

WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

Amphibians

Frogs, toads and salamanders: choosing well



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New owner? Go straight to Section 1. It is written so you can set up a safe, correct home and get through the first 48 hours without reading anything else first.

Few pets stop a person in their tracks like an amphibian. A round, grumpy Pacman frog sits in its burrow like a living beanbag. A thumb-sized dart frog sings from a bromeliad leaf in broad daylight. A fire-bellied toad floats at the surface with its arms spread wide, and an axolotl drifts past the glass wearing a permanent smile and a crown of feathery gills. It is easy to fall in love in a single afternoon. This guide exists to slow that moment down just enough to make it a good decision, because amphibians are some of the most rewarding animals a family can keep and also some of the most misunderstood.

Here is the honest headline. Amphibians are **look-don't-touch pets**. Their skin is thin and **permeable**, which means water, oils and chemicals pass straight through it, so the soap, lotion, sunscreen or hand sanitizer on your fingers can hurt them. They need **dechlorinated water** every time. Most of them eat **live insects or worms**, which means you are really keeping a small feeder colony too. Several of them have a **temperature ceiling**: fire-bellied toads and axolotls are cool-water animals that struggle in a warm house. If those facts sound like a fun puzzle, you are in the right place. If they sound like a chore, read on anyway, because the right species for your family may be the one that fits your life best, not the one with the prettiest picture.

We cover five popular choices: the Pacman Frog, the Tree Frog, the Dart Frog, the Fire-Bellied Toad and the Axolotl. Each has its own full care guide. Think of this page as the matchmaker: it helps you pick, sets honest expectations, and then sends you to the detailed guide for your choice.

SECTION 1

Quick Start: Choosing Your First Amphibian

Before you fall for a species, walk through this checklist with everyone in the household. Write your answers down. They will narrow the field faster than any chart.

1. **Be honest about daily time.** Every amphibian needs a quick daily check of temperature, water and food. Dart frogs add fruit fly cultures. Axolotls add water testing and cooling. Plan on **10 to 20 minutes a day** on average, plus a bigger weekly session.
2. **Measure the space.** Amphibian homes are small compared with a dog or even a big lizard, but they cannot be moved around casually. A Pacman frog needs a 20-gallon long tank as an adult. An axolotl needs the same at minimum, and a 40-gallon breeder is better. Decide where it will live before you buy.
3. **Add up the real budget.** The animal is often the cheapest part. Tank, lid, lighting, thermometers, water treatment, substrate, live plants and a steady supply of feeders add up. Axolotls may also need a fan or chiller. Budget for a setup and for ongoing food.
4. **Count the years.** Fire-bellied toads and axolotls commonly live 10 to 15 years. White's tree frogs can reach 15 to 20 or more. Many dart frogs live a decade or longer. This is not a short-term pet.
5. **Decide who does the daily care.** If a child is the keeper, an adult must be the backup, every day, including vacations. Live feeders and water changes do not pause for a sleepover.
6. **Think about touching.** If anyone in the family dreams of a pet to cuddle or carry around, an amphibian is not it. These are display animals. Hands go in only when truly necessary, and only after rinsing them well with plain water.
7. **Think about other pets.** Cats and dogs can stress, injure or poison a tank by interfering with it. Plan a spot out of reach, with a lid that locks or clips shut.
8. **Consider the children's ages.** Young children can enjoy watching, helping with feeders and learning the rules, but they should not be unsupervised with the tank. Careful handwashing matters because amphibians can carry Salmonella.
9. **Check local law.** Some states restrict or ban certain species, and Pennsylvania has specific rules about native reptiles and amphibians. See the Legal & Ethical Sourcing section below, then check your own state wildlife agency and local rules.

10. **Find an exotic-animal vet before you need one.** Many general vets do not treat amphibians. Call ahead, ask whether they see frogs, toads or salamanders, and save the number.

First-Time Starter Bundle

These are the basics every new amphibian keeper needs on day one, whichever species you choose. Species-specific extras are in each full care guide.

