

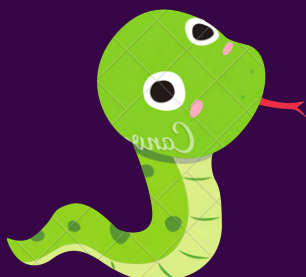
RADIANT REPTILES CANADA

QUALITY THAT SPEAKS FOR ITSELF



WHAT'S INSIDE

- Ra X Quartz Eggs!
- Honest Product Reviews
- The Dirt On Substrates Pg. 3 - 8
- Exclusive March Promotions



RA X QUARTZ EGGS!

On March 3rd the first eggs of this season dropped. 10 good eggs and one dud from our big girl Ra. If all goes well this clutch should yield - Normal 100% Het Snow, with a potential for Albinos and/or Axanthics. We will see in about 50-55 days. We are especially excited to see if that little egg turns out.

Mother - "Ra" - Normal Het 50% Het Albino, 66% Het Axanthic, 50% Het Hypo.

Father - "Quartz" - Snow





HONEST PRODUCT REVIEWS

QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE ANIMALS AND FOR US KEEPERS TOO!

I want to preface this topic that we are not being paid or sponsored in any way. We will always give honest reviews of the products we use and recommend. All brands pictured are for reference, many of these substrates are available from different companies (except Yesterday's news and Fresh 4 Life).

Since we first started working with Western Hognoses several years ago, we have tried countless types of substrates, weighing the pros and cons of them all so our clients don't have to.

Some Substrates are merely not as good as others for things like odour control, burrowing, moisture, etc. while others are potentially dangerous to the animal. Some folks may not agree with us, and that is OK. We are merely letting keepers know some options, and the pros and cons involved.

We are always looking at new ways to improve the quality of life for our animals and the best products for them and ourselves. As time goes on we may move onto other substrates or products. We will be sure to update our information in a future newsletter and on our website/social media pages.

This is not an exhaustive list, there are other substrates we have tried as well, but I have included the most notable.



THE DIRT ON SUBSTRATES

YESTERDAY'S NEWS ★★★★★

NON-SCENTED PAPER PELLET CAT LITTER

This is one of the top products we recommend to use for Western Hognoses and Kenyan Sand Boas. It is fantastic for the smell, does not get in the animal's vent or mouth, is scoopable, lasts long, retains heat well, is not dusty, and the animals can burrow in it. Another nice thing about this product is that many stores carry it including Wal Mart.

Cons - Pricy compared to others, More noticeable if you have a large number of reptiles. Pellets break down once wet from spilt water. Heavy, we have a rack system with lids. I take down each tub for feeding/cleaning etc. the weight of doing so adds up. However, the added weight works well for toning an animal's muscles.

(This product is NOT to be confused with "Care Fresh")



FRESH 4 LIFE ★★★★★

NON-SCENTED PAPER PELLET CAT LITTER

This product is very similar to Yesterday's News. However, the pellets are a little larger and thicker, we noticed that it is also a little dustier, and breaks down faster when damp from spilt water. This is a Total Pet brand, so many other stores do not sell it. Fresh 4 Life tends to be a couple of dollars cheaper than Yesterday's News.

We favour Yesterday's News over this product due to less dust and that it clumps better for waste removal. We have moved away from this product due to those cons and mainly recommend Yesterday's News Non-Scented.

For those that cannot obtain Yesterday's News, this would be a good alternative.



COCO HUSK ★★★★★

LARGE CHIPPED COCO HUSK

This past year we have been experimenting with Coco Husk as a full ground cover with some of our Western Hognoses and Northern Blue Tongue Skink's enclosures. Price-wise this is a superior product to Yesterdays News as it is cheaper and can come in a compressed cube format (higher yield).

Despite the flaws listed below, I would say that so far this product is on par with Yesterday's News. We want to spend more time testing it but so far it looks like Yesterdays News and Coco Husk are the top two substrates we will be recommending.

