

WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

Dart Frog

A living jewel box: bioactive terrariums and tiny live food



Family-owned in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters nationwide

13 sections · walnutcreeksupply.com

CONTENTS

What's Inside

-
- 01 **Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours**
-
- 02 **Meet Your Dart Frog**
-
- 03 **Enclosure & Bioactive Setup**
-
- 04 **Substrate & Clean-Up Crew**
-
- 05 **Heat, Light & Humidity — The 3 Numbers**
-
- 06 **Diet & Nutrition**
-
- 07 **Culturing Feeder Insects**
-
- 08 **Common Challenges & Solutions**
-
- 09 **Handling & Observation**
-
- 10 **Routine Care Calendar**
-
- 11 **When to See a Vet**
-
- 12 **FAQ**
-
- 13 **Every Purchase Gives Back**

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 animals stop a person in their tracks like a dart frog. A thumb-sized jewel in electric blue or buttery yellow sits on a bromeliad leaf in the middle of the day, singing, hunting, and completely unbothered by your face six inches from the glass. They are bold, they are active in daylight, and they are some of the most rewarding animals in the whole hobby. They are also a **display animal, not a handled pet**, and they come with a real routine: an established, living terrarium and a steady supply of tiny live food, every week, for a decade or more. This guide is written honestly and warmly, the way we would talk it through with you across our own kitchen table here in Lancaster County. Read the Quick Start first, get the terrarium growing and the fruit fly cultures started before any frog comes home, and you will be set up to enjoy these little jewels for a very long time.*

SECTION 1

Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

1. **Establish the terrarium before the frogs arrive.** Build the whole living enclosure first. We call this a **bioactive** setup, meaning a planted terrarium with a built-in team of tiny cleaners, and it includes a drainage layer, soil, leaf litter, live plants, and a clean-up crew and give it **two to four weeks** to settle. Plants need time to root, springtail populations need time to boom, and the humidity and temperature need to hold steady on their own. A dart frog should move into a terrarium that already works, not one you are still figuring out around it.
2. **Start the feeder cultures today.** *Flightless* fruit flies are simply fruit flies bred with stunted wings so they hop and crawl but cannot fly away, and their cultures take about **two weeks** to produce their first flies, and you will want at least two or three cultures running in rotation. If you wait until the frogs are in the house, you will be scrambling. Order a starter culture of both *Drosophila melanogaster* (the smaller species) and *Drosophila hydei* (the larger species) now. The Culturing Feeder Insects section walks you through it.
3. **Dial in the three numbers and prove them.** Target **72–80°F** (ideal about 74–78°F, never above roughly 82°F), **70–100% humidity**, and a **10–12 hour** light cycle. Verify with a digital probe thermometer and a digital hygrometer at frog level, not a stick-on strip. Run them for several days and watch the daily swings.
4. **Make the lid escape-proof.** Fruit flies and frogs both go where you do not want them to. Use a secure lid with fine-mesh screen ventilation strips, and check that there is no gap around wiring, tubing, or the front door. A dart frog that gets out can desiccate (dry out) in a couple of hours.
5. **Add the clean-up crew.** Seed the terrarium with **springtails and dwarf isopods**, the tiny soil-dwelling cleaners that make a bioactive setup work. Give them a few weeks of head start so they are established before the frogs eat them.
6. **Set up a simple quarantine tub for the new frogs.** Every new frog spends **4 to 8 weeks** in a separate, bare-bones enclosure with paper towel, a hide, a shallow water dish, and the same temperature and humidity targets. This is not optional. It protects the animals you already have and gives you time to watch for parasites and appetite problems before the frog enters your living display.
7. **Buy captive-bred frogs from a reputable breeder, and know exactly what you are buying.** Confirm the species and morph, ask how old the frogs are, ask what they have been eating and supplemented with, and ask whether the group has been tested or treated for parasites. Do not buy wild-caught frogs; they arrive carrying parasites and are a poor first choice.
8. **On arrival day, keep it quiet.** Place the frogs in quarantine, mist lightly, offer a small first meal of flightless fruit flies lightly dusted with supplement, and leave them alone. Expect shy, hidden frogs for a day or two; this is normal.
9. **Wash your hands before and after any contact with the enclosure, every single time.** Amphibians can carry **Salmonella**, and our hands carry lotions, soaps, and sanitizers that can harm a frog's absorbent skin. Rinse thoroughly with plain water first, wash with soap, and keep the enclosure and feeder supplies away from kitchen prep areas.

10. **Find an amphibian-experienced veterinarian now, before you need one.** Many vets who treat dogs, cats, and even reptiles have little frog experience. Call around, ask specifically whether they see amphibians, and tape the number to the cabinet where you keep your supplements.

First-Time Starter Bundle

What needs to be in the house before the frogs are, and what to look for in each category.