Essentials

- **A secure, escape-proof enclosure sized for the species.** A glass tank or vivarium with a tight-fitting lid and fine-mesh ventilation. Amphibians are surprisingly good at escaping, and a frog that gets out can dry out in a couple of hours. Floor space matters more than height for ground-dwellers and aquatic species; height matters for climbing frogs.
- **A water conditioner that removes chlorine and chloramine.** Chlorine can fade from sitting water, but chloramine (chlorine bonded to ammonia) does not. Use a dechlorinator on every water change, every top-off and every bit of water you mist with.
- **A digital thermometer with a probe, and a digital hygrometer.** A stick-on strip is not accurate enough for animals with a temperature ceiling. You need real readings at animal level.
- **A shallow, easy-to-exit water dish or the right water volume.** Land-dwelling frogs need a dish they can soak in and climb out of. Axolotls need a full, cool, filtered tank.
- **A safe substrate suited to the species.** Damp coconut fiber and sphagnum moss for most frogs and toads, a layered soil mix for bioactive dart frog terrariums, and bare bottom or very fine sand for axolotls. No gravel an animal could swallow.
- **Hides and cover.** Cork bark, half logs and live or artificial plants. Amphibians feel safest when they can disappear.
- **A gentle, low-heat lighting plan.** Most amphibians need a day and night cycle of about 10 to 12 hours of light and soft, cool-running lighting. Strong lamps overheat small enclosures. Axolotls prefer dim, shaded water.
- **A calcium powder and a reptile and amphibian multivitamin.** Used to dust insects for the species that eat them. Plain calcium without D3 and a vitamin-rich powder are both useful.
- **Feeding tongs or a feeding cup.** Keeps your hands away from the animal and from the feeder insects.
- **A dedicated set of cleaning tools.** A bucket, sponge and net that are used only for the amphibian setup, never in the kitchen sink, and never with soap.

Ready to set up? Browse the essentials in our collections: [Reptile and Amphibian Enclosures](#) and [Reptile and Amphibian Terrarium Supplies & Accessories](#).

Enrichment

- **Live plants such as pothos or bromeliads.** They hold humidity, give cover and make the tank look like a tiny rainforest. Rinse any plant well and use only plants grown without pesticides.
- **A climbing network of branches, cork rounds and vines.** For tree frogs and dart frogs, vertical space is enrichment and exercise in one.
- **A leaf litter layer.** Dried, pesticide-free leaves give ground frogs and toads something to rustle through and hide under.
- **A clean-up crew of springtails and dwarf isopods.** These tiny soil dwellers eat mold and waste and keep a damp terrarium fresh.
- **A feeder culture setup.** A small culture of fruit flies, crickets or earthworms gives you a fresh, gut-loaded food supply and fewer trips to the store.

- **A dim background or backing on three sides.** Reduces reflections and helps shy animals relax.
- **A quarantine tub for new arrivals.** A bare-bones tub with paper towel, a hide and a water dish keeps a new animal separate for weeks before it meets any others.

Enrichment, one click away. Shop Reptile and Amphibian Accessories.

SECTION 2

Meet the Amphibians

Amphibians are a big and varied group. In this guide we cover two frogs that sit and wait, one that climbs, one that sings by day, one that is technically a toad and one that never grows up. Here is each in turn, with what it is really like to live with.

Pacman Frog: the ambush predator

The Pacman Frog (also called the ornate horned frog or Argentine horned frog) is round, wide-mouthed and wonderfully grumpy. It is an **ambush predator**, an animal that hunts by sitting perfectly still and lunging when something edible moves past. Adult females reach about 4 to 6 inches, sometimes up to roughly 7, and males are smaller. They typically live 6 to 10 years with good care, and sometimes up to 15. A Pacman frog spends much of its day buried in damp substrate, mostly active at dusk and night. It is **strictly solitary**: one frog per enclosure, always, because they are cannibalistic and will try to eat a tankmate. They are a gentle, low-activity display animal that eats big meals and explodes into action only when food appears. Pacman frogs are a good first amphibian for someone who wants a simple setup and does not mind a pet that mostly sits.

Tree Frog: the quiet climber

The Tree Frog family covers three species most keepers meet first: the White's tree frog, the American green tree frog and the red-eyed tree frog. All three climb, all three are active mostly at night, and all three love a tall, planted, humid enclosure. The White's tree frog is the calm, chunky favorite, about 3 to 4.5 inches long, tolerating very brief handling, and living 15 to 20 or more years. The American green tree frog is smaller, about 1.5 to 2.5 inches, hardy and active, and typically lives about 5 to 10 years. The red-eyed tree frog is a stunner at 2 to 3 inches but more stress-prone, best admired from outside the glass, and is generally an intermediate choice. For a first tree frog, the White's and the American green are the easiest to keep well.

Dart Frog: the jewel by day

The Dart Frog is the one that makes people gasp: bright blue, yellow, green or orange, thumb-sized and out in the open during the day. Medium species such as the dyeing dart frog (including the blue "azureus" morph), the bumblebee and the green-and-black dart frog are about 1.5 to 2 inches and often live 10 to 15 years or more. Tiny *Ranitomeya* species are under an inch and more delicate. Dart frogs are bold, loud and fascinating to watch, which is why they are so popular in planted, bioactive terrariums. They are also demanding: they eat only tiny live prey such as flightless fruit flies and springtails, so you will be running feeder cultures. They are not handled pets at all. And yes, a captive-bred dart frog is **not poisonous**, a point we explain in the FAQ.

