

WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

Reptiles & Amphibians

Scales or slime: which is right for your family?



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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.

*Every spring, somebody's kid walks out of a pet store with a bag containing something small, cold-blooded and fascinating, and a plan that has not been thought all the way through. We would love to change that. Reptiles and amphibians are among the most rewarding animals a family can keep, but they are two very different kinds of animal that happen to share a shelf, a reputation and a reasonable amount of confusion. A reptile has **dry, scaled skin**, lays eggs with leathery or hard shells on land (or gives birth to live young), and mostly wants a hot, bright basking spot. An amphibian has **thin, moist, permeable skin** that breathes and drinks, usually begins life in water, and mostly wants cool, clean, humid conditions and to be left alone. Picking the wrong group for your household is the single most common reason these animals end up in rescues.*

This is the hub guide that sits above our separate [Reptile Guide](#) and [Amphibian Guide](#) pages. Its job is the big comparison: what the two groups share, where they split, which family situations suit which, and an honest look at all 18 species we cover so you can pick one and then go deep in its full care guide. No mystery ingredients, no cheap filler, and no sugar-coating about how long these animals live.

SECTION 1

Quick Start: Choosing Your First Reptile or Amphibian

Before you fall for a face, work through this checklist honestly with everyone in the house. If any answer gives you pause, that is useful information, not a failure.

1. **Time.** Every animal here needs something every day: a look-over, fresh water, a feeding, a temperature or water check. Hot-and-dry reptiles often need 15 to 30 minutes a day plus a weekly deep clean. Aquatic and amphibian setups can be quicker day to day but demand a steady water-quality routine. Nobody is "set it and forget it."
2. **Space.** Adult size, not the size in the shop, decides the enclosure. Several of the animals in this guide need a footprint bigger than a dog crate, and a few need a dedicated room or outdoor pen. Measure the spot first.
3. **Budget.** The animal is often the cheapest part. Heating, UVB (ultraviolet B light), thermostats, filters, a proper enclosure and a vet fund add up. Plan on a real startup cost and an ongoing monthly one, and check the species guide for what each setup needs.
4. **Lifespan.** Some of these animals live five years; others can outlive the person who bought them. Count forward honestly, through college, moves, new babies and retirement.
5. **Who does the daily care.** Pick one named adult who is responsible. Children can help and learn, but a child cannot be the safety net for a living animal.
6. **Allergies and health.** Check for immune-compromised family members, pregnancy, infants under five and the elderly. Reptiles and amphibians can carry Salmonella (see the FAQ), which changes how careful you need to be.
7. **Other pets.** Cats, dogs, ferrets and birds see small cold-blooded animals as toys or prey. Plan a secure room or a lockable setup, and keep amphibians' skin away from pet and human hands alike.
8. **Children's ages.** Young children do best watching, feeding with help and washing hands. Many amphibians should not be handled at all, and tiny hands are rough on delicate bodies.
9. **Local law.** Rules vary by state and sometimes by city. See [Legal & Ethical Sourcing](#) below and check your state wildlife agency before you buy.
10. **Vet access.** Find a veterinarian who actually sees reptiles or amphibians before you bring one home. A dog-and-cat clinic usually cannot help.

First-Time Starter Bundle

What every new keeper in this group needs on the counter before the animal comes home. Your species guide fills in exact sizes and numbers.

Essentials

- **A secure, correctly sized enclosure** matched to the adult animal, with a locking or tight-fitting lid. Escape artists are the rule here, and a reptile or frog on the loose is stressful for everyone.
- **Heating that matches the animal.** Reptiles generally need a basking lamp or heat source on a thermostat so there is a warm end and a cool end. Most amphibians need only gentle room warmth and, for some, active cooling. Never use a heat source without a thermostat.
- **UVB lighting for the animals that need it.** Most daytime basking reptiles need a quality UVB tube on a schedule and replaced on the manufacturer's timeline. Amphibians generally do not need the same strong UVB, though some keepers use low levels (see the FAQ).
- **Two digital probe thermometers and a hygrometer.** A hygrometer measures humidity. Stick-on dials are not accurate enough; you need real readings in every zone.
- **Water dishes or an aquatic setup.** Shallow, non-chlorinated or treated water for drinking and soaking; a filtered, cycled tank for aquatic species.
- **Water conditioner.** Tap water contains chlorine and chloramine, which harm amphibians' skin and can bother aquatic species. Always treat it.
- **Appropriate substrate and hides.** Substrate is the material on the floor. It must suit the species, whether that is dry and burrowable, moist and spongy, or none at all. Every animal needs at least two hiding spots, one warm and one cool.
- **Species-appropriate food and supplements.** Gut-loaded feeder insects, whole prey, fresh greens or specialty diets, plus calcium and vitamin powders as the species requires.
- **Feeding tongs and a spray bottle or mister.** Tongs save fingers and keep food off the substrate. A mister or fogger helps humidity.
- **A hand-washing station.** Soap and water, used every single time you touch the animal, its water or anything in the enclosure.