Essentials

- **An appropriately sized glass vivarium** (a *vivarium* is simply a living, planted enclosure for animals) — at least **18" × 18" × 18"** for a pair or trio of a medium species such as a dyeing dart frog, with **18" × 18" × 24"** a better choice. Front-opening doors make feeding and maintenance far easier than a top-opening lid.
- **A secure, ventilated lid or screen strips** — fine mesh built into the top or upper front, tight enough to keep flightless fruit flies and springtails in while letting fresh air circulate.
- **A drainage layer material** — lightweight clay pebbles (expanded clay aggregate) to hold excess water below the soil.
- **A substrate barrier** — fine fiberglass or plastic mesh, or landscape-fabric style material, that separates the drainage layer from the soil above.
- **A bioactive soil mix** — an **ABG-style mix** (named for the Atlanta Botanical Garden, which popularized it) built from tree fern fiber, sphagnum moss, and charcoal, plus leaf litter for the surface.
- **A clean-up crew starter culture** — springtails and dwarf isopods, the tiny decomposers that eat waste and mold so the terrarium stays healthy.
- **Live, frog-safe plants** — bromeliads, pothos, and mosses suit most setups. They hold humidity, offer cover, and give the frogs somewhere to climb and perch.
- **A plant-grade LED light** — full-spectrum, cool-running, on a timer for a 10–12 hour day.
- **A digital thermometer with a probe and a digital hygrometer** — placed at frog level, not stuck to the outside of the glass.
- **A misting system or a quality hand mister** — plus a way to make dechlorinated or reverse-osmosis (RO) water for misting.
- **Flightless fruit fly starter cultures** — both *D. melanogaster* and *D. hydei*, plus culture containers and fly medium.
- **A calcium and multivitamin supplement set** — calcium with D3, calcium without D3, and a reptile and amphibian multivitamin, all in fine powder.
- **A quarantine tub setup** — a small, simple enclosure with paper towel, a hide, and a shallow water dish.

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

Enrichment

- **Cork bark, tubes, and flats** — natural hiding and perching spots at several heights that also give the frogs ceiling-level territory to claim.
- **Vines and climbing branches** — to create vertical highways through the planted layer.
- **Egg-laying sites** — film canisters, small cups, or coconut huts placed horizontally, which breeding-age frogs will use for egg deposition.
- **A shallow water feature** — a tiny dish or a small pool with sloped access, because dart frogs are not swimmers and should never be in water too deep to climb out of.

- **A background** — cork bark, tree fern panels, or a foam background to give the back wall depth and added climbing surface.
- **A small timer or controller for lights and misting** — so the daily rhythm runs on its own, even on busy mornings.
- **A feeding station** — a small cup or ledge where fruit flies can be released consistently, helping the frogs learn where dinner arrives.

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

SECTION 2

Meet Your Dart Frog

Dart frogs belong to the family **Dendrobatidae** and live in the humid rainforests of **Central and South America**, from Nicaragua and Costa Rica south through Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Suriname, and Brazil. They are small, daytime hunters of the forest floor and lower canopy, hopping through leaf litter, sipping from rain-filled bromeliad cups, and calling out to each other from mossy logs. Their brilliant colors are no accident; in the wild, bright color announces "I am not a safe meal." In your home, that same color is simply a joy to look at.

Species	Adult size	Typical lifespan	Temperament	Beginner notes
Dyeing dart frog (<i>Dendrobates tinctorius</i>)	1.5–2"	10–15+ years	Bold, visible, active by day	Popular and hardy; many morphs; males can be territorial
Blue poison frog, "azureus" (<i>D. tinctorius</i> "azureus")	1.5–2"	10–15+ years	Bold and confident	A blue, black-spotted morph of the dyeing dart frog; same care
Bumblebee dart frog (<i>D. leucomelas</i>)	About 1.5–2"	10–15+ years	Bold, loud caller, territorial males	Hardy and striking; yellow and black
Green-and-black dart frog (<i>D. auratus</i>)	About 1.5–2"	10–15+ years	Bold, active	Hardy; green and black pattern; males can be territorial
Small <i>Ranitomeya</i> species	0.5–0.75"	5–10+ years	Quick, shy, tiny	More delicate; need very small feeders and a sharper eye

That table is a starting point, not a promise. Species and morph names get complicated fast in this hobby, so the single best habit you can build is to ask your breeder exactly what you have, write it down, and keep it with the enclosure records.

The "poison" myth, and what is actually true

Here is the warm and honest truth: **captive-bred dart frogs are not poisonous**. In the wild, dart frogs get their skin toxins from the specific ants, mites, and beetles they eat, which they sequester (store) in their skin. Frogs raised in captivity on fruit flies and springtails never receive those chemicals, so they do not carry them. A frog raised in your home, or by a reputable breeder, is not a danger to you, your children, or your dog.

We still say this with a note: **wash your hands and do not touch them**. Not because of toxins, but because amphibian skin is thin and absorbs whatever is on your fingers (soap, sunscreen, lotion, sanitizer), and because they can carry Salmonella. "Not poisonous" does not mean "okay to pick up."

Lifespan, temperament, and a display animal

With good care, dart frogs live **5 to 15+ years**, depending on species. Dyeing dart frogs, bumblebees, and green-and-black dart frogs commonly reach a decade or more; the tiny *Ranitomeya* are on the shorter end, often 5 to 10 years or more. That is a long commitment for an animal that fits on your thumbnail.

Dart frogs are **bold, diurnal (active by day), and wonderful to watch**. They call, hunt, wrestle with each other, wander the leaf litter, and ignore you completely, which is the best compliment a frog can give. But they are a **display animal**, not a handled pet. They do not enjoy being picked up, they do not recognize you in the way a lizard or a rat might, and handling is stressful for them. The joy is in the watching.