Fire-Bellied Toad: the cool-water charmer

The Fire-Bellied Toad (the Oriental fire-bellied toad) is a small, bold green toad, about 2 to 2.5 inches, with a vivid red or orange-and-black belly. It lives in a half-water, half-land setup called an **aquaterrarium**. It is active by day, calls loudly, and lives in groups of three to five of its own species. It typically lives 10 to 15 years, sometimes up to 20 in captivity. The big catch is the **temperature ceiling**: it is a cool-climate animal from northeast China and Korea, so a warm room is a real problem. Its warning posture, called the unken reflex, shows the bright belly when it feels threatened, and its skin secretions can irritate your eyes and mouth, so it is not a handling pet. For a family with a cool spot and a love of watching, it is an excellent first amphibian.

Axolotl: the salamander that stays a kid

The Axolotl is a **fully aquatic salamander**, not a fish, despite the nickname "Mexican walking fish." It keeps its feathery external gills and lives in water its whole life. Adults are typically 9 to 12 inches long and live 10 to 15 years with good care. It is calm, curious, food-motivated and best kept alone. Wild axolotls are critically endangered, and pet axolotls are captive-bred. They are fascinating but have exacting needs: **cool water (about 60 to 68°F)**, a fully cycled, filtered tank and zero chlorine or chloramine. They are not handling pets, and they are illegal or restricted in some states. For the right household, they are a joy.

SECTION 3

Which Amphibian Is Right for You?

This is the page to bookmark. The chart below compares the five side by side, using the same figures as our full species guides. Where a figure varies by species or by animal, we give a safe range.

Species	Adult size	Typical lifespan	Minimum enclosure	Daily time	Handling	Best for
Pacman Frog	About 4 to 6 inches (females up to roughly 7)	6 to 10 years, sometimes up to 15	20-gallon long for an adult (10-gallon for a juvenile)	5 to 10 minutes	None; look, do not touch	Simple setup, low activity, watching a dramatic feeding
Tree Frog	1.5 to 4.5 inches depending on species	About 5 to 10 years for green and red-eyed; 15 to 20+ for White's	18" x 18" x 24" tall for green or red-eyed; 24" x 18" x 36" tall for White's	10 to 15 minutes	Brief handling only for White's; avoid for others	A tall planted display, a long commitment, an easy first frog
Dart Frog	About 0.5 to 2 inches	5 to 15+ years	18" x 18" x 18" for a pair or trio of a medium species; 18" x 18" x 24" is better	15 to 20 minutes plus feeder cultures	None	Hobbyists who love building a living, planted terrarium
Fire-Bellied Toad	About 2 to 2.5 inches	10 to 15 years, sometimes 20	10-gallon for one or two; 20-gallon long for three to five	10 to 15 minutes	None; skin secretions irritate	A cool room, a lively group of display animals
Axolotl	About 9 to 12 inches	10 to 15 years	20-gallon long minimum; 40-gallon breeder preferred	10 to 20 minutes plus water testing	None; look, do not touch	A cool home, patient keepers who love water chemistry

Choose this if...

You want the easiest first amphibian. Start with the White's tree frog or the American green tree frog, or the Pacman frog if you prefer a ground-dweller. The fire-bellied toad is also beginner-friendly in a cool home. Of the five, the dart frog and the axolotl are the least forgiving for a first-timer.

A child wants a first pet. Be careful. Every amphibian here is a look-and-learn pet that needs an adult in charge. A fire-bellied toad group or a White's tree frog can be a great shared family project, with the adult handling water, feeders and temperature, and the child helping with feeding time and observation. Do not pick a species that depends on a child's daily diligence alone.

You are busy and want low daily effort. The Pacman frog is the most forgiving of an irregular schedule, since adults eat only a few times a week and sit quietly in between. A planted White's tree frog tank is also easy to run once it is dialed in. Avoid the dart frog if you cannot keep feeder cultures going every week.

You want to hold your pet. Amphibians are the wrong group. Their permeable skin takes in whatever is on your hands, and handling stresses them. If you need a pet you can hold, look at a leopard gecko or a small mammal instead. The only exception is brief, necessary handling of a White's tree frog with clean, wet, rinsed hands.

You want a stunning display animal. The dart frog is the showpiece, with its jewel colors and daytime activity, but it asks the most of you. The fire-bellied toad and the axolotl are easier to keep and just as fascinating to watch.

You live in a small apartment. A Pacman frog or a dart frog vivarium takes very little room. Axolotls need cool water, which can be tough in a warm apartment without a chiller. Check your summer room temperature honestly before choosing.

You want a long commitment. The White's tree frog is the champion at 15 to 20 or more years. Fire-bellied toads, axolotls and many dart frogs commonly live a decade or longer.

Poor first choices. The red-eyed tree frog is delicate and stress-prone, the dart frog needs heavy live-food and terrarium work, and the axolotl is wonderful but needs steady cool temperatures and careful water chemistry. These are rewarding second or third amphibians, not impulse buys.