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

Enrichment

- **Climbing and basking structures:** branches, cork bark, rocks and ledges placed so the animal can choose between warm and cool.
- **Live or artificial plants** for cover. Many plants are toxic to some animals, so confirm yours is safe for your species.
- **Visual barriers and background panels** that give shy animals a sense of safety and reduce glass-surfing.
- **Foraging opportunities:** scattered food, feeders released in a bioactive or leaf-litter setting, and varied textures.
- **A hide box and a humid hide** for shedding or resting, sized snug to the animal.
- **A travel container** with ventilation for vet trips.
- **A record notebook** for weights, feedings, sheds and tank readings. It makes vet visits much more useful.

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

SECTION 2

Meet the Reptiles & Amphibians

Reptiles and amphibians are both **ectotherms**, which is the technical term for "cold-blooded": their body temperature follows their surroundings, so the keeper's job is to build the right climate. Beyond that shared fact, they split sharply.

Reptiles (lizards, snakes, turtles and tortoises) have dry skin covered in scales or scutes, breathe with lungs from birth, and lay eggs with a protective shell on land. Hatchlings look like miniature adults. Most of the popular pet species come from warm, sunny places, and many bask in the open to warm up and make vitamin D3 under UVB light.

Amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders) have thin, smooth or slightly bumpy skin that absorbs water and oxygen and also absorbs whatever touches it. Most lay soft, jelly-like eggs in or near water, and the young live a different life from the adults: tadpoles breathe with gills and swim, adults often breathe with lungs and live on land, and some, like the axolotl, never fully leave the water. They come from damp, cool or tropical, forested places and depend on clean water.

The Reptile or Amphibian Comparison

Trait	Reptiles	Amphibians
Skin	Dry, scaly or plated; waterproof	Thin, moist and permeable; absorbs water and chemicals
Eggs and life cycle	Shelled eggs laid on land (some bear live young); hatchlings are miniature adults	Soft jelly eggs, usually in water; larval stage (tadpole or gilled larva) before the adult form
Heat	Often need a hot basking spot and a temperature gradient	Most need cool to moderate, steady temperatures; heat is dangerous
Light	Many daytime species need UVB lighting	Little or no UVB; low levels are sometimes used for some species
Humidity and water	Ranges from desert-dry to tropical-humid; water is mostly for drinking and soaking	Moist to wet at all times; water quality is life and death
Handling	Many tolerate calm, short handling	Most should not be handled; hands carry oils, soap and lotions
Diet	Herbivore, omnivore, insectivore or carnivore	Almost all are insect, worm or whole-prey eaters
Typical lifespan	About 5 years to 70+ years, depending on species	About 5 to 20 years, depending on species
Typical cost	Moderate to high: heat, light, large enclosure	Low to moderate for small frogs; moderate for filtered aquatic setups
Best for families who	Want an animal to observe and (often) hold	Want to watch a living display and are comfortable not touching

All 18 Species at a Glance

Each name below links to its full species care guide. This table uses our own guide figures; where individuals or subspecies vary, we give a range.