What surprises new owners

Three things catch new keepers off guard. The first is **the live food**. Dart frogs eat tiny, moving prey, so you are not just keeping frogs, you are keeping fruit flies and springtails too. Cultures need weekly attention, and there is no pellet shortcut. The second is **how much the terrarium matters**. A bioactive terrarium is a small ecosystem, and its stability is what keeps the frogs healthy. This is not a "set and forget" animal; it is a "set up carefully, then tend steadily" animal. The third is **how visible they are**. Many new keepers expect hidden, nocturnal animals. A healthy dart frog is out in the open, in full daylight, hunting right in front of you.

SECTION 3

Enclosure & Bioactive Setup

A **bioactive** terrarium is a living, self-maintaining habitat where live plants, soil, and a *clean-up crew* of tiny decomposers work together to break down waste and keep the enclosure healthy. It is not maintenance-free, but done well it is beautiful, stable, and very good for the frogs.

Size and shape

For a pair or trio of a medium species like a dyeing dart frog, the minimum is about **18" wide × 18" deep × 18" tall**, and **18" × 18" × 24"** is better. The extra height lets you build more vertical levels, which is how these frogs use their space. More climbing species do best with more vertical room. Smaller *Ranitomeya* can do well in a similar footprint but with a particularly escape-proof lid, because their tiny size lets them squeeze through gaps.

The layout, from the floor up

Read this as a labeled cross-section, from the bottom of the glass to the top of the lid.

Layer one, the drainage layer (bottom, about 1.5–2" deep): lightweight clay pebbles sit directly on the glass. This is the reservoir. Extra water from misting drains down here instead of waterlogging the soil. Keep the water level in this layer below the barrier above it so the soil never sits in standing water.

Layer two, the substrate barrier: a sheet of fine mesh cut to fit the footprint and lying flat across the clay pebbles. It keeps the soil from sifting down into the drainage layer while still letting water pass through.

Layer three, the soil layer (about 2–3" deep): an ABG-style mix of tree fern fiber, sphagnum moss, and charcoal. It should be damp and springy, not soggy. This is where your springtails and isopods live and work.

Layer four, the leaf litter (the top, about 1–2" deep): dried leaves scattered across the whole floor, such as magnolia or oak, to create cover for the frogs, a home for the clean-up crew, and food for the decomposers. Replenish it as it breaks down.

The back wall and midlevel: cork bark flats, tree fern panels, or a foam background rise up the back wall. Cork bark tubes, vines, and ledges cross the middle of the enclosure at several heights, making a three-dimensional landscape for the frogs to claim.

The upper canopy: bromeliads perched high on cork or wedged into the background, with trailing pothos and moss reaching down. These catch drips from misting, hold tiny pools of water in their leaf cups, and give frogs elevated perches.

Hides and egg-laying sites: place a film canister, small cup, or coconut hut on its side at ground level and another halfway up the wall. They serve double duty as shelters and, for breeding-age frogs, as egg deposition sites.

The water: a very shallow dish or small sloped pool, never deeper than the frog's body, placed on the substrate and partially buried so the rim sits level with the soil. Fill with dechlorinated or RO water.

The lid: a close-fitting lid with **fine-mesh screen ventilation strips** (to let air circulate and moisture escape). Fruit flies are the real escape risk, so choose mesh fine enough to hold them, and keep a consistent feeding routine so flies are eaten rather than wandering.

Housing: pairs, trios, and never mixed species

Many dart frogs do well kept as a **pair or trio**, but some species have territorial males that will chase and wrestle each other, so two males in a small enclosure is a recipe for stress. Start with a confirmed group raised together if you can, give every frog its own cork bark hide and perch, and set out more than one feeding spot so the boldest frog cannot guard dinner. **Never mix species.** Different dart frogs will fight, can hybridize (producing offspring that muddy captive bloodlines), and can pass disease to one another. One species, one enclosure, every time.

Plants that work

Bromeliads, pothos, and mosses are the classics because they tolerate frequent misting, handle the light, and are robust under feet. Add more if you like, but avoid plants that are sold with systemic pesticides (ask your nursery, and rinse everything thoroughly). Do not use aerosols, air fresheners, or cleaning sprays anywhere near the vivarium; amphibian skin absorbs airborne chemicals.

Why a drained, ventilated build matters

Dart frogs live in a world of 70–100% humidity, but not stagnant humidity. A terrarium that is wet and airless grows mold and harmful bacteria, including the kind linked to red-leg. A terrarium that is wet but breathing, with good ventilation, a drainage layer, and a working clean-up crew, stays fresh. That balance, humid but never stale, is the heart of the setup.