SECTION 4

Space, Setup & Budget

Amphibian setups look small on the shelf, but each species wants a different kind of space. Match the shape of the tank to how the animal lives, not just the gallon number.

Species	Lives mostly	Best tank shape	Starting size	Setup style
Pacman Frog	On the ground, often buried	Low and wide (a "long" tank)	10-gallon juvenile, 20-gallon long adult	Deep damp substrate, hide, shallow water dish
Tree Frog	In plants and on branches	Tall with climbing room	18" x 18" x 24" tall; White's 24" x 18" x 36" tall	Vertical planted terrarium
Dart Frog	Leaf litter and low plants	Standard cube or front-opening vivarium	18" x 18" x 18" minimum, 18" x 18" x 24" better	Bioactive planted terrarium
Fire-Bellied Toad	Land and water	Long and low, split into water and land	10-gallon for one or two, 20-gallon long for three to five	Aquaterrarium
Axolotl	Fully underwater	Long floor, modest height	20-gallon long minimum, 40-gallon breeder preferred	Cool, filtered, cycled aquarium

Escape-proofing

Every amphibian setup needs a secure lid with fine-mesh screening. Fruit flies, frogs and toads all go where you do not want them to, and axolotls can leap out of an open tank. Check every gap around cords, filter tubing and feeding doors.

Budget in plain terms

Plan your spending in three buckets rather than a single number. The **one-time setup** covers the tank, lid, lighting, hides, plants, thermometers and a hygrometer. The **ongoing monthly costs** are feeders, supplements, water conditioner, replacement plants and substrate. The **seasonal or surprise costs** are a fan or chiller for cool-water species, a vet visit, or a bigger tank when the animal outgrows the first one. Setup costs run higher for dart frogs (a planted bioactive terrarium) and axolotls (filtration and cooling), and lower for a Pacman frog. Ongoing costs run lowest for a Pacman frog and highest for dart frogs and axolotls, because of the live feeders and the water care.

Buy the right tank once

The most common budget mistake is buying a tiny starter tank and replacing it within a year. Buy the adult-sized enclosure from the start, even if the animal is small. A larger volume of water or substrate is also steadier, which is easier on the animal and easier on you.

SECTION 5

Heat, Light & Habitat Basics

Amphibians are **ectotherms**, which means their body temperature follows the temperature around them. They also breathe and drink partly through their skin, so moisture matters as much as warmth. The two big rules are: measure everything with a real thermometer and hygrometer, and respect the temperature ceiling.

Species	Air temperature	Water or humidity target	Ceiling or special note
Pacman Frog	75 to 82°F by day, 70 to 75°F at night	Damp, humid substrate	Do not let it fall much below about 68°F
Tree Frog	75 to 82°F by day, 68 to 75°F at night	50 to 70% humidity (60 to 80% for red-eyed)	Overheating and dry air are the risks
Dart Frog	72 to 80°F	70 to 100% humidity	Never above about 82°F
Fire-Bellied Toad	70 to 75°F typical (68 to 78°F safe range)	60 to 80% humidity; water in the upper 60s to low 70s	Above 80°F is dangerous
Axolotl	Water 60 to 68°F	Fully aquatic	Above about 72°F is stressful; above about 75°F is dangerous

Heat: gentle, measured, and often unnecessary

Most amphibians do not need a heat lamp. Strong lamps dry the air and can overheat a small tank fast. Pacman frogs and many tree frogs may need gentle warmth from a thermostat-controlled under-tank heater on the side of the tank, not a basking light. Dart frogs usually do fine at ordinary room temperature. Fire-bellied toads and axolotls need to be kept **cool**, and the more common problem for them is a summer heat wave, not a cold snap. Always put your thermometer where the animal lives and check it every day.

Cooling cool-water species

For axolotls and fire-bellied toads, plan your cooling before the animal arrives. Simple options include placing the tank in a cool basement or room, pointing a clip-on fan across the water surface (evaporation pulls heat out), and, for hot climates, an aquarium chiller. Never add ice directly to the water, and never let the temperature swing quickly. Slow, steady changes are safest.

Light

Most amphibians do well with a **10 to 12 hour** day and night cycle from soft, cool-running lighting. Many need only gentle ambient light. Planted terrariums benefit from an LED that suits the plants. Axolotls prefer shade and floating plants because they dislike bright light. Whatever you choose, keep the light cool and the tank out of direct sun.

Humidity and moisture

Misting by hand or with a timer keeps humidity up in tanks with tree frogs, dart frogs and fire-bellied toads. Use dechlorinated or reverse-osmosis water for misting. Good ventilation matters too: a tank that is wet but stagnant is a breeding ground for bacteria. A simple rule is wet substrate, damp air and fresh airflow through screened sections.