Species	Group	What it is	Beginner fit
Leopard Gecko	Reptile	Hardy, nocturnal desert-edge lizard	Excellent first reptile

Species	Group	What it is	Beginner fit
Crested Gecko	Reptile	Arboreal (tree-living) lizard that eats a powdered fruit diet	Excellent first reptile
Bearded Dragon	Reptile	Daytime Australian omnivore; very handleable	Excellent, with a bigger budget
Blue-Tongue Skink	Reptile	Calm, ground-dwelling omnivore	Good
Chameleon	Reptile	Stress-sensitive, arboreal; a display animal	Challenging
Chinese Water Dragon	Reptile	Tall, semi-aquatic climbing lizard	Intermediate
Green Iguana	Reptile	Very large herbivore needing a custom enclosure	Not recommended for beginners
Uromastix	Reptile	Hot, dry, plant-eating desert lizard	Intermediate
Corn Snake	Reptile	Active, hardy, tolerant rodent-eating snake	Excellent first snake
Ball Python	Reptile	Docile, long-lived constrictor	Good
Tortoise	Reptile	Land-dwelling shelled herbivores, from compact to giant	Varies sharply by species
Aquatic Turtle	Reptile	Water-living shelled reptile; large, messy, long-lived	Challenging
Box Turtle	Reptile	Small, shy, land-dwelling omnivore; very long-lived	Intermediate; local law matters
Pacman Frog	Amphibian	Round, ambush-hunting ground frog	Good
Tree Frog	Amphibian	Arboreal frogs from hardy to delicate	Good (White's); varies
Dart Frog	Amphibian	Tiny, bold, daytime frogs in planted vivariums	Intermediate
Fire-Bellied Toad	Amphibian	Active, cool-water, semi-aquatic toad	Good
Axolotl	Amphibian	Fully aquatic salamander that keeps its gills for life	Good, with cold-water setup; legality varies

SECTION 3

Which Reptile or Amphibian Is Right for You?

Here is the big chart. Figures come from our species guides; ranges reflect that individuals, forms and subspecies vary. "Daily time" is a realistic average for routine care, not including weekly cleaning.

Species	Adult size	Lifespan	Minimum enclosure (one adult)	Daily time	Handling	Best for
Leopard Gecko	7-10 in	15-20 years	36" x 18" floor	10-15 min	Tolerates calm handling	First reptile, small homes
Crested Gecko	6-10 in	15-20 years	18" x 18" x 24" tall	10-15 min	Handleable with patience	Busy keepers, low-fuss feeding
Bearded Dragon	16-24 in	10-15 years	4' x 2' x 2' recommended	20-30 min	Very tolerant	Kids and families who want to hold
Blue-Tongue Skink	18-24 in	15-20+ years	4' x 2' x 1.5-2'	20-30 min	Calm, rarely bites	Long-term handleable pet
Chameleon	10-14 in (female), 18-24 in (male)	3-5 years (female), 5-8 years (male)	24" x 24" x 48" tall	20-30 min	Tolerates, does not enjoy it	Experienced display keepers
Chinese Water Dragon	24-36 in	10-15 years	48" x 24" x 48" tall	20-30 min	Docile with time	Keepers with vertical space
Green Iguana	4-6 ft	10-20 years	6' x 3' x 6' custom build	30-45 min	Highly variable	Experienced, room-sized setups
Uromastyx	8-16 in (up to 30+ in for Egyptian)	15-25 years	4' x 2' x 2'	15-25 min	Calm and curious	Keepers who like a heat-loving herbivore
Corn Snake	3.5-5 ft	15-20 years	4' x 2' x 2'	10-15 min	Tolerant	First snake, low-cost feeding
Ball Python	3-6 ft	20-30 years	4' x 2' x 2'	10-15 min	Docile	Quiet, calm homes

Species	Adult size	Lifespan	Minimum enclosure (one adult)	Daily time	Handling	Best for
Tortoise	About 6-10 in (compact) to 24-30 in (sulcata)	40-80+ years	8' x 4' table for compact species; outdoor pen for large ones	20-30 min	Limited ; they prefer ground	Multi-generation households
Aquatic Turtle	About 5-12+ in	20-30+ years	75-125+ gallons for large species	20-30 min	Not a handling pet	Keepers who want a big aquatic display
Box Turtle	5-7 in	40-50+ years	About 4' x 2' (8' x 4' ideal)	15-25 min	Best observed	Patient, legally compliant keepers
Pacman Frog	4-6 in (female, up to about 7)	6-10 years	20-gallon long	10 min	Not recommended	Low-activity, watch-only
Tree Frog	1.5-4.5 in	About 5-20+ years	18" x 18" x 24" (24" x 18" x 36" for a White's)	10-15 min	Brief and rare	Evening watching, small spaces
Dart Frog	0.5-2 in	About 5-15+ years	18" x 18" x 18" for a pair or trio	10-15 min	Do not handle	Keepers who love planted display tanks
Fire-Bellied Toad	2-2.5 in	10-15 years	10 gallon for a pair; 20 long for a group	10-15 min	Do not handle	Low-cost, active display
Axolotl	9-12 in	10-15 years	20-gallon long minimum; 40 breeder better	10-15 min	Do not handle	Cold-water display, tank lovers

Choose This If...