SECTION 4

Substrate & Clean-Up Crew

Layer or material	Best for	Performance	Notes
Clay pebbles (expanded clay aggregate)	Drainage layer	Holds excess water below the soil; lightweight; reusable	Rinse before use; keep the water level below the barrier
Fine mesh substrate barrier	Separating layers	Keeps soil from sifting into the drainage layer	Cut to fit; do not leave gaps at the edges
ABG-style mix (tree fern fiber, sphagnum, charcoal)	Soil layer	Holds moisture yet drains; supports roots; ideal for springtails	Pre-moisten; avoid mixes with added fertilizers
Leaf litter (magnolia, oak, sea grape)	Top surface	Cover, food for the crew, natural look	Use clean, pesticide-free leaves; refresh as it breaks down
Sphagnum or other live moss	Accent and moisture	Holds humidity; frogs rest on it	Keep damp, not waterlogged
Paper towel	Quarantine tub only	Easy to inspect droppings and appetite	Replace when soiled
Sand or gravel	Avoid	Impaction risk; poor moisture behavior	No place in a dart frog setup
Cedar or pine shavings	Never	Aromatic oils harm amphibians	No safe use
Potting soil with fertilizer, perlite, or time-release beads	Avoid outright	Chemicals leach into the terrarium; frogs can ingest beads	Use a pure, additive-free mix
Cocoa shell mulch or treated landscape mulch	Avoid	Can mold or carry chemicals	Not appropriate for any amphibian

Meet the clean-up crew

The *clean-up crew* is the team of tiny invertebrates that eats waste, mold, and decaying leaves. They are the quiet heroes of a bioactive terrarium.

Springtails are pinhead-sized, jumping soil dwellers (a group called Collembola). They eat mold and decaying plant matter and reproduce quickly in a damp enclosure. They are also a perfect snack for baby frogs and the smallest *Ranitomeya*. Most keepers use a white springtail (*Folsomia candida*) for the damp lower layers and a tropical species for the surface, so there are always some at the top for the frogs.

Isopods are tiny relatives of pill bugs (sometimes called roly-pollies). For dart frogs, choose a **dwarf species**, such as dwarf white or dwarf purple isopods, which are small enough to share space with frogs without bothering them and which help break down droppings and leaf litter.

How to establish the crew

Start with a healthy culture of each. Sprinkle springtails across the damp soil and leaf litter, add the isopods, and drop in a small piece of fresh fruit or a pinch of fish flake every week or two to feed them in the early weeks. Cover with leaf litter, mist lightly, and watch the population grow. Once the crew is thriving, you will see them scurrying through the leaves, and the enclosure will smell like a forest floor, not a pet store.

What to avoid, outright

Never use sand, gravel, cedar, pine, or any aromatic wood product. Skip any soil with fertilizer, time-release beads, or pesticides. Never spray cleaners, air fresheners, or aerosols near the vivarium. Do not collect leaves, wood, or moss from yards, roadsides, or treated lawns unless you are absolutely certain they are pesticide-free, and even then rinse thoroughly. When in doubt, buy clean, purpose-sold materials.

SECTION 5

Heat, Light & Humidity — The 3 Numbers

Dart frogs live in a narrow comfort zone: warm but never hot, wet but never stagnant, bright but never harsh. They **overheat easily**, and heat is the number most new keepers underestimate. Getting these three numbers right at the same time is the whole game.

Parameter	Target value	How to measure it	What goes wrong when it is off
Temperature	72–80°F (ideal about 74–78°F); never above about 82°F	Digital probe thermometer at frog level, with a min/max function; infrared gun for spot checks	Too hot: heat stress, dehydration, and rapid decline; too cool: sluggish digestion, poor appetite, weakened immunity
Humidity	70–100% with good ventilation	Digital hygrometer at mid-height, plus a look at the plants and leaf litter	Too low: dehydration and stress; too wet and airless: mold, bacterial growth, and red-leg risk
Light	10–12 hour cycle of plant-grade LED	Timer; observe plant growth and frog activity	Too little: weak plants, poor frog behavior; too much heat from the light: overheating

Temperature

Most homes already sit in or near the right range, so a heater is often unnecessary. The common problem is overheating: a hot lamp, a sunny window, or a summer heat wave. Choose a cool-running LED and keep the vivarium out of direct sun. If your room runs cold, add gentle heat and always check with a probe. **A night drop into the low 70s is natural and fine.** Anything pushing past about 82°F calls for immediate cooling.

Humidity and ventilation

Aim for **70–100%**, with daily misting or a misting system, ideally once or twice a day, to leave the leaves glistening. Humidity should rise after misting and then ease off, which is healthy. Use **dechlorinated or RO water** for misting, as tap water chemicals and minerals can build up on leaves and affect the frogs. A well-ventilated enclosure shifts moisture in and out, and that gentle cycle is what keeps mold and bacteria in check.

Light, and the question of UVB

Provide plant-grade LED lighting on a **10 to 12 hour** daily cycle for the plants and for the frogs' natural rhythm. As for **UVB**, ultraviolet light that helps animals make vitamin D3, the picture is changing. Dart frogs live in shaded forest and fall into what herpetoculturists call **Ferguson zone 1**, the lowest-light category (the Ferguson zones are a system that classifies animals by how much UV their native habitat provides). **Low-level UVB is optional but increasingly used**, with a low-output tube placed so that frogs can retreat from it into shade. If you choose to use it, keep it gentle, provide plenty of cover, and talk with your amphibian vet. If you do not use UVB, supplement more carefully with D3 calcium, according to the product directions.

SECTION 6

Diet & Nutrition



Tiny live prey: flightless fruit flies, springtails and pinhead crickets, dusted on a rotating supplement schedule. The terrarium's clean-up crew doubles as a snack.

Dart frogs are **insectivores**, and in captivity that means one thing: tiny live prey, every few days, for the rest of their lives. They hunt by sight, so the food must move. Pellets, freeze-dried insects, and dead food do not interest them. The good news is that the right menu is simple, affordable, and easy to produce at home once you have your rhythm.

