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How to Feed Your Dragon



BALL PYTHON



RED-EYED TREE FROG



TIGER SALAMANDER



Top 5



CHOLLY/S STUDIO

Fire-bellied Toad

These amphibians swim to the head of the pack when it comes to being good pets.

BY DEVIN EDMONDS

Of the more than 7,000 described amphibian species in the world, only a few dozen are regularly found in the pet trade. Of these, five notably charismatic species stand out among the rest. They have earned their popularity for a reason, whether it's their attractive coloration, ease of care, or simply availability. It's worth any prospective amphibian keeper's time to read up and learn a little more about these five favorite pet amphibians. But first, let's discuss some essential care requirements.

Amphibian Care 101

While the care of the amphibians discussed in this article differs in many ways, there are three shared aspects of their husbandry which you'll find in common.



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Fire-bellied Newt

1. Water Quality

Water quality is of utmost importance, especially for tadpoles, larvae and species that remain aquatic or semi-aquatic as adults. This means keeping water clean with frequent water

changes, but it also means starting with a good water source. Usually, tap water can be used, but it will need to be treated with a chemical that removes chlorine and chloramines, and then left to sit for a day before use. Chemicals that make water safe for amphibians can be found for sale in the fish department at most pet stores.

2. Handling

All amphibians have sensitive skin, through which they breathe and drink. Compared to their scaly and often-handle-able reptile counterparts, pet amphibians are not usually well-suited to be held. In fact, two of the species in this article—fire-bellied newts and fire-bellied toads—are mildly poisonous. Their bright, fire-colored bellies warn predators of this fact.

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Amphibians



Tiger Salamander



White's Tree Frog

It is good practice to always wash hands before and after holding any amphibian, and to avoid touching your eyes, mouth or nose while doing so. Although the words "poison" and "pet" used together may cause alarm, there is little need to be concerned so long as you don't eat your pets. In fact, there is usually more risk to the pet than to the person. The oils, salts and possible residues from soaps or detergents found on human skin are irritating and harmful to amphibians. When handling is necessary, make sure your hands are wet. You can also examine and transport amphibians within a moist net or small plastic container, which is the best option of all.

Temperature

In addition to being tied to water and having sensitive, permeable skin, all amphibians are also ectotherms, meaning that their body temperature is dictated by their environment. In captivity, one of the most important aspects of their proper care is the availability of an appropriate temperature range. Tropical species may perish quickly during a cold night if there is not a heat source, while amphibians that live in cool streams or underground are especially sensitive to warm temperatures.

For all of these five favorite pet amphibians, make sure there is an accurate thermometer within their enclosure so you can monitor the temperature. If heating is needed, use a low-wattage incandescent light bulb, or a fully submersible aquarium heater with thermostat if there is a large water area. Generally, hot rocks, heating pads and heat cables are more appropriate for heating reptile housing than for amphibians. Cooling an enclosure is more difficult than heating one, so species that don't tolerate heat may need to be kept in a basement or on the floor in an air-conditioned room.



Red-eyed Tree Frog



DEVIN EDMONDS

Most Popular

Now the fun part. Introducing the top five amphibians! Here they are in no particular order.

Fire-bellied Toad

(Bombina orientalis)

Of the top five pet amphibians, fire-bellied toads are perhaps the most popular, and for good reason. They are low-maintenance pets that tolerate a wide range of conditions. They are also diurnal and colorful, and when housed in a group, display interesting behavior.

Adult fire-bellied toads grow to around 2 inches in length. Males have bulkier front arms than females and vocalize to defend territory and attract mates. Dorsally, fire-bellied toads range in color from vibrant green to muddy brown or black. Their ventral side is always patterned in bright orange and dark blotches.

Although fire-bellied toads will live happily alone, I recommend keeping them in groups because they are often more active and enjoyable to watch. A 15-gallon aquarium is large enough for four to six toads. While the typically warty-skinned toad is terrestrial, fire-bellies are semi-aquatic amphibians and should be provided with a large water area. You can achieve this by filling the



Fire-bellied toads are low-maintenance pets that tolerate a wide range of conditions.

an aquarium with several inches of large-diameter gravel and sloping it toward one end. Large rocks can then be positioned to keep gravel at an angle, and the tank can be filled with 2 to 4 inches of water.