Water: the non-negotiable

Tap water is treated to be safe for people, not amphibians. Chlorine and chloramine can burn a frog's skin or an axolotl's gills. Always use a dechlorinator that states it removes both chlorine and chloramine, for every dish refill, water change and misting bottle. In some homes with well water or heavy treatment, reverse-osmosis water with minerals replaced is the safest route. For

aquatic setups, cycle the tank first. A new tank has no helpful bacteria, so ammonia from waste has nowhere to go and can poison an animal added too soon.

The hand rule

Rinse your hands thoroughly with plain water before and after any contact with an amphibian or its enclosure. Soap, lotion, sunscreen, bug spray and sanitizer residue can pass through the skin and harm the animal. If you have to touch an amphibian, wet your hands with dechlorinated water first.

SECTION 6

Diet & Nutrition



Live insects and worms, sized to the animal and dusted on a schedule. Nearly every amphibian eats live food, so plan for that ongoing chore and cost.

Almost every pet amphibian is a **carnivore** or **insectivore**. In plain terms, they eat animal prey, mostly live, and they judge it by movement. That means feeders are a big part of the job. Each species has its own staple and its own common mistake.

Species	Diet type	Main staple	Common mistake
Pacman Frog	Carnivore	Crickets, dubia roaches and earthworms or nightcrawlers, sized to the frog	Overfeeding; a Pacman frog will eat until it is dangerously fat
Tree Frog	Insectivore	Crickets, dubia roaches and other insects, dusted with calcium	Too many fatty feeders and too little variety, leading to obesity
Dart Frog	Insectivore	Flightless fruit flies and springtails, dusted with supplements	Skipping the supplements or letting the fruit fly cultures crash
Fire-Bellied Toad	Insectivore	Small crickets, fruit flies and worms	Feeding prey that is too big, or feeding only crickets

Species	Diet type	Main staple	Common mistake
Axolotl	Carnivore	Earthworms, blackworms and quality sinking pellets	Feeding too much, which fouls the water, or feeding warm-water fish foods

Gut-loading and dusting

Feeder insects are only as healthy as what they eat. **Gut-loading** means feeding the insects a nutritious diet for a day or so before they are offered, so their stomachs are full of good nutrition when your animal eats them. **Dusting** means lightly coating them with calcium or a multivitamin powder. Calcium prevents metabolic bone disease, a painful and common weakness in captive amphibians. Rotate between plain calcium and a vitamin powder on a schedule that your species guide spells out.

Live food and safety

Never feed wild-caught insects, which can carry pesticides or parasites. Choose feeders from a trusted source or breed your own. Keep feeders in a separate, clean container, and do not keep feeders in the kitchen. Use tongs or a feeding dish to keep your hands off the animal.

How often to feed

Feeding frequency depends on species and age. Growing froglets and young axolotls eat daily or nearly so, and adults eat far less often. As a rough guide, adult Pacman frogs eat about two or three times a week, adult White's tree frogs about two or three times a week, adult dart frogs most days in small, dusted portions, adult fire-bellied toads about two or three times a week, and adult axolotls about every two or three days. Always check your species guide, and skip a meal if the animal looks plump.

Feeding mistakes to avoid

- **Feeding too big.** Prey should be no wider than the space between the animal's eyes.
- **Overfeeding.** Amphibians do not know when to stop. Adults should look round but not bulging.
- **Feeding human food.** Meat, cheese and processed foods do not belong in an amphibian diet.
- **Leaving live crickets in the tank.** Crickets can chew on sleeping frogs. Remove uneaten ones.
- **Skipping the supplements.** Even good feeders need dusting to prevent bone disease.

Shop the food and supplies: Browse Reptile & Amphibian Food and Live Feed Delivered!.

SECTION 7

Lifespan & Commitment

Amphibians are a long commitment dressed up in a small body. Here is the realistic range for each, with the usual caveat that individual animals and care quality vary.

Species	Typical lifespan	The long-term picture
Pacman Frog	6 to 10 years, sometimes up to 15	A moderate commitment; adults need little but a stable, warm, damp home
Tree Frog	About 5 to 10 years for green and red-eyed; 15 to 20+ for White's	The White's tree frog may be with you for most of a child's growing years
Dart Frog	5 to 15+ years	Many reach a decade or more; the tiny <i>Ranitomeya</i> are on the shorter end
Fire-Bellied Toad	10 to 15 years, sometimes 20	A long-lived group animal that needs a steady cool climate
Axolotl	10 to 15 years	A decade of cool, clean, cycled water

Think in life stages

Young animals grow fast and need frequent feeding and tank upgrades. Adults settle into a calm routine. Older animals need extra attention: they may slow down, eat less and need steadier temperatures. Plan for the whole span, including who will care for the animal if your family's life changes.

Rehoming is a last resort

If you cannot keep an animal, contact the seller, a reputable reptile and amphibian rescue or a knowledgeable local keeper. **Never release a pet amphibian into the wild.** Released pets can spread disease and harm native wildlife. Planning the full commitment before you buy is the kindest thing you can do.