The feeder menu

Feeder	Size	Best for	Notes
Flightless fruit flies (<i>Drosophila melanogaster</i>)	Small, about 2 mm	Juveniles, small species, everyday staple	Culture at home; easy to dust with supplements
Flightless fruit flies (<i>Drosophila hydei</i>)	Larger, about 3 mm	Adult medium species	Slightly slower to culture; good for bigger mouths

Feeder	Size	Best for	Notes
Springtails	Tiny	Froglets, <i>Ranitomeya</i> , extra variety	Often live in the enclosure and can be cultured separately
Pinhead crickets	Very small	Occasional variety for larger frogs	Size matters; remove uneaten crickets
Bean beetles	Small	Adult medium species, occasional variety	Easy culture; flightless varieties preferred
Dwarf isopods	Tiny	Part of the clean-up crew; an occasional snack	Not a staple

Variety matters. A diet of only fruit flies is common but nutritionally narrow. Rotating in springtails, bean beetles, and the occasional pinhead cricket gives a broader nutrient profile and keeps the hunting instincts engaged.

Supplement rotation

Feeder insects are nutritionally thin on their own. Lightly dusting them with supplement powder makes up the difference. Use three products in rotation, and follow the directions on each label:

Supplement	Role	Typical rotation
Calcium without D3	Everyday calcium for bones and muscles	Most feedings
Calcium with D3	Calcium plus vitamin D3 to help absorb it	About once a week; less if you also use UVB
Amphibian multivitamin	Vitamins and trace nutrients, including vitamin A in a safe form	About once a week

A light dusting means the flies look faintly powdered, not white and caked. Over-supplementing, especially with vitamin A and D3, can cause problems of its own. A multivitamin with beta-carotene as its vitamin A source is often preferred. When in doubt, follow the label and ask your vet.

Feeding schedule

Frog stage	How often	How much
Froglets and juveniles	Daily	A generous, dusted portion of the smallest feeders; they should eat actively
Adults	About 4–6 days a week	Light, dusted portions that the frogs finish within an hour or two
Ranitomeya	Daily or near-daily	Very small flies and springtails, in small, frequent portions

Watch the frogs, not the calendar. A healthy frog is rounded but not bulging, with a visible waist behind the shoulders. Remove too many uneaten feeders if you see them piling up, and adjust.

Never feed

- Wild-caught insects, which can carry pesticides and parasites
- Insects too large for the frog's mouth, as oversized prey can cause choking or injury
- Dead or freeze-dried insects
- Undusted food, always, since an unsupplemented diet leads to deficiency
- Anything from a treated lawn or yard

- Kitchen scraps, fruit, or any human food

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

SECTION 7

Culturing Feeder Insects

Feeder cultures are the real commitment of dart frog keeping. The good news is that once you have a rhythm, fruit flies are one of the easiest cultures in the hobby.

Starting a fruit fly culture

You will need a ventilated culture container (a deli-style cup with a vented lid works well), prepared fly medium (instant medium is the easiest), a little yeast, a piece of paper or wood-wool for the flies to climb on, and a starter culture of flightless flies.

1. Add about an inch of dry medium to a clean container.
2. Add water according to the medium instructions, mixing until it is moist but not soupy.
3. Sprinkle in a few grains of yeast, if directed.
4. Place a piece of paper towel, coffee filter, or wood-wool upright in the medium.
5. Add a pinch of flies from your starter culture, usually 20 to 30.
6. Label it with the date and keep it at room temperature, away from direct sun.

In roughly **10 to 14 days**, you will see larvae, then pupae, then a new generation of flies. *D. hydei* typically takes a bit longer than *D. melanogaster*.

Keeping a steady supply

The trick is rotation. Start **a fresh culture every week**, so that you always have cultures at different stages. A culture is productive for several weeks, then declines, so you keep refreshing. A typical home setup for a few frogs runs three to four cultures at a time.

Feeding the frogs from a culture

Tap the culture gently to settle the flies, remove the lid, and shake a portion into a small cup with a pinch of supplement powder. Swirl to coat, then tip the dusted flies into the vivarium. Using a feeding ledge or cup in the same spot every day teaches the frogs where to expect dinner.

Troubleshooting cultures

Mold, mites, and a sour smell usually mean too much moisture or a contaminated container; discard and restart. A culture that never takes off may be too cold, too wet, or too old. Keep a spare container of medium on hand so you can restart quickly.

Springtail cultures

Springtails are even easier. A small container with a damp charcoal and coconut fiber base, a few leaves, and a small piece of fruit or a pinch of yeast will grow a thriving colony. Tap springtails into the vivarium regularly to keep the clean-up crew and the frogs' snack supply topped up.

Buying versus culturing

Option	Pros	Cons
Culturing at home	Cheapest long term; fresh; reliable once established	Takes weekly attention; needs space; occasional crashes
Buying cultures regularly	No culture upkeep; good as a backup	Costs add up; shipping delays can leave you short
A hybrid of both	Resilient; you always have a backup	Slightly more planning

Most keepers settle on a hybrid: they culture at home and keep a backup order on hand for when a culture crashes.