Live plants, such as pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*) and Java moss (*Vesicularia dubyan*), can be grown directly on gravel, and given time, will help anchor the semi-aquatic habitat in place. As well as providing cover, plants help maintain water quality. Position a fluorescent light or two over the enclosure if you choose to grow live plants. You can use a small filter to help keep the water clean if needed, in addition to weekly partial water changes. Temperatures from 68 to 78 degrees Fahrenheit are adequate, but fire-bellied toads are tolerant of days outside this range.

Feeding fire-bellies is always entertaining. They are aggressive eaters, and as soon as live food is noticed, they pounce on just about anything that walks by. Crickets can form the bulk of the diet. Provide variety with small earthworms and waxworms, and coat all food items in a high-quality powdered nutritional

supplement feeding. Correct enclosure conditions have been shown to have been shown to have been shown in captivity.

White

(Litor

If these are a pet, White's native habitat is full of stunningly colorful frogs, grow toad-like frogs, grow toad-like frogs. However, their activity during the day and food is an important part of their life. Frogs are normally not kept in a tank. While wild toads are imported from the wild, most often juveniles are sold and are a good start off with.

A 20-gallon tank for one or two toads provide ventilation for White's toads, which are two or three

White's tree toads are kept between 85 degrees, with the coolest temperatures occurring at night and the warmest during the day.

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Don't forget to use a quality nutritional supplement on food items before feeding them to frogs.

Alternatively, you can use coconut husk fiber or large river rocks that are too big to be accidentally ingested. Include a large water dish that is 2 to 3 inches deep for soaking at night, as well as several pieces of driftwood and artificial

plants for perches.

White's tree frogs do best when kept between 68 and 85 degrees, with the coolest temperatures occurring at night and the warmest near a light source during the day. It's a good idea to lightly mist the enclosure with water once a day to help keep the substrate moist and provide temporary increases in humidity.

Food is never a problem for White's tree frogs.

Crickets, roaches and earthworms can make up the bulk of the diet, feeding adult frogs once every three to five days.

Juveniles should be fed every

day. You can also offer

silkworms, waxworms

and mealworms

for variety,

supplement at least every other feeding. With a varied diet and the correct environment, fire-bellied toads have been known to live up to 20 years in captivity.

White's Tree Frog

(Litoria caerulea)

If there is any amphibian deserving of being called cute, White's tree frog would be it. The Australian native has earned its place in the top five not because of stunning coloration or interesting behavior, but simply due to charm. It is a hardy, heavysset, big-bodied frog, growing to nearly 4 inches, and tolerates handling now and then.

However, don't expect much activity during the day unless humidity is around. White's tree frogs are nocturnal and are normally only active at night.

While wild-caught tree frogs imported from Indonesia are most often available, captive-bred juveniles are also frequently found for sale and are the best way to ensure you start off with a healthy frog.

A 20-gallon aquarium is enough space for one or two adults. Use a screen cover to provide ventilation. The simplest substrate for White's tree frogs is moist paper towels, which should be replaced two or three times each week.

White's tree frogs do best when kept between 68 and 85 degrees, with the coolest temperatures occurring at night and the warmest up near a light source during the day.



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placed in a feeding dish at night. Use a powdered nutritional supplement on food before feeding at each meal for juveniles and every other feeding for adults. When provided with a varied diet and the right environment, pet White's tree frogs often live 10 to 15 years or more.

Red-eyed Tree Frog

(*Agalychnis callidryas*)

Perhaps the most exotic looking of the five favorite amphibian pets is the red-eyed tree frog. The stunning coloration varies with their origin in Central America, but typically, they have tomato-red eyes, tangerine-orange feet and their sides are patterned in beautiful blue bands. Their bright coloration remains hidden during the day as the frogs sleep with eyes shut and feet and flanks tucked away from view.

Red-eyes can be sensitive pets, so it's best to have a little experience keeping other frog species first. Starting with captive-bred individuals is the way to go, because wild-caught red-eyed tree frogs can be touchy. Choose well-started juveniles that are at least three-fourths of an inch length. A group of up to five juveniles can be kept in a 5-gallon aquarium with a screen cover, being moved to a 20-gallon aquarium as they mature. Adults measure between 2 and 3 inches in length, with females usually noticeably

Adult red-eyed tree frogs measure between 2 and 3 inches in length, with females usually noticeably larger than males by at least half an inch.