SECTION 8

Handling, Temperament & Families

Say it with us: **amphibians are look-don't-touch pets**. Their skin is thin, moist and permeable, so it absorbs oils, soap, lotion, sunscreen and sanitizer straight from your fingers. Their bodies are delicate, and handling is stressful even for the calmest animal. The reward is in watching, not holding.

Species	Temperament	Handling guidance
Pacman Frog	Placid and still until food appears, then explosive	Do not handle; it can bite hard at feeding time, and the stress is not worth it
Tree Frog	White's is docile and calm; green is skittish; red-eyed is delicate	Brief, necessary handling only, and only for White's, with clean wet hands
Dart Frog	Bold, loud, active by day	Do not handle; they are display animals and handling stresses them
Fire-Bellied Toad	Bold, active, curious	Do not handle; skin secretions can irritate eyes and mouth, and the toad can stiffen into its warning pose
Axolotl	Calm, curious, food-motivated	Do not handle; their slime coat is fragile, and warm hands can harm them

When you must touch

Sometimes an animal has to be moved for a tank clean-out or a vet visit. Use a clean, damp cup or a soft net kept only for that animal. If you must use your hands, rinse them with plain dechlorinated water first, with no soap, and keep contact short. Never use gloves with powder or residue.

Salmonella and family hygiene

Amphibians can carry **Salmonella**, a bacterium that causes serious stomach illness in people but does no harm to the animal. This is not a reason to avoid them, but it is a strict household rule. Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds after touching the tank, the water, the substrate, the decorations or the animal, then rinse well. Keep amphibian supplies out of the kitchen, never clean a tank in a sink used for food, and keep the tank away from food-prep areas. Children under five, adults over 65, pregnant women and anyone with a weakened immune system face higher risk and should be extra careful or avoid direct contact with the animal and its water.

Dart frogs are not poisonous in captivity

In the wild, dart frogs get their skin toxins from the ants, mites and beetles they eat. Captive-bred frogs raised on fruit flies and springtails never receive those chemicals, so they are **not poisonous**. They are still look-don't-touch for the same skin reasons as every other amphibian.

Families and other pets

A tank in a family room is a wonderful teaching tool: children learn about habitats, water and responsible care. Keep the lid secure, place the tank out of reach of cats, dogs and toddlers, and make the rules clear. A shared chart on the wall that lists daily, weekly and monthly tasks keeps everyone on track.

SECTION 9

Legal & Ethical Sourcing

Laws vary, so check yours

Rules about keeping amphibians differ by state, county and city. Some species are restricted or banned, and the rules change over time. Before buying, check your state wildlife agency and your local rules. If you rent, check your lease too.

Axolotls are banned in California, Maine and New Jersey, and need a permit in New Mexico. Virginia has allowed them since August 1, 2021. Many older lists still show Virginia as restricted, which is out of date.

Pennsylvania's native reptile and amphibian rules

Our home state has specific rules worth knowing even if you live elsewhere. In Pennsylvania, it is **unlawful to bring a native reptile or amphibian into the state from another state** (58 Pa. Code § 79.10), and it is unlawful to buy or sell a native reptile or amphibian taken in Pennsylvania, or its offspring (§ 79.9). The practical lesson for every keeper, in every state, is to be sure of where an animal came from and what the local rules say before you bring it home. If you are unsure, check with your state wildlife agency.

Buy captive-bred, never wild-caught

Choose captive-bred animals from a reputable breeder or store. Wild-caught amphibians often arrive with parasites, stress and disease, and taking animals from the wild harms wild populations. Ask where the animal was bred, how old it is and what it has been eating. A healthy animal looks plump (not bloated), clear-eyed, alert and active at the right time of day.

Chytrid fungus and why we never mix or release

Chytrid fungus (Bd) is a skin disease that has devastated wild amphibian populations around the world. It spreads through contact and water. Signs include lethargy, loss of appetite, odd posture, and abnormal shedding of skin. Two rules protect wild amphibians and your own:

- **Never release a pet amphibian into the wild**, no matter how kind it feels. A released animal can carry disease and compete with native species.
- **Never mix wild-caught or backyard amphibians with your pets**, and never put pond water or wild animals in your tank. Quarantine every new animal in a separate tub for several weeks.

Ethical keeping

The best amphibian keepers learn the species, give it room, keep the water and temperature right, and plan for the whole lifespan. Axolotls are critically endangered in the wild, and the pet trade relies on captive-bred stock. Choose breeders who care for their animals and are open about their care.

SECTION 10

Common Challenges & Solutions

Most amphibian problems come from the same handful of causes: wrong temperature, wrong water, wrong food or the wrong match between animal and household. Here are eight group-level problems, with what to look for and what to do. Your species guide covers detailed health issues.

