

Snake identification chart

Six regional examples | Eastern United States, with a Mid-Atlantic focus | Online Field Guide

Observe from a distance. This shortlist cannot rule out venomous species or authorize handling.

1. Central ratsnake

Pantherophis alleghaniensis



Mid-Atlantic adults often mostly black; young blotched

Dark adult; coiled on log

2. Common gartersnake

Thamnophis sirtalis



Lengthwise pale stripes; often a checkered background

Striped snake; dorsal view

3. Dekay's brownsnake

Storeria dekayi



Small brown snake; paired dark back spots

Brown snake; close side view

4. Ring-necked snake

Diadophis punctatus



Dark smooth-looking back; pale neck collar

Dorsal view; yellow neck ring

5. Eastern copperhead

Agkistrodon contortrix



Brown crossbands often narrow along the spine

Adult; hourglass crossbands

6. Northern watersnake

Nerodia sipedon



Front crossbands change to alternating rear blotches

Reddish adult; plain background

1. Alejandro Santillana
2. bgirardot
3. Jesse Rorabaugh
4. David LaMagna; CC BY 4.0.
5. Brady Reed
6. David Weisenbeck; CC BY 4.0.

Comparison notes and photo credits

Snake chart companion | Original layout and wording by Online Field Guide

Snake	Habitat clue	Identification level	Seasonal activity
Central ratsnake	Woodlands, edges, farms and buildings	Regional ratsnake candidate	Spring through fall
Common gartersnake	Gardens, meadows, wetland edges and woodland	Gartersnake candidate	Spring through fall
Dekay's brownsnake	Gardens, damp leaf litter and woodland edges	Species candidate	Spring through fall
Ring-necked snake	Damp woodland, rocky cover and leaf litter	Species candidate	Spring through fall
Eastern copperhead	Woodlands, rocky slopes and leaf litter	Venomous species candidate	Spring through fall
Northern watersnake	Ponds, streams, marshes and adjacent land	Watersnake candidate	Spring through fall

Age, shedding, lighting and geographic variation change snake appearance. Seasonal ranges are broad. The identification level reflects what a photograph may support; it is not a statement that handling is safe.

Photo credits and original file links

- 1. Central ratsnake:** Pantherophis alleghaniensis - iNaturalist photo 8075083, by Alejandro Santillana.
- 2. Common gartersnake:** Thamnophis sirtalis - iNaturalist photo 99896729, by bgirardot.
- 3. Dekay's brownsnake:** Storeria dekayi - iNaturalist photo 3839001, by Jesse Rorabaugh.
- 4. Ring-necked snake:** Diadophis punctatus - iNaturalist photo 493952151, by David LaMagna. CC BY 4.0.
- 5. Eastern copperhead:** Agkistrodon contortrix - iNaturalist photo 7459698, by Brady Reed.
- 6. Northern watersnake:** Nerodia sipedon - iNaturalist photo 15458841, by David Weisenbeck. CC BY 4.0.

Identification references: Central ratsnake; Common gartersnake; Dekay's brownsnake; Ring-necked snake; Eastern copperhead; Northern watersnake.

This chart compares regional examples; it is not a complete species key.