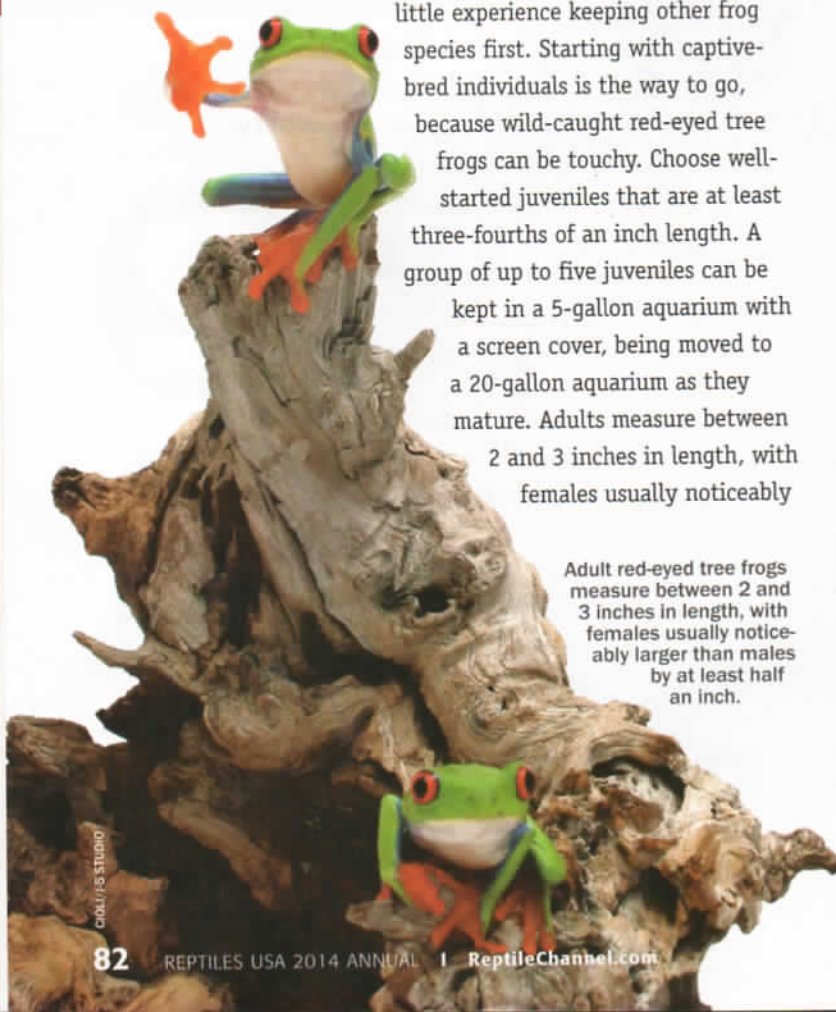
The red-eyed tree frog's stunning coloration varies with its origin in Central America, but typically, it has tomato-red eyes, tangerine-orange feet and sides that are patterned in beautiful blue bands.

larger than males by at least half an inch.

Maintain a temperature between 75 and 85 degrees during the day, making sure to avoid drafty conditions. At night, the temperature can drop by around 5 degrees. Position the terrarium away from windows and doors so its temperature remains fairly constant. Additionally, mist the terrarium with water each day. You may need to mist the terrarium two times daily to keep humidity levels ranging between 60 and 100 percent. Providing the appropriate captive environment is especially important for red-eyed tree frogs—they are less forgiving of variation than the other frogs in this article.

Luckily, red-eyed tree frog housing does not need to be complex. Normally, they spend their time above ground, either on the sides of the terrarium or on the leaves of plants. Artificial or live plants, such as *Philodendron* and *Calathea* species grown in pots, can be placed over a substrate of moist paper towels or sphagnum moss to offer sleeping spots during the day and perches at night. Additionally, provide a water dish that is 1 to 2 inches deep.

Feed adult red-eyed tree frogs twice a week, and juveniles every night. Adults love to eat house flies, which, along with frequent offerings of crickets, can



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make up the majority of the diet. Juveniles will accept flightless fruit flies. Don't forget to use a quality nutritional supplement on food items before feeding them to frogs at every feeding for juveniles and every other for adults.

Fire-bellied Newt

(*Cynops orientalis*)

Fire-bellied newts can be found for sale at nearly any pet store with a fish or herp department. They have cute, curious faces and vivid orange and black coloration ventrally. Adults grow up to 4 inches in total length. Although popular, there is much misinformation about their care in captivity, and frequently, they are short-lived simply because they are kept too warm, are fed inappropriate diets, or are housed with tropical fish or other amphibian species.