Impulse buys

What you see: a tank set up in a rush, an animal bought on the same day, and a keeper who has not planned for feeders, water treatment or cooling. **Why it happens:** amphibians are small, colorful and cheap to buy on the spot, and the real costs are hidden. **What to do:** set up the full habitat first, run it for at least a week, and confirm your numbers with a probe thermometer. Read the species guide before the animal comes home. **When to ask for help:** if an animal arrives before the tank is ready, set it up in a clean quarantine tub with the right temperature and call the store at (717) 983-8069 for guidance.

Outgrown enclosures

What you see: a Pacman frog with no room to burrow, an axolotl with its tail curled against the glass, or a toad group squabbling over space. **Why it happens:** buyers choose the juvenile size and forget animals grow. **What to do:** buy the adult-sized tank from the start, and upgrade promptly when the animal reaches the size limit. **When to ask for help:** if an animal is stressed, hiding all the time or not eating, check the setup against your species guide and ask a vet who sees amphibians.

Wrong diet from pet-store advice

What you see: an animal that refuses food, grows thin, or becomes obese. **Why it happens:** casual advice such as "just feed crickets" or "give it a goldfish" misses the species needs, and feeders may be the wrong size or poorly fed. **What to do:** feed the staple in your species guide, gut-load and dust feeders, vary the menu, and size prey to the animal. **When to ask for help:** weight loss, a swollen belly, or a weak, shaky frog needs a vet visit within a few days, because those can signal metabolic bone disease or parasites.

Heat and humidity mistakes

What you see: a dart frog or tree frog that sits still with dry skin, a fire-bellied toad panting and sprawled in the water, or an axolotl with curled gills and no appetite. **Why it happens:** a heat lamp that is too strong, a sunny window, a summer heat wave, or dry indoor air. **What to do:** check the probe thermometer and hygrometer, move the tank out of the sun, add a fan or chiller for cool-water species, and mist as your species guide advises. Make changes slowly. **When to ask for help:** if the animal does not recover within a day of correcting the numbers, or if you see red or white patches on the skin, call an exotic-animal vet.

Lonely or aggressive tankmates

What you see: bite marks, missing toes, a smaller animal hiding constantly, or an animal that suddenly disappears. **Why it happens:** some species are strictly solitary (Pacman frogs and axolotls), while others are social (fire-bellied toads, green tree frogs). Mixing species invites aggression, disease and cannibalism. **What to do:** keep solitary species alone, keep social species only with their own kind in a large enough tank, and never mix species. **When to ask for help:** separate injured animals into a clean quarantine tub right away and consult a vet.

Handling stress

What you see: a frog that freezes, a toad that arches and shows its belly, or an animal with torn or blotchy skin after being picked up. **Why it happens:** amphibian skin is thin, and oils and residue on hands can harm it. **What to do:** stop handling, rinse your hands with plain water, and give the animal a quiet week. Use a damp cup or soft net when you must move it. **When to ask for help:** call a vet if you see redness, sores or skin that does not look right after contact.

Water quality problems

What you see: a cloudy tank, a strong smell, gill damage on an axolotl, or a frog sitting in murky water. **Why it happens:** chlorine or chloramine in untreated tap water, uneaten food, a tank that was never cycled, or too little cleaning. **What to do:** use dechlorinator on all water, test the water if the tank is aquatic, remove uneaten food within an hour or two, and do regular partial water changes. **When to ask for help:** if an animal shows red or white-patched gills, lethargy or floating, move it to a clean, treated tub and call a vet.

Vet access and rehoming

What you see: a sick animal and no vet who treats amphibians, or a keeper who can no longer care for an animal. **Why it happens:** exotic vets are less common, and life changes. **What to do:** find a vet before you need one, and keep records of temperature, feeding and shedding. If you must rehome, contact the breeder, a rescue or an experienced keeper, and never release the animal outdoors. **When to ask for help:** call the store at (717) 983-8069 for guidance on finding resources, and call a vet the same day if an animal is bloated, limp or not responsive.

SECTION 11

Routine Care at a Glance

Use this table as a weekly rhythm that works across the group. Your species guide has the fine details.

Frequency	Task	Notes
Daily	Check temperature and humidity on the probe thermometer and hygrometer	Note anything outside the range for your species
Daily	Look at each animal	Clear eyes, normal posture, normal color, no sores
Daily	Refresh water	Dechlorinated or reverse-osmosis water only
Daily or every few days	Feed the right portion	See your species guide for the frequency
Daily	Remove uneaten feeders and waste	Especially live crickets and uneaten worms
Weekly	Mist or top off as needed and wipe the glass	Keep ventilation fresh
Weekly	Tend feeder cultures	Fruit flies, springtails, crickets and worms
Weekly	Partial water change for aquatic tanks	Test water and dechlorinate every new addition
Monthly	Deep clean decor and replace damaged plants	Rinse with plain water, no soap
Monthly	Check filters, lids, heaters, fans and lights	Replace anything that is failing
Every six months	Replace aging lights and check equipment	Cool-running LEDs last longer
Yearly	Visit an exotic-animal vet	Ask about a fecal exam for parasites

SECTION 12

FAQ

What is the best amphibian for a beginner?

