



*\*Photo Credit: SREL Lab*

## Rough Green Snake (*Opheodrys aestivus*)

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### **Rough Green Gems of the Bushes**

Rough green snakes are relatively small, slender bodied arboreal to semi-arboreal North American colubrid snakes that can be identified by their slender, pencil thin bodies with keeled scales that distinguish them from the Smooth Green Snake (*Opheodrys vernalis*). Dorsal color of these snakes is usually a bright green, with yellowish to whitish or cream colored ventrals, or bellies. Rough green snakes are largely arboreal, using their slender bodies and bright green coloration to climb, thermoregulate, and to remain cryptic and to seek refuge in shrubs, bushes, grasses, overhanging vegetation, and small trees. These small, delicate snakes are quite inoffensive, and very seldom bite, often relying on their cryptic camouflage to avoid predators, and will often sway from side to side while remaining motionless in order to mimic a twig or other piece of vegetation blowing in wind. These small, delicate snakes are one of the few truly insectivorous snakes in North America, and can be readily available and are inexpensive to acquire in the pet industry, but many are wild caught and captive breeding is nearly non-existent, unfortunately.

### **Taxonomy**

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum/Sub Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Reptilia

**Order:** Squamata

**Suborder:** Serpentes

**Infraorder:** Alethinophidia

**Family:** Colubridae

**Subfamily:** Colubrinae

**Genus:** *Opheodrys*

**Species:** *Opheodrys aestivus*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, rough green snakes can attain longevity of at least 5 years or more, with their maximum longevity being unknown.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

The rough green snake is a relatively small, slender, arboreal to semi-arboreal colubrid snake

indigenous to the eastern half of the United States. More specifically, this small and colorful species occupies the eastern to south-eastern and south-central regions of the U.S. Within this range, rough greensnakes occupy primarily terrestrial to semi-arboreal environments, including a variety of edge, or ecotone habitats, such as forest edges, meadow and field edges, and the margins of rivers, swamps, marshes, ponds, and other wetlands, where they occupy the above ground vegetation and low shrubs and trees in which they forage for their food, seek shelter, and thermoregulate.

### **Origin/History**

*Opheodrys aestivus* (Linnaeus, 1766).

Rough green snakes have been commonly available in the pet trade for many decades, although their exact first timing is not known. They are not frequently bred in captivity, and most that would be available in pet stores or other sources are wild-collected.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner to Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Hatchling rough green snakes are tiny, at 2 to 4 inches. Adult rough green snakes can attain lengths of up to 2 to 3 feet on average, or 24 to 36 inches.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

***Enclosure System: Primarily Arboreal.*** Housing must be sealed and escape proof but be well ventilated. Typically for one to two adult snakes, a minimum of a 20 to 30 gallon tall terrarium or enclosure will be needed. Substrates that promote moderate to high humidity, including coconut husk fibers, sphagnum moss, cypress mulch, or orchid bark should be used for these snakes. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide a sturdy water bowl or dish and a hide box at all times in the enclosure. Rough green snakes will also benefit highly from regular misting for their hydration, either manually, or through the use of a misting or fogging system at least once to twice weekly. They will drink the condensation and moisture from their scales and surrounding areas of the enclosure more so than from a standing water bowl. Rough green snakes are also highly arboreal, and should be given an ample variety of live or artificial plants, vines, driftwood, cork bark, rock or log hides, perches and other furnishings for sufficient hiding, basking, and climbing opportunities.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized under tank heating pad, ceramic, nighttime red bulb, or radiant heat emitter. Unlike many snakes, rough green snakes require, and benefit from the appropriate overhead incandescent and UVA/UVB full spectrum lighting. This UVA/UVB lighting is preferred for these snakes in order to allow for them to properly synthesize the needed calcium and vitamin D3. Overall, suitable temperatures for rough green snakes can range from 80 to 88 degrees on the warm, basking side, and 75 to 80 degrees on the cooler side, and ambient temperatures. A 10 to 12 degree drop in temperatures overnight, as well as a 10 to 12 hour day/night cycle for these snakes is also acceptable. Spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least once per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Rough green snakes should be maintained at relatively moderate relative humidity levels, from about 40 to 60%, with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

## **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Primarily Insectivorous***; Unlike many other snakes, rough green snakes are primarily insectivorous, feeding on a variety of small, or soft bodied worms, slugs, insects, arachnids, and other invertebrates, although they may also occasionally consume smaller reptiles and amphibians as well. In captivity, unlike most other snakes, rough green snakes are primarily insectivorous, and can be given a variety of feeder insects of appropriate size and quantity two to three times weekly. Feeder crickets, roaches, mealworms, waxworms, superworms, pesticide free redworms, earthworms, and other safe, non-toxic invertebrates can all be used. These snakes may also accept small, frozen/thawed rodents, feeder frogs, or lizards on occasion as well. Food items can gradually be increased as needed depending on the overall age, size, and health of the animal. A general rule of thumb to follow when feeding snakes is to provide prey items that are approximately the same width as the widest point of the snake. It is gutload, and dust any insect feeders with calcium and vitamin D3 for proper nutrition and optimal health and well-being for these snakes. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

## **Handling**

Rough green snakes in general are a docile and inoffensive species, very seldom offering to bite apart from the occasional bluffing consisting of gaping, coiling, and inflating their bodies to appear larger. Although rough green snakes can be handled for short periods of time, they are also a fragile and delicate species that will not tolerate frequent, prolonged, or otherwise rough handling and will become stressed by it. They are overall better suited as a display snake species for the novice/beginner to intermediate/moderate pet owner or reptile enthusiast.

**\*\*Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens\*\***

## **Contact**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact:

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