You want a first pet for a child (ages 8 and up). A leopard gecko or bearded dragon is the usual starting point because both tolerate calm handling and have well-understood needs. A corn snake works for a snake-curious kid with an adult handling feeding. Avoid chameleons, aquatic turtles and the delicate frogs as a child's first animal.

You are a busy adult with a full schedule. Geckos, snakes and a fire-bellied toad or axolotl suit short, predictable daily routines. A crested gecko is great because its main diet is a mixed powder, not live feeders every day. A ball python eats once a week or less.

You want an animal you can hold. Reptiles are the answer. Bearded dragons, blue-tongue skinks, corn snakes and ball pythons are the best handlers. Amphibians are not.

You want a living display to watch. Dart frogs, tree frogs, fire-bellied toads and axolotls shine here. A planted vivarium or cool-water aquarium is a living piece of furniture.

You live in a small apartment. Leopard geckos, crested geckos, corn snakes, pacman frogs and the small frogs fit well. Skip green iguanas, adult aquatic turtles, large tortoises and water dragons unless you can give them the room.

You want a lifelong companion. Tortoises, box turtles, ball pythons and blue-tongue skinks can live for decades. Make a succession plan in writing, because a tortoise can outlive its owner.

You are poor first-choice territory. Green iguanas, chameleons, sulcata tortoises and red-eared slider-type aquatic turtles are the species that most often end up in rescues. They are wonderful animals in the right hands, and the right hands have large rooms, bigger budgets and a lot of experience.

SECTION 4

Space, Setup & Budget

Reptiles usually need more floor space, more electricity and more equipment. A 4' x 2' enclosure is the baseline for many adult lizards and snakes, and a handful need much more. Heating, thermostats, UVB tubes (replaced regularly) and a quality enclosure that holds heat are the big costs.

Amphibians often need smaller enclosures, but they are less forgiving in other ways. A small frog can live in an 18" cube, but that cube must stay clean, damp and in a narrow temperature range. Aquatic species need a filter, a water test kit and the patience to cycle a tank before the animal arrives (cycling means growing helpful bacteria that process waste).

Cost area	Reptiles	Amphibians
Enclosure	Moderate to high; front-opening models cost more but ease care	Low to moderate; a glass tank or small vivarium is often enough
Heat	Basking lamp, ceramic heat emitter and thermostat	Often none; cooling may be needed in warm homes
Light	UVB tube and basking bulb, replaced regularly	Simple LED for plants; little or no UVB
Water	Dishes and soaking area	Dechlorinator, test kits, filter for aquatic species
Food	Live insects, greens, frozen-thawed prey	Live insects, worms, whole prey or specialty pellets
Vet fund	Needed; reptiles hide illness	Needed; amphibians hide it even better

Rule of thumb: buy the adult-sized enclosure once. Upgrading a juvenile setup three times costs more than a single good purchase.

SECTION 5

Heat, Light & Habitat Basics

The core difference is **hot and bright versus cool and damp**.

Reptile climate. Most pet reptiles need a **temperature gradient**: a hot basking end and a cooler end so the animal can regulate itself. Basking surface temperatures run from about 85 to 135 degrees Fahrenheit depending on species (a box turtle's dock is gentler than a uromastyx's desert rock). UVB light lets many reptiles make vitamin D3 and absorb calcium. Without it, bones soften, a condition called metabolic bone disease. Humidity ranges from desert-dry for a uromastyx to humid for an iguana or crested gecko, so read the species guide.

Amphibian climate. Most amphibians prefer **steady, moderate or cool temperatures**. Axolotls need water around 60 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit, and above roughly 75 it becomes dangerous. Fire-bellied toads prefer water around 65 to 75, and dart frogs about 72 to 80 in the air. Heat lamps are generally a bad idea. Humidity must be high and steady, with clean water and a moist substrate.

