

The EGSA

In the non-commercial

European Garter Snake Association

admirers of this snake-complex have joined together to exchange information and breed animals.



The EGSA was created 1996 as Netherlands association and is registered since 2006 in Germany as non-profit association. The members originate to the largest part from Germany, some also from the European foreign country and the USA.

Once a year an official meeting of the members takes place. As well as that there are smaller meetings at different reptile fairs. Guests are always welcome at these meetings. The dates and venues for these meetings are published regularly on the association's homepage www.egsa.de.

The association's magazine "THE GARTER SNAKE" comes out quarterly with reports, offers and interesting information. Because the EGSA has many international contacts, members have the chance to keep and breed a variety of common and rare species.

The EGSA is a registered society that wants to support the exchange of information among like-minded hobbyists, gather and publish new knowledge of keeping and breeding garter snakes, help reduce the number of snake imports from the USA through breeding programs and find new friends for these wonderful snakes.

EGSA-membership

The annual membership fee is € 40. Membership includes all of the association's benefits including the association's magazine – "THE GARTER SNAKE". Membership begins with the receipt of your enrolment form and the appropriate fee.

Do you have more questions about the association or want to become a member?

Take a look at our homepage <http://www.egsa.de> or write with name and address to a member of our committee.

1st Chairman:

Daniel Grübner

Flemingstraße 9, D - 22299 Hamburg

email: Vorsitz1@egsa.de

2nd Chairman:

Jan Trischberger

Hasenwaldstraße 1, D - 70736 Fellbach

email: Vorsitz2@egsa.de

Treasurer:

Bettina Waschliger,

Geißleite 22, D - 97289 Thüngen

email: kassenwart@egsa.de

Bankconnection (international):

Account Holder : European Garter Snake Association

Bank : Sparkasse Elmshorn

Bank (BIC): NOLADE21ELH

Account (IBAN): DE05 2215 0000 0001 1356 27

Handed over by:

The Fascinating
Garter Snake



European Garter Snake Association

www.egsa.de

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Beginners and Advanced

The *Thamnophis* genus contains 34 species with 50 subspecies and numerous colour variations from mundane to magnificent. In its natural habitat in North and Central America the garter snake has adapted to the most varied of climates and habitats from swamplands to deserts.

In the available *Thamnophis* literature you will not often find differentiations made between the various species and subspecies. The snake is usually recommended for beginners, but in fact there are some varieties that should really only be kept by experienced specialists. Depending upon their huge distribution that reaches from the southern half of Canada to North Mexico some *Thamnophis* species require special conditions in captivity. Due to their relatively low prices and their ready availability and because of the (contentious) fact that these snakes can be fed easily on dead fish they erroneously earned the reputation of being a beginner's snake.

Terrarium and keeping conditions

Garter snakes are diurnal and ground-living snakes. They require a spacious lowland terrarium that is adjusted to their size and activity with lighting from 10 to 12 hours a day. UV-light is not necessary. Of most species the females reach a length of 100-120 cm long and a weight of 100-500g – males usually stay smaller and lighter.

Most of the available *Thamnophis* species can be kept successfully at a background temperature of 20°C with a local spot light under which the temperature should reach about 30°C. Although in the wild garter snakes will mainly be found in humid areas and near waters, in captivity they need a dry substrate and a water bowl. Long-term high humidity can lead to severe skin diseases. Hiding-places offer the animals safety to lead a stress-free and active life according to their natural curiosity. Like this they can reach an age of 10 to 15 years.

Feeding

In the wild garter snakes feed on amphibians, spawn, tadpoles, fish, leeches, slugs or earthworms.

There are also populations that capture mice and young birds. Occasionally they will even take snakes or other reptiles. In captivity *Thamnophis* can easily be fed with smelt (*osmerus eperlanus*) with a vitamin supplement added from time to time. Many specimen will also take thawed mice probably scented with fish.



Contrary to widespread opinion, garter snakes need to be fed regularly. If they remain active they won't survive longer periods of starvation very well. Depending on their age and the amount of food, the snakes require 1-3 feedings per week. A diet only consisting of fish fillet, sea fish or carp fish (like goldfish, guppies, platies, etc) can cause thiamine deficiency symptoms. Young snakes will usually take fish strips or earthworms as their first food. They are not to be fed too much as that might lead to organ defects and a drastic decrease in life expectancy.

Keeping together

Although sometimes it can work well, it is generally not a good idea to keep garter snakes with other species. Keeping together different garter snake subspecies is possible. The snakes are loners but even in nature they come together at selected basking or hiding places. If need be they might have to be separated when feeding as they might suffer stress or bite injuries.

Breeding

If kept properly and fed a sufficiently balanced diet in captivity, *Thamnophis* usually reach sexual maturity during their second or third year of life. They are live-bearing and after a pregnancy of three to four months they give birth to 10-30 completely developed baby snakes. Kept under proper conditions there are usually no problems with breeding, but some subspecies require a long enough winter hibernation period.

Winter hibernation

To solve the problem of winter scarcity of food and low temperature *Thamnophis* enter a prolonged and controlled state of dormancy. Depending on the area they live in this can take up to half a year. In captivity a hibernation of one to two months suffices. During this time the snakes should be kept at 5-10°C in relative darkness. They do not need any food but enough water to drink and bathe and should not be disturbed except for occasional health checks.

Diseases

Garter snakes, especially wild caught ones, occasionally suffer from internal or external parasites, as well as inflammation of skin or mucous membranes. Another phenomenon that can be observed frequently is vitamin B deficiency. Most diseases can be avoided by clean, spacious housing and a balanced diet.