Pros - Good for the smell, easily scoopable, not too dusty, the animals can burrow. Don't have to worry about water spilling. We have not had any issues with the substrate sticking to prey items, or going in their mouth/vent. I really like how light it is compared to Yesterday's News. Cheaper cost.

Cons - It can be difficult to see poop for spot checks, it stains the ceramic water dishes (it can be bleached out) we noticed its natural colour can slightly 'tint' animals, (same with coco peat) shedding removes this. It is a bit dustier than Yesterday's News, it gets into their water dishes more.

If purchased in the brick format, air-dry until damp before placing it in the enclosure. You don't want a wet substrate. Once in the animal's enclosure, we keep it slightly damp and stir it once a week.

Getting a hold of this product has been a pain, we are trying to find additional sources to purchase this type of product from. We have been ordering it via Home Hardware. They recently changed its name to "Mega Mulch" Once our next order comes in we will be able to read the fine print to make sure it is the same product with no other changes. (Always check to make sure no fertilizers/chemicals etc. have been added.)



This product can be found by various producers, and may have different names depending on the brand.

We will keep you updated on how we end up liking this substrate long-term.



COCO PEAT AS AN ENCLOSED ADDITION

FINE COCO HUSK ★★★★★

This item goes by lots of different names depending on who sells it. Compressed Coconut Fiber Expandable Substrate by Exo Terra is called "Plantation Soil", Zilla calls it "Coconut Husk Brick", while Zoo Med calls it "Eco Earth" Regardless, It usually is in a brick-like format, sometimes sold in packs of 3. You soak it and it becomes a fine soil-feeling product.

(Not to be confused with large chipped Coco Husk above. Same ingredient, different size pieces.)

For simplicity sake, I will be referring to this substrate as "Coco Peat."

This can be an excellent contained additive to an adult Western Hognose enclosure. We use the large Exo-terra dishes (because they are heavy) and fill them half-way full with damp coco peat as a mental and physical enrichment area that adds a humidity source, which is extra helpful during shedding, while not causing too much humidity.

We recommend using this in the diggy-dish mentioned above while using products like Yesterdays News for the main ground cover. Used in this format it allows the Coco Pete to be easily cleaned and does not get tracked around the cage. The cons are mentioned in the next part.

COCO PEAT AS FULL GROUND COVER ★★

We do not recommend using Coco peat as a full ground cover in the animal's enclosure as we tried that and found it to be terrible. When an animal defecated, (even cleaned up right away, as we do) we were still finding that the faeces and urates were getting tracked and mixed into this substate and spread throughout the entire enclosure. Needless to say, that is unsanitary. It even made mould pockets. Used in this style It does nothing for the smell, is not easily scoopable, and constantly made the entire enclosure either far too wet or far too dry. The animal was always covered in the mixture, which I did not like that it never had the option to rid itself of that. It also made keeping the water dish clean a nightmare. When it was dry, it was very dusty.



See the photo on pg. 1 to see our diggy-dish in action!



TOP SOIL MIXTURE ★★

TOP SOIL, PEAT, COCO PEAT, PLAY SAND, SPHAGNUM MOSS ETC.

We mixed topsoil, coco peat, 20% play sand peat, sphagnum moss, and dried leaf litter. Which is what many bioactive groups advise. While this may be an OK mix for a bioactive set-up, we found that this had all the cons of the above-mentioned Coco Peat when used as a full enclosure cover.

After 15 days of using this substrate, we had to do a full tank change for every one of our snakes due to the smell alone. (Yes, even with spot checks occurring during those 15 days.) The mix clung to everything, causing the tubs to look messy, even after cleaning them. We also noticed that the mix was sticking to the scales of the animals, and could be seen embedded in the sheds. In the wild Western Hognoses may run into that to some degree, but we were not comfortable with it.