Water quality. For amphibians, water is part of the animal. Their skin absorbs chlorine, chloramine and soap. Use treated or dechlorinated water for every dish, spray and tank, and change aquatic water on a schedule. Aquatic turtles are the reptile exception: they live in water, make a lot of waste and need a powerful filter and regular changes.

Light. Reptiles that bask in daylight generally need UVB on a 10 to 12 hour schedule. Amphibians use gentle day-and-night lighting and plants for cover.

Habitat feature	Reptiles	Amphibians
Basking spot	Yes for most; temperatures vary widely by species	Usually no
Temperature goal	Gradient from warm to hot	Steady, cool to moderate
UVB	Required for most diurnal (daytime) species	Generally not needed; ask about your species
Humidity	Desert-dry to tropical	Moist to wet, always
Water	Drinking and soaking dishes	Clean, treated water; some species fully aquatic
Greatest risk	Burns, low UVB, wrong temperatures	Overheating, dirty water, chemicals on skin

SECTION 6

Diet & Nutrition



Reptiles and amphibians eat very differently: insects and rodents, greens and vegetables, worms and flies. Check each species guide before you shop.

Amphibians are almost all **carnivores** (insects, worms and, for the largest, small whole prey). Reptiles run the whole range. The most common mistake across both groups is feeding what the pet store shelf suggests instead of what the species needs.

Diet type	Species	Main staple	Common mistake
Herbivore	Green Iguana, Uromastyx, Tortoise	Leafy greens, weeds and flowers; for iguanas and uromastyx, no insect protein for adults	Feeding fruit and iceberg lettuce, or adding insects to a plant eater
Omnivore	Bearded Dragon, Blue-Tongue Skink, Box Turtle, Chinese Water Dragon, Crested Gecko	A mix of insects (or prepared diet), greens and some fruit, with ratios that change with age	Too many insects for adults, or too much fruit
Insectivore	Leopard Gecko, Chameleon, Tree Frog, Dart Frog, Fire-Bellied Toad	Gut-loaded feeder insects, dusted with supplements as needed	Feeding only one feeder type; skipping calcium and vitamins

Diet type	Species	Main staple	Common mistake
Carnivore	Corn Snake, Ball Python, Pacman Frog, Axolotl, Aquatic Turtle (especially when young)	Whole prey, worms, or species-appropriate pellets	Feeding live rodents, oversized prey or wild-caught food

Some notes that apply across the board:

- **Gut-loading** means feeding the insects a nutritious diet before you feed them to your pet. Dusting means coating feeders in calcium or vitamin powder. Both matter more than most new keepers realize.
- **Frozen-thawed prey** is safer than live for snakes. Live rodents can injure your animal.
- **Never feed wild-caught insects**, which may carry pesticides and parasites.
- **Fruit flies, earthworms and dubia roaches** are staples for different amphibians and reptiles, and a varied feeder colony is better than a single type.
- **Feeding schedules** depend on age. Babies eat daily; adults of many species eat far less. Check the species guide.
- **Obesity** is common in captivity, especially with bearded dragons and pacman frogs.

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

SECTION 7

Lifespan & Commitment

Lifespan is where these two groups differ most in what they ask of a family.

Lifespan band	Species	What it means
Under 10 years	Chameleon (3-8 years), Pacman Frog (6-10), some small dart and tree frogs (5-10)	A shorter commitment, but one that ends in grief for a child; plan for that conversation
10 to 20 years	Bearded Dragon, Chinese Water Dragon, Green Iguana, Leopard Gecko, Crested Gecko, Blue-Tongue Skink, Corn Snake, Fire-Bellied Toad, Axolotl, Dart Frog, White's Tree Frog	Roughly a dog's lifetime; your pet will see a child go from kindergarten to college
20 to 30 years	Ball Python, Uromastix (15-25), Aquatic Turtle (20-30+)	A two-decade promise, often longer than a first apartment or first job
40+ years	Tortoise (40-80+), Box Turtle (40-50+)	A multi-generation commitment; write the animal into your will

Think about holidays, moves, new babies, allergies that appear later, and the likelihood that a toddler becomes a teenager who loses interest. A pet that outlives your plans is the number one reason for rehoming. Put the answer in writing: who cares for it if you cannot?