SECTION 8

Common Challenges & Solutions

Metabolic bone disease (MBD)

What you see: crooked or bowed limbs, a soft or misshapen jaw, tremors or twitching, a frog that struggles to jump, climb, or flick its tongue accurately. **Why:** a shortage of calcium or vitamin D3, or poor balance between them, usually from skipped or poorly rotated supplements. **What to do:** review the supplement schedule and dusting routine, make sure fresh calcium is in use, and discuss UVB and D3 with your vet. **When to call a vet:** at the first sign of limb deformity, tremors, or a soft jaw. Early cases respond well; advanced cases may cause permanent damage.

Vitamin A deficiency and fading color

What you see: a once-vivid frog that slowly looks pale or washed out; difficulty catching prey; swollen or puffy eyelids, or a tongue that seems to miss its target or does not shoot out properly. **Why:** low vitamin A or carotenoids in the diet, often from unsupplemented or unvaried feeder insects. **What to do:** use a fresh amphibian multivitamin with a safe vitamin A source on a regular rotation, and vary the feeders. **When to call a vet:** if you see eye swelling, tongue problems, or fading that continues despite a corrected diet. Too much vitamin A can also be harmful, so avoid doubling up without guidance.

Parasites (nematodes and flagellates)

What you see: weight loss despite eating, a thin or wasted body, loose or stringy droppings, regurgitation, lethargy. **Why:** internal parasites such as nematodes (roundworms) and flagellates (single-celled organisms) are common, particularly in wild-caught or poorly quarantined frogs. **What to do:** collect a fresh dropping or ask your vet about a fecal exam, and keep the enclosure clean. Do not treat with over-the-counter products without a diagnosis. **When to call a vet:** for any ongoing weight loss, wasting, or abnormal droppings. Quarantine would have caught many of these early.

Chytrid fungus (Bd)

What you see: lethargy, loss of appetite, excessive or abnormal shedding of skin, odd posture such as sitting with legs held away from the body, loss of coordination, sometimes sudden death. **Why:** *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, called **Bd** or chytrid, is a fungus that attacks amphibian skin and has devastated wild populations worldwide. It spreads through contact, water, and contaminated equipment. **What to do:** isolate the affected frog, keep everything clean, and contact a vet immediately. **When to call a vet:** at any suspicion of chytrid. Testing and veterinary-directed treatment are essential, and this is not a do-it-yourself fix.

Red-leg

What you see: reddish or pinkish skin on the belly and inner legs, sometimes with bleeding spots, a bloated look, lethargy, and no appetite. **Why:** a bacterial infection, often tied to dirty, stagnant, or poorly ventilated conditions, or to stress. **What to do:** correct cleanliness and ventilation, and contact a vet right away. **When to call a vet:** immediately. Red-leg can progress quickly and needs prescription treatment.

Bloat and edema

What you see: a swollen, fluid-filled body or limbs, a taut, balloon-like look, and a frog that sits heavily or cannot hop normally. **Why:** fluid retention, often from kidney problems, infection, or other internal disease. **What to do:** keep the frog warm, calm, and in a clean quarantine setup, and call a vet. **When to call a vet:** the same day. Bloat is a serious sign.

Obesity

What you see: a round, heavy body with no visible waist, folds of fat behind the shoulders, reduced activity. **Why:** overfeeding, especially of rich feeders, and too little room to roam. **What to do:** reduce the portion size and frequency, vary the feeders, and

add climbing and foraging space. **When to call a vet:** if the frog is severely overweight or if weight does not improve with diet changes.

Failure to capture prey

What you see: a frog that lunges at flies and misses, flicks its tongue weakly, or ignores food entirely. **Why:** causes include MBD, low temperatures, stress, illness, vitamin A problems, or prey that is too large or too small. **What to do:** check the temperatures, check feeder size, and review supplements. **When to call a vet:** if the problem persists beyond a few days or is paired with weight loss.

Stress from overhandling

What you see: hiding, loss of appetite, dull color, frantic escape attempts, or sudden deaths in a newly handled frog. **Why:** dart frogs have thin, absorbent skin and are easily stressed by handling and by loud, busy environments. **What to do:** stop handling, give the frogs lots of cover, and keep the room calm. **When to call a vet:** if appetite does not return within a few days.

Escape and desiccation

What you see: a missing frog, or a frog found on the floor, dry, shriveled, and inactive. **Why:** a gap in the lid, an open door, or a frog escaping through a feeding hole. **What to do:** search carefully, and if you find a dried-out frog, place it in a small, clean container with a damp paper towel and call a vet. **When to call a vet:** immediately for any frog found dry or limp.

Overheating

What you see: a frog that sits at the water dish, appears lethargic, breathes quickly, or becomes unresponsive. **Why:** temperatures above about 82°F, often from sunny windows, a hot lamp, or summer heat. **What to do:** cool the room, move the vivarium out of the sun, and increase gentle misting. **When to call a vet:** if the frog does not recover quickly after cooling.