CORN COB SUBSTRATE ✦

When we first bought the Cob Bedding, we thought it was perfect. It smelled nice, clumped amazingly, looked like it shouldn't get in a snake's mouth or vent, etc.

We did several of our snake's cages as a test run. Within 48 hours, we smelled an odd sour smell. I checked and found that a tiny bit of water had dripped down the side of a water dish, in that short amount of time a ring of mould had formed around the water dish and under it. I checked the other cages and found this to be the case for any cage where the water dish had any amount of moisture on the outside of it.

Needless to say, we quickly got rid of that substrate and do not recommend it.



CALCIUM SAND ("CALCI-SAND")

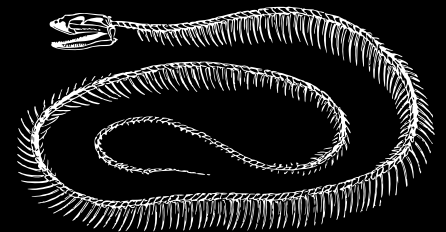
FINE CHALK-LIKE SAND

DO NOT USE THIS PRODUCT!

This product goes by different names depending on the brand and can be found in various colours.

We have not personally tried this product and refuse to. I know from my own research and countless reports from other keepers who have tried it that this is a horrible product that should be taken off the shelves.

It has a reputation for causing reptile deaths, stuck sheds, impaction, dry scales, lodging in scales, respiratory issues, is extremely dusty, and other issues. This is a gimmick product that serves no benefit to the animal.



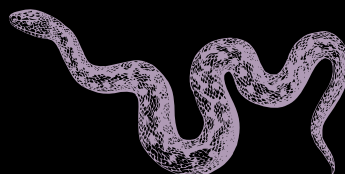
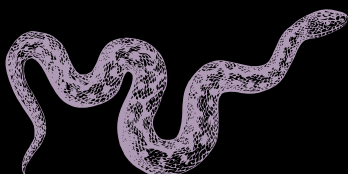
CEDAR AND PINE SHAVINGS

COMES IN VARIOUS SHAPES

WE DO NOT ADVISE TO USE EITHER PINE OR CEDAR

Cedar and Pine both give off aromatic hydrocarbons (phenols) and acids. These types of woods contain volatile oils that are toxic to reptiles and many mammals. Studies have shown that the use of these as substrates can cause damage to a reptiles' respiratory and nervous system in an enclosed situation like a animals' cage since the animal is exposed to an enclosed environment.

If the Cedar and Pine are processed at a very high temperature some say that it is enough to eliminate the oils. However, we feel the risk is not worth it and there are better substrate options out there.



ASPEN ★★

CHIPPED AND SHREDED CONCERNS

I have saved this substrate for last as it is going to be a controversial one. Many keepers and breeders alike use and suggest aspen in both shredded and chipped forms. Due to this, it was the first substrate we tried years ago - and the reason we have tried so many since.

Within the first week of owning our first group of Western Hognoses, I pulled a large shard of shredded aspen that was sticking out from an adult female's vent. I figured this had to be a one-off. Nope, not long after it happened again with a different female. You would think for being a semi-burrowing species this would not be a problem.

Before I had the chance to switch the substrate one of our males developed a lump in his hemipenes' pocket. We took him immediately to the vet where we did everything possible. The lump at the time was very small. we tried getting Xrays, but nothing showed up. We were not sure what was causing it, I mentioned the substrate issue and asked if that could be the cause. The vet informed us that if it was that it would be considered an organic material, which most types of pet Xrays would not be able to detect. We were given various anti-biotics. Within a couple of weeks, the issue became worse and we had to put that male down.

We opted to switch to fine-chipped aspen instead. This seemed to not get in their vents, but was constantly getting in the animal's mouths even though we were neither feeding in their enclosure nor on the substrate.

