Hey, wait a minute — don’t hurt that snake! Sure, a few kinds are deadly, but most are harmless. In Texas, we have 76 species of snakes, the largest number found in any U.S. state. That’s really good news. Why? Because snakes eat mice, rats and other critters that can spread diseases. Like turtles and lizards, snakes are cold-blooded reptiles, which means their body temperature changes depending on their surroundings. Scientists who study snakes are called herpetologists. If you learn about snakes, too, then you’ll be less afraid of these beneficial animals.
Anatomy of a Snake

**Scales:** Snake’s dry, protective covering.

**Snout:** Sharp, tooth-like points used by venomous snakes to inject venom into prey.

**Forked Tongue:** Used to smell, not taste.

**Pit:** Special organ between eyes and nostrils on certain snakes that detect heat.

**Scutes:** Thick, large scales on snake's belly.

**Rattles:** A new “button” is added every time the snake sheds its skin.

**Brille:** Clear, protective scales that cover eyes (also called spectacles).

**Did You Know?**

- Have you ever found a snake skin? That’s how snakes grow — by shedding their old skin.
- Because snakes burn up little energy, they don’t need much food. Some eat once a week while others dine only a couple of times a year.
- When they do eat, snakes swallow their food (like a mouse or frog) whole.
- Snake Menu: slugs, worms, fish, birds, mice, eggs, other snakes.
- Snakes brumate (like hibernation) in the winter and come out of their dens in the spring.
- Small snakes can live up to 12 years. Large kinds can survive 40 or more years!

**Venomous or poisonous?**

An animal that can bite or sting and inject a harmful toxin (venom) is “venomous.” An animal or plant that would make you sick if you ate it is “poisonous.” Example: Rattlesnakes are venomous. Some mushrooms are poisonous.

**Common Non-Venomous Snakes**

“Red and yellow, kill a fellow. Red and black, friend to Jack.”

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**Common Non-Venomous Snakes**

- **RATTLESNAKE**
- **CORN SNAKE**
- **RAT SNAKE**
- **VERUS**
- **VERUS**
- **VERUS**
- **VERUS**
- **VERUS**
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**Looking for a snake skin?**

That’s how snakes grow — by shedding their old skin.

**Georgia’s rough green snake**

- **FORKED TONGUE:** Used to smell, not taste.
- **BRILLE:** Clear, protective scales that cover eyes (also called spectacles).
- **SCUTES:** Thick, large scales on snake’s belly.
- **RATTLES:** A new “button” is added every time the snake sheds its skin.
- **SCALES:** Snake’s dry, protective covering.
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WHY DO SNAKES COIL UP? Curling up helps a snake stay warm or moist. Some snakes coil up before they strike at prey. Think of a spring. If you hold it down, then let go, what happens? BOING! A snake can strike with more force! Make your own coiled snake from a paper plate. First draw a spiral (like the picture) on a plate. Using markers or crayons, color your snake. Cut the plate along the spiral line. Glue on a forked tongue and googly eyes if you like. Then attach a piece of string or yarn to the head and hang it up!

POISONOUS or venomous?

Circle your answer.

Black widow  
Oleander  
Puss caterpillar  
Bee  
Wheel bug  
Mistletoe  
Jellyfish  
Poinsettia

Answers below.

SCIENTISTS FEAR THAT WE HUMANS could kill off snakes completely. Why? The more new homes and roads we build, the fewer habitats there are for them. Many people kill snakes out of fear and ignorance. What can you do to help snakes? Learn about one you might find in your yard and tell your friends (especially the ones who don’t like snakes) why that snake’s so cool. For instance, rough green snakes — which do not bite — mostly eat caterpillars, spiders, grasshoppers and crickets. Plus, they’re really cute, don’t you think?

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Texas Parks and Wildlife

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