Quick reference

What you see	Likely cause	What to do	Vet urgency
Bowed limbs, soft jaw, tremors	Metabolic bone disease	Review calcium and D3 rotation	Within days
Pale color, poor tongue use	Vitamin A deficiency	Use a fresh multivitamin; vary feeders	Within days if eyes or tongue are affected
Weight loss despite eating	Parasites	Fecal exam	Within a week
Lethargy, skin shedding, odd posture	Chytrid (Bd)	Isolate; contact vet	Same day
Red belly or legs	Red-leg	Clean and ventilate	Same day
Swollen, fluid-filled body	Bloat or edema	Keep calm and warm	Same day
Round body, no waist	Obesity	Reduce portions	Routine visit
Missing prey	Prey capture problem	Check temperatures, feeder size, supplements	If it lasts more than a few days
Hiding, stress	Overhandling	Stop handling	If appetite does not return
Dry, limp frog	Escape or desiccation	Rehydrate	Same day
Frantic frog, fast breathing	Overheating	Cool the room	Same day if not recovering

SECTION 9

Handling & Observation

The look-don't-touch philosophy

The most important thing we can tell you about handling a dart frog is that you mostly shouldn't. They are a **display animal**. Their skin is thin and absorbent, their bodies are tiny and fragile, and handling is stressful for them. Even a gentle touch can strip their protective mucus and expose them to whatever is on your hands. Think of the vivarium as a living painting; your role is to keep it healthy and enjoy the show.

Observation tips

- **Watch at the same times each day.** Dart frogs are most active in the morning and early afternoon, right after lights-on and misting.
- **Sit still.** Bold frogs will come out and hunt when they feel safe; sudden movements send them to cover.
- **Learn individual frogs.** Take photos of the patterns on each frog's back; they are as unique as fingerprints and help you track body condition.
- **Keep a simple log.** Note feeding, droppings, weight impressions, and behavior. Changes in routine are your earliest warning of trouble.
- **Check posture and eyes.** A healthy frog sits upright, with clear eyes and a rounded body.

Rare, safe transfers

There are occasions when a frog must be moved, such as quarantine to display or a vet visit. When you must:

1. Rinse your hands thoroughly with plain water, with no soap residue, or wear fresh, powder-free, moistened gloves.
2. Use a clean, damp container, like a small cup or deli container, and coax the frog in rather than grasping it.
3. Move quickly and gently, and release the frog on a leaf or near cover.
4. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap afterward.

Quarantine, step by step

New frogs spend **4 to 8 weeks** in their own bare-bones quarantine tub before they ever see the display. Line the floor with damp paper towel, add a hide, a few leaves, a shallow dish of dechlorinated water, and keep the same temperature and humidity targets as the main terrarium. Replace the paper towel every day or two so you can read droppings easily. Feed and dust just as you would in the display, and watch for steady appetite, firm body condition, and normal droppings. Always care for the quarantine tub **after** the main terrarium, wash your hands between them, and never share tools. Wild-caught frogs carry parasites and are a poor starting point, which is one more reason we recommend captive-bred animals only.

Children and families

Dart frogs are wonderful for curious kids who love to watch. Encourage children to look, ask questions, and help with misting, but not to touch. Handwashing after any contact with the enclosure is the family rule.

SECTION 10

Routine Care Calendar

How often	What to do
Daily	Mist the vivarium with dechlorinated or RO water; check the temperature and humidity readings
Daily	Confirm the lights are on their 10–12 hour cycle
Daily	Feed juveniles; feed adults on their 4–6 day schedule with lightly dusted feeders
Daily	Observe each frog for activity, posture, eyes, and body condition
Daily	Remove uneaten feeders and any visible waste
Weekly	Start a fresh fruit fly culture; discard any exhausted ones
Weekly	Rotate supplements according to the schedule
Weekly	Refresh the water dish with dechlorinated or RO water
Weekly	Check the misting system, lid, and screen for gaps or clogs
Weekly	Wipe the glass with plain water only; no cleaners
Monthly	Prune plants; trim back anything crowding the glass or lights
Monthly	Top up leaf litter and check the clean-up crew population
Monthly	Check the drainage layer; remove excess standing water if needed
Monthly	Review supplement and culture supplies; reorder before running out
Every 6–12 months	Replace LED or UVB lighting according to the manufacturer's directions
Annually	Amphibian vet wellness visit and fecal exam
Annually	Deeper refresh of the substrate and leaf litter if needed

SECTION 11

When to See a Vet

Dart frogs hide illness well, and by the time a problem is visible, it has often been developing for some time. **When you are uncertain, call.** Because amphibian medicine is a specialty, find a vet with **amphibian or exotic animal experience** before you have an emergency. A regular dog and cat vet may not be equipped to treat a frog.

Go today, same day or emergency:

- A frog that is limp, unresponsive, or cannot right itself
- Red or pink skin on the belly or legs, or visible bleeding
- A swollen, fluid-filled body or limbs
- A frog found dry, shriveled, or desiccated after an escape
- Rapid breathing, gasping, or open-mouth breathing
- Sudden collapse, seizures, or loss of coordination
- A frog that is suddenly refusing to eat and acting sluggish after a heat event
- Any open wound or injury

Book within a few days:

- Limb deformities, tremors, or a soft jaw
- Slow, progressive weight loss
- Abnormal droppings that last more than a few days
- Persistent fading color or poor prey capture
- Repeated skin shedding or odd posture
- Eye swelling or cloudy eyes

Bring a written log of temperature, humidity, feeding, and supplement routines, plus a fresh dropping in a clean container if you can. This helps the vet far more than a description.

SECTION 12

FAQ

Are dart frogs poisonous in captivity?