A couple of months later we had a male that started acting off. He stayed hidden at the back of his tank, became quick to bluff strike and went off of food which was unlike him. I took him out to do an inspection and noticed his vent looked a tiny bit irritated. I pressed lightly on the hemipene area and was able to express some musk along with one of the small squares of chipped aspen which had a tiny bit of blood and semi-clear puss on it.



Initial lump hardly detectable



Less than 2 weeks later.
(This was the first male).

We apologize for the graphic images. We feel it is important to share these kinds of things to help others.

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE

I had hoped that we caught things soon enough by removing the embedded piece. They were taken to the vet and given an injectable antibiotic. This time it seemed to be working. Over the next while they remained not eating and the swelling would come and go. We took them back to the vet several times over a period of a couple of months, but there was nothing more that could be done after the third type of antibiotic failed. Surgery was not an option given the size of the animal.

While we were dealing with the second animal, a third male was displaying the same issues, (that one's onset came on even more aggressive than the second.) Our Vet explained that due to the nature of the infected area that any issues near the vent can spread rapidly through the bloodstream and spine, often not showing signs before it is already too late.

Both animals had to be put down. This made the count three males from aspen, all with hemipene/tail issues, the first from shredded, the second two from fine-chipped.

Again, I know many keepers keep their reptiles on this substrate, but the way I look at it is the same as what we tell people who insist that their cohabitated reptiles are fine because they don't fight or try to eat each other. "It is not a problem until it is."

When I initially came forward years ago about having this problem, many people (including reputable large scale breeders) said that this issue simply does not happen. Since then I know of many individual reputable breeders and pet keepers who have had their hognoses, (particularly male Western Hognoses,) require surgery due to infections caused by aspen getting in their hemipene pocket. Many of these animals did not make it, regardless of receiving antibiotics, or surgery. Some of these animals had barely noticeable bumps, while others were very noticeably necrotic. How many animals have mysteriously died without people taking into consideration that it may be the substrate?

Along with vent issues, this substrate has been known to cause oral impaction. Many people will aggressively argue this is not possible, yet when I brought this topic up to three different vets they confirmed that the shape of chipped aspen can lock with one another, causing blocks, as well as having sharp-edges that can irritate and even tear the lining of their intestine.

Many people swear they have fed their animals on various aspens for years without issue. I am glad that has been the case, however, there are many animals who have not been that fortunate. Something to consider is perhaps some brands are less prone to causing issues? Or are manufactured differently depending on the country?

In any case, our goal is not to go to war with other keepers or breeders but to let people know of the potential risks. We had to learn this the hard way and want to make our losses not be in vain.

Since switching to Yesterday's News/Fresh 4 Life and large Chipped Coconut, we have had no further issues with it getting in the animal's mouths or vents, and no infected vents etc.



APRIL NEWSLETTER NEWS

We hope that everyone has a pleasant March, just as a heads-up the April Newsletter will be a short Spring and Easter-themed photo-based newsletter (unless we have egg updates!), due to a very busy month already scheduled.



EXCLUSIVE NEWSLETTER PROMOTION

For the month of March, we are offering a "Twix" Western Hognose colouring page.

Email us with the code `MARCH_NEWSLETTER` and you will receive the colouring page as a high-resolution jpg. The file will not have Dean's watermark, unlike below, however, it will have his logo. You then can print the images at home for your own personal colouring use.

Images are NOT to be used for commercial purposes, or for any other purposes, other than colouring. DO NOT distribute my uncoloured line art to anyone, this includes posting it online, and or sharing it with others. You may post your finished coloured page online, so long as you credit - "Dean CS Lewis of Mystic Creations", and post a link back to www.mysticcreations123.com/colouring-pages My logo must remain on the shared image.

I would love to see your finished colourings, feel free to email them to us. RadiantReptilesCanada@gmail.com



As always, we encourage questions and suggestions. If you have an idea for a future newsletter topic please email us at RadiantReptilesCanada@gmail.com