For most families, the best first amphibian is the White's tree frog, the American green tree frog, the Pacman frog or the fire-bellied toad, depending on your home. The White's is calm and forgiving but is a 15 to 20 year commitment. The Pacman frog suits a simple, low-activity setup. The fire-bellied toad is great if you have a cool spot. Dart frogs and axolotls are wonderful, but they ask more of a first-timer, with feeder cultures for dart frogs and steady cooling and water chemistry for axolotls.

What is the easiest pet frog to take care of?

The White's tree frog and the American green tree frog are widely considered the easiest pet frogs, with the Pacman frog close behind. All three are hardy and forgiving of small mistakes once the habitat is dialed in. Easy still means daily checks of temperature, humidity and water, plus live insects for food. No amphibian is a no-effort pet.

Can you hold a pet frog?

It is best not to. Frogs have thin, permeable skin that absorbs oils, soap, lotion and sanitizer from your hands, and handling is stressful for them. A White's tree frog tolerates very brief, necessary handling better than most, but even then, wet your hands with dechlorinated water first and keep it short. Wash your hands with soap afterward, because amphibians can carry Salmonella.

Are pet frogs poisonous?

Captive-bred pet frogs are not dangerous to touch in the way people fear. Dart frogs in the wild pick up skin toxins from the ants, mites and beetles they eat. Dart frogs raised in captivity on fruit flies and springtails never get those chemicals, so they are not poisonous. Some species, such as fire-bellied toads, have mildly irritating skin secretions, so keep your hands away from your eyes and mouth, and always wash up. Never allow pets or children to mouth an amphibian.

Do frogs need a heat lamp?

Usually not. Most pet frogs do well at comfortable room temperature or with gentle warmth from a thermostat-controlled heater on the side of the tank. Strong lamps dry the air and can overheat a small enclosure. Pacman frogs and some tree frogs may need mild supplemental warmth, while dart frogs, fire-bellied toads and axolotls often need to be kept cooler, not warmer. Measure with a probe thermometer rather than guessing.

What do pet frogs eat?

Most pet frogs eat live insects and worms. Pacman frogs eat crickets, roaches and earthworms. Tree frogs eat crickets and other insects. Dart frogs need tiny prey, mainly flightless fruit flies and springtails. Fire-bellied toads eat small insects and worms. Dust feeders with calcium and a vitamin powder on the schedule in your species guide, and size prey to the animal. Feeding amounts and frequency vary with age and species.

How long do pet frogs live?

It depends on the species. Pacman frogs typically live 6 to 10 years, sometimes up to 15. American green and red-eyed tree frogs live about 5 to 10 years, and White's tree frogs can live 15 to 20 or more. Dart frogs live roughly 5 to 15 or more years depending on species. Fire-bellied toads live 10 to 15 years, sometimes longer. Care quality makes a big difference, so expect a long commitment.

Is an axolotl a good first pet?

It can be, for the right household, but it is not the easiest. An axolotl is a fully aquatic salamander, not a fish, and it needs cool water (about 60 to 68°F), a fully cycled and filtered tank, and a dechlorinator on every drop of water. It cannot be handled, and it is banned or restricted in some states, so check your local rules first. If you have a cool spot and enjoy water chemistry, it can be a rewarding and fascinating first pet.

Can frogs and toads live together?

Generally no. Mixing species invites stress, disease and aggression, and different species have different needs for temperature, humidity and water. Some species are also cannibalistic, and a Pacman frog will try to eat anything that fits in its mouth. Social species such as fire-bellied toads and green tree frogs do well with their own kind in a large enough tank. Keep each species in its own enclosure.

Do amphibians need special water?

Yes. Tap water usually contains chlorine or chloramine, which can burn an amphibian's skin and gills. Use a dechlorinator that removes both for every water dish, water change and misting bottle, or use reverse-osmosis water. Never use water that contains soap or cleaning residue. For aquatic species such as the axolotl, also cycle the tank and test the water regularly.

***Ready to shop?** Start with Reptiles & Amphibians. 10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters.*

SECTION 13

Every Purchase Gives Back

Here at Walnut Creek Supply, **10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters** across the country, before we earn a dime ourselves. When you bring home a tank, a thermometer or a culture of fruit flies for your new frog, you are helping animals in need too. We are a family-owned shop in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and every animal, from the smallest dart frog to the biggest hound, is family to us. Pick the amphibian that fits your home, set it up with care, and enjoy watching a small wild world come to life on your shelf. Questions? Give us a call at (717) 983-8069. We are always happy to help.