give no visual clue as to whether they are working unlike filament based heat bulbs which emit light as well. If you forget to check temperatures and feed your snake when there is no heat they will most likely die as they will be unable to digest the meal. Humidity of around 60-70% can be achieved by using a big enough water bowl (we often use 9 or 12 litre Really Useful Boxes with the handles removed) or use less ventilation on the viv. The best substrate for retics is white unprinted newspaper, it is cheap, easy to clean and is easily disposed of when soiled. You can also tell very easily when it is needing to be cleaned unlike some wood based substrates which can encourage lazy cleaning habits as only the soiled part is removed during weekly cleaning. Although it isn’t the most natural looking substrate newspaper is the simplest and easiest to keep hygienically clean. If humidity is a real problem cypress mulch makes a good substrate as unlike others such as aspen or lignocel it holds moisture for a prolonged period. We avoid aspen or lignocel with retics as they can ingest or get it stuck in their mouths it when feeding.

**Temperament**

Reticulated pythons are generally very tame snakes. Super Dwarf and Dwarf retics tend to move faster than mainland animals so can seem more unpredictable but usually they are just being nosey! Ensure that you regularly handle your retic and do not restrict any interactions to just at feeding time otherwise you ill condition the snake to think that you have food every time you open the viv. Even so retics do get very food orientated and will often strike first and ask questions later so “tap training” is a good idea. This is where you rub the snake gently on the top of the head with a rubber tipped snake hook as you slide open the viv. This tells the snake that you do not have food and generally will diffuse any food response. If the snake does ever get confused or over excited and bites they normally let go as soon as they realise you are not prey. If they do not release you, do not try and wrench your hand out as you will likely end up pulling several teeth out which not only damages the snake but they can be hard to find and remove. Also you will increase any possible damage and bruising. If the snake will not release you and starts to coil round your hand a gentle run under a cool tap will make them let go. Spraying vinegar in the mouth also works but only if you have this ready and accessible. This is one reason that large mainland retics should never be handled by one person on their own but most super dwarf / dwarf animals can be easily managed.
**Feeding**

We feed our super dwarf animals every week when they are hatchlings up to around 9 months old. Then we move them onto every two weeks. Adult males not being used for breeding may even be fed every three weeks. Prey should be sized to suit the girth of the snake. Over feeding or feeding prey that is too large will result in dwarf or super dwarf animals putting on too much fat instead of muscle. We vary the food that we offer between defrosted rats, rabbits and chickens. Chickens (not from your local supermarket but fully feathered with heads, legs and insides intact) are very popular with Super Dwarfs possibly because their natural prey on the islands they originate from would have been birds. If feeding chickens (these can be purchased from specialist reptile frozen food suppliers) always cut the beaks and feet off with secateurs as they are sharp and could potentially cause damage. Do not handle any snake for at least 24 hours after feeding.