Keep fire-bellied newts in a mostly aquatic setup. A standard 10-gallon aquarium is large enough for a group of three. Make sure to use a tight-fitting screen cover. Although they do not look particularly agile, they are quite good at climbing and will escape through small gaps in the cover. Set up the aquarium with either no substrate or a thin layer of gravel, and provide a water depth of at least 6 to 8 inches.

Keep fire-bellied newts in a mostly aquatic setup. A standard 10-gallon aquarium is large enough for a group of three.

Change 25 percent or more of the water each week. You can use a small sponge filter to help maintain water quality.

Fire-bellied newts are semi-aquatic, so also offer land in part of the aquarium by floating a piece of cork bark on the water or stacking rocks in a pile until they protrude from the water's surface. Aquatic plants will also provide resting areas at the water's surface.

Young newts often prefer a more terrestrial habitat, so if your newts seem to spend most of their time out of the water, adjust housing accordingly and provide a greater land area until they transition to a more aquatic life stage.

Water temperature should stay between 60 and 70 degrees, ideally never rising above 75 degrees. The best place for a fire-bellied newt enclosure is in a cool basement. Warm temperatures may cause newts to stop eating or come down with health problems like fungal or bacterial infections, while cool temperatures down to 50 degrees are no problem.

Occasionally, a newt will learn to feed on non-





Big, fat and secretive, tiger salamanders are popular because of their monstrous appetites and attractive contrasting coloration.

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living pellet diets designed for amphibians or tropical fish, but the majority of fire-bellies won't accept these and should be offered live food, such as black worms and chopped earthworms. Drop food items into the water because most newts won't regularly accept food on land. Given a healthy diet and cool temperatures, fire-bellied newts should live 10 years or more.

Tiger Salamanders

(*Ambystoma mavortium* and *A. tigrinum*)

Big and secretive, tiger salamanders are popular because of their monstrous appetites and attractive coloration. They have not been bred in captivity, and all individuals in the trade are wild caught, usually captured and sold during their spring breeding migrations when they wake from hibernation and congregate to breed for a short time at temporary ponds. If tiger salamanders are native to your area and it is legal to do so, the best way to acquire one is to spend a night in the field and collect one yourself. Before doing so, check to see if a permit is required. Also, take into consideration that

tiger salamanders are fairly long-lived. The first one I kept was acquired in 1994 and is still alive today.

Tiger salamanders can grow to almost 14 inches in total length, but most stay smaller. Though they are large amphibians, they are not particularly active and spend most of their time under cover, waiting for food to arrive. A 15-gallon aquarium is large enough for one adult. A substrate around 3 inches thick of coconut husk fiber blended 50/50 with cypress mulch works well, but take care to provide a moisture gradient within it so that the bottom portion stays damp while an area to one side or on top is dryer. You can achieve this by pouring a little water into the enclosure once a week or as needed, but take care to avoid soggy or water-logged conditions.



Tiger salamanders are not particularly active. A 15-gallon aquarium is large enough for one adult.

Additionally, provide a large water dish, 2 inches deep, in which your salamander can soak. Cork bark, driftwood or dead leaves laid over the substrate provide hiding spots. Maintain a temperature between 60 and 75 degrees, but don't let it rise above this range.

Feeding tiger salamanders is the most enjoyable part of their care. They are ferocious little predators that won't hesitate to snap at just about anything

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Position the terrarium away from windows and doors so the temperature remains fairly constant.

that is alive and placed in front of their mouths, including your finger. Adults will even eat young mice and small fish, but these are best fed sparingly because they are high in fat and using them too frequently may lead to health problems. Instead, a diet of earthworms, night crawlers and crickets is healthiest.

Rotate waxworms, silkworms or superworms into their diet once a month for variety. Feed one to two times per week, offering worms by hand or with tongs so the food does not burrow into the substrate before your salamander attacks.

Something for Everyone

There is good cause for the five amphibian species in this article to be named the top favorite. Each offers

something a little different to the prospective amphibian keeper, whether it's color, ease of care, a beastly appetite or an exotic form. Because they all have different care requirements, keep them in their own dedicated enclosures without mixing them with other species. Always research the animals you keep before buying on and set up their enclosures first. This will help ensure they live a long, healthy life under your care. 🐸

Devin Edmonds has kept amphibians since childhood and runs a popular website about their care (amphibiancare.com). He currently resides in Madagascar, where he helps coordinate an amphibian captive-breeding facility with the conservation organization, Mitsinjo.



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