



# Texas Garter Snake

*Thamnophis sirtalis annectens*



Photo: Meghan Cassidy

## What do they look like?

Like most other garter snakes, this one has three stripes. The central one is some shade of orange and is fairly broad. The stripes along the side can look a little ragged and the light color is on parts of scale rows 2, 3, and 4. Between the stripes you can usually make out a suggestion of alternating black spots. The scales along the upper lip have at least some black edges. The broad scales across the belly generally have half-moons on the edges when you spread the scales apart. (The related Western Ribbon Snake can look somewhat similar but the stripes look like they have “clean” edges and the lateral or side stripes are on rows 3 and 4, and the light scales along the lip should be an unmarked light color.)

Adult females grow larger than males and may be up to 28 inches long or somewhat longer. The scales along the back are keeled and the anal plate is undivided.

## How do they defend themselves? Can they hurt you?

Garter snakes may nip if picked up, leaving only small, shallow scratches. They have glands along the upper jaw that can release mild toxins that may help it capture the frogs that it eats. Rarely, a person could experience some temporary inflammation or bleeding from a bite in which the snake holds on and chews.

This snake's main defense is to thrash around and try to get away, while secreting an unpleasant musk along with feces. If not grabbed or harmed, garter snakes will not try to harm a human.

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## Where are they found?

The Texas Garter Snake has been found in Central and North Texas prairies and in oak woodlands (especially in oak savannahs or Cross Timbers woodlands with prairie openings). It is also found in western Oklahoma and part of the nearby Texas panhandle, in Great Plains floodplain areas. In a 2019 study, Key and her colleagues found that these habitats were best for Texas Garter Snakes. Because they are closely related to the Red-sided Garter Snake (a different subspecies), there have been different ideas about the limits of their range. Werler & Dixon show Texas Garter Snakes occurring from the North Texas woods and prairies down through Central Texas along the eastern edge of the Hill Country, as does Dixon.

## What do they eat?

There is limited information about their prey in the wild, but it apparently includes frogs, smaller toads, tadpoles, earthworms, and perhaps nestling mice and other small animals.

## How do they reproduce?

Females give live birth to young which look similar to adults.

## What conservation problems do they face?

The 2019 study mentioned above was not able to find any individuals, in two seasons of field work in 2013-2014. Texas Garter Snakes continue to be reported occasionally on iNaturalist. NatureServe lists them as “critically imperiled” in Texas.

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### Sources of information:

Dixon, J.R. 2013. Amphibians and reptiles of Texas, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

Key, K.N., Banta, J.A., Gluesenkamp, A.G., Hertweck, K.L., & J.S. Placyk. Conservation Biology of a Southwestern Endemic, the Texas Garter Snake, *Thamnophis sirtalis annectens*: An Integrative Perspective. *The Southwestern Naturalist*, 64(1), 8-19.

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Werler, J.E., & J.R. Dixon. 2000. *Texas Snakes: Identification, Distribution, and Natural History*. Austin: University of Texas Press.



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