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Unusual, Exotic, and  
Native Plants



## Garden Beneficials of Almost Eden

### Dekay's Brown Snake



This small, usually 8-12" long and up to about 15-18" long, brown to reddish brown snake commonly with a lighter stripe down the back and black speckles is a common garden and nursery inhabitant of the Eastern US, south along the Gulf of Mexico and into Central America as well as into Canada. This harmless and beneficial snake is reported to spend much of its life underground and it is also commonly found under rocks, containers, and other moist cool dark areas where its main prey occurs which are slugs, snails, earthworms, and small invertebrates. In spring these small brown snakes venture out to find mates and this is the same time that many of us are most active in the garden thus increasing our chance of meeting.

Like a Garter Snake or Ribbon Snake, the Dekay's Brown Snake, *Storeria dekayi*, basically has live birth, although technically speaking it is viviparous and so basically the eggs remain in the snake until just before the baby snakes emerge giving the appearance of live birth. A mature female can bear anywhere from 3-30(-40) young which are about 3-4" long at birth.

Unfortunately, many people in our area grew up knowing this as a 'Ground-Rattler' and so anyone who saw one would immediately kill it. There is an Eastern Pygmy Rattlesnake in at least part of the Dekay's Brown Snake's geographic range which is also known as a Ground Rattlesnake and with which Dekay's Brown Snake could easily be confused by a casual observer. The Dekay's Brown Snake can imitate this viper to scare off would be predators. When it feels threatened it can widen and swell out its body to appear more like the shape of the true Ground Rattlesnake. It can also coil up and strike or threaten to strike to continue the ruse. Some snakes, if they feel threatened, will even flick and vibrate their tail tip against dry leaves to further imitate the sound of a Rattlesnake although I am not sure if the Dekay's Brown Snake utilizes this defense as well. The Dekay's Brown Snake can also play possum and will roll over and play dead like the Hognose Snake.

Even though the Brown Snake is a good garden and nursery beneficial helping to control slugs and snails you should **NEVER EVER** handle a snake as it would be easy to confuse a young Copperhead or other poisonous snake with it creating a dangerous situation where you or someone you know could get bitten by one of these poisonous vipers. It is best to **ALWAYS** respect wild animals and give them a wide berth. You should leave them where they are unless they pose a danger to someone and need to be relocated by a professional. Our native vipers like Rattlesnakes and Copperheads, are also beneficial helping to keep rodent and other small mammal populations in check although it is hard to convince some not to destroy them. Interestingly we are reported to be innately born with a fear of snakes and for good reason as they all deserve our respect.



**For More Information See the Following Websites:**

Wildlife of Connecticut

<http://wildlifeofct.com/dekays%20brownsnake.html>

University of Georgia – Savannah River Ecology Laboratory

<https://srelherp.uga.edu/snakes/stodek.htm>

Herps of Texas

<https://www.herpssoftexas.org/content/dekays-brownsnake>

*Thank you & Good Growing,*

*Jeff McMillian*

*Almost Eden*