No. Captive-bred dart frogs are not poisonous, because their toxins come from specific ants, mites, and beetles they eat in the wild, and frogs raised on fruit flies and springtails never receive them. That said, we still treat them as look-don't-touch animals. Their skin is thin and absorbent, and our hands carry soaps, lotions, and sanitizers that can harm them. Amphibians can also carry Salmonella, so wash your hands before and after any contact with the enclosure.

What do dart frogs eat?

Dart frogs eat tiny live prey. The everyday staple is flightless fruit flies (*Drosophila melanogaster* for small frogs and juveniles, *Drosophila hydei* for larger adults), supplemented by springtails, pinhead crickets, and bean beetles for variety. The insects are lightly dusted with calcium and vitamins on a rotating schedule: calcium without D3, calcium with D3, and a multivitamin, following the product directions. Juveniles eat daily, and adults eat about four to six days a week in light portions.

How big a tank do dart frogs need?

For a pair or trio of a medium species like a dyeing dart frog, the minimum is about 18 inches wide by 18 inches deep by 18 inches tall, and 18 by 18 by 24 inches is better. Climbing species benefit from extra vertical space. The enclosure needs a secure lid with fine-mesh ventilation strips, because fruit flies, and tiny frogs, can slip through gaps.

How long do dart frogs live?

With good care, dart frogs live roughly 5 to 15 years or more, depending on the species. Dyeing dart frogs, bumblebees, and green-and-black dart frogs commonly reach a decade or longer, and the smaller *Ranitomeya* are often in the 5 to 10 year range. A stable, well-ventilated bioactive terrarium, a varied and properly supplemented diet, and a calm environment are the best things you can do to help them live long.

Do dart frogs need UVB?

Low-level UVB is optional but increasingly used. Dart frogs come from shaded rainforest and fall into Ferguson zone 1, the lowest UV category, so they do not need strong UVB the way a basking lizard does. Many keepers add a gentle UVB tube with plenty of shade to retreat into, and others rely on careful supplementation with calcium and D3 instead. Either way, a good supplement rotation matters, and your amphibian vet can help you decide what is right for your setup.

What humidity do dart frogs need?

Dart frogs thrive at roughly 70 to 100 percent humidity, with daily misting or a misting system and, just as importantly, good ventilation. The goal is humid but never stagnant, with humidity rising after misting and easing off between cycles. Use dechlorinated or reverse-osmosis water for misting, and keep the temperature between 72 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit, never above about 82.

Can you handle a dart frog?

You can, but you really shouldn't. Dart frogs are a display animal, and their thin, absorbent skin makes handling stressful and potentially harmful for them. The joy of the hobby is in watching them hunt, call, and explore a living terrarium. When a transfer is necessary, such as moving a frog to quarantine or a vet visit, use clean, damp, moistened hands or a small container, and wash your hands carefully before and afterward.

What is a bioactive terrarium?

A bioactive terrarium is a living, self-maintaining enclosure where live plants, a layered soil and drainage system, leaf litter, and a clean-up crew of springtails and isopods work together to break down waste and keep things healthy. It builds a small ecosystem rather than a sterile box. It still needs steady care (misting, feeding, pruning, and watching), but it is more stable, more natural, and a better home for dart frogs than a bare tank.

Can dart frogs live together?

Some can, with care. Many dart frogs are kept as pairs or trios in a properly sized enclosure, but males of some species are territorial and may fight. Never mix different species: it invites aggression, hybridization, and disease. If you keep more than one frog, watch closely for bullying, make sure everyone is eating, and be ready to separate them. New frogs should always be quarantined for four to eight weeks before joining a display.

Are dart frogs good pets for beginners?

Some species are beginner-friendly, but dart frogs are not a low-effort pet. Dyeing dart frogs, bumblebees, and green-and-black dart frogs are hardy and forgiving compared with the smaller *Ranitomeya*, but every dart frog needs an established terrarium and a steady supply of tiny live food. They are a display animal, not a handled one. A beginner who loves research, enjoys steady routines, and does not mind culturing fruit flies can succeed beautifully, but someone who wants a cuddly, set-and-forget pet should look elsewhere.

Ready to shop? Start with *Reptiles & Amphibians*. 10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters. Not sure this is the right pet? Compare your options in our *Amphibian Guide*.

SECTION 13

Every Purchase Gives Back

Before we earn a dime, **10% of every purchase at Walnut Creek Supply goes to no-kill animal shelters across the country.** Not at checkout. Not as an option. Off the top of every order, every day, because we believe responsible pet ownership and community care are the same commitment pointed in two directions.

For dart frog keepers, that spirit looks like patience: building the terrarium first, quarantining before introducing, and learning the animal before bringing it home. If you have read this far, you are exactly the kind of keeper these little jewels deserve.

We are a family business in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We grow our own food, keep our own animals, and stock the clean-label goods we would put in front of our own pets, with **no mystery ingredients, Clean Fuel, No Junk**, and honest guidance every time. If you have a question about your bioactive setup, your fruit fly cultures, or your supplement rotation, call us at **(717) 983-8069**. We would rather talk it through with you.

Welcome to years of watching a tiny, glittering rainforest come alive in your home.

*From our family to yours, **Walnut Creek Supply** — Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania walnutcreeksupply.com*