SECTION 8

Handling, Temperament & Families

Reptiles. Many reptiles tolerate calm, short handling and some enjoy it. Bearded dragons, blue-tongue skinks, leopard geckos, corn snakes and ball pythons are the friendliest. Handle from below, support the whole body, wash hands before and after, and stop if the animal hisses, gapes, flattens, bolts or loses color. Wait a few days after bringing a new animal home and after every meal before handling.

Amphibians. Most should not be handled. Their skin absorbs soap, lotion, sunscreen, salt and oils from your hands, and their bodies are delicate. Dart frogs, fire-bellied toads, axolotls, pacman frogs and most tree frogs are display animals. If you must move one, wet your hands with treated water or use a clean container. Fire-bellied toads and some frogs release mild skin secretions, so wash up afterward. Captive-raised dart frogs are generally not toxic, but their skin is still no place for your hands.

Families. A good family reptile is one the children can hold with an adult present and feed with supervision. A good family amphibian is one the children can watch, help set up and learn from. Teach the household rules from day one: wash hands, no kissing or snuggling the animal near the face, no eating near the enclosure, and no cleaning enclosures in the kitchen sink.

Household	Best group	Notes
Young children (under 5)	Neither, ideally	Salmonella risk is higher for under-fives
Children 8 and up	Reptile for handling; amphibian for watching	Adult handles care and sanitation
Teen who wants a project	Either	Planted vivariums and bioactive setups are great learning
Apartment with roommates	Small amphibian or gecko	Clear communication about safe, quiet rules
Households with dogs and cats	Either in a locked room	Never rely on a lid alone
Immunocompromised, pregnant, very young or elderly	Talk to a doctor first	Both groups can carry Salmonella

SECTION 9

Legal & Ethical Sourcing

Rules for reptiles and amphibians vary by state and sometimes by city or county. Check your state wildlife agency and your local rules before you buy. Here is what we have verified.

Pennsylvania native reptiles and amphibians. The woodland (eastern) box turtle has a possession limit of zero in Pennsylvania (58 Pa. Code § 79.3), which means you cannot legally keep one. It is unlawful to bring a native reptile or amphibian into Pennsylvania from another state (§ 79.10), and it is unlawful to buy or sell one taken in Pennsylvania or its offspring (§ 79.9). Native turtles include painted, map, musk and mud turtles. If you find a native turtle or frog in your yard, enjoy it and leave it where it lives.

The federal 4-inch rule. Since 1975, the FDA has banned selling turtles and tortoises with a shell under 4 inches, except for bona fide scientific, educational or exhibition purposes (not as pets) and for export. If someone offers you a tiny turtle as a pet, it is being sold illegally and may also have been taken from the wild.

Axolotls. Axolotls are banned in California, Maine and New Jersey and need a permit in New Mexico. Virginia has allowed them since August 1, 2021. Check your own state and local rules before you buy.

Everything else. Many states restrict certain species, require permits for large or venomous animals, or regulate the sale of particular turtles. Check your state wildlife agency and your local rules. We cannot do that for you, and rules change.

Ethical sourcing.

- **Captive-bred only.** Choose animals bred in captivity by reputable breeders, never wild-caught. Wild collection harms wild populations, spreads disease and produces stressed, parasite-laden animals that often die in the first months.
- **Ask where it came from.** A good seller can tell you the breeder, hatch date and feeding history.
- **Never release a pet into the wild.** A released animal can die in the first winter, carry disease to native populations or become an invasive species. Releasing an unwanted pet is illegal in many places and never kind.
- **Rehome responsibly.** If you can no longer keep your animal, contact the seller, a reptile or amphibian rescue or a local herpetological society.
- **Native species stay native.** Do not keep or collect wild animals, however tempting.

SECTION 10

Common Challenges & Solutions

- 1. The impulse buy.** *What you see:* a pet bought on a whim with no enclosure at home. *Why it happens:* tiny, adorable animals are sold at the front of the store with no plan for the adult. *What to do:* set up the complete enclosure and run it for several days before the animal comes home. *When to ask for help:* if your setup cannot hold the right temperatures, call your vet or the store before purchase.
- 2. The outgrown enclosure.** *What you see:* an animal pressed against the walls, pacing, or not turning around. *Why it happens:* the juvenile-sized tank was never meant for an adult. *What to do:* buy the adult enclosure once, or plan the upgrade date. *When to ask for help:* if the animal has sores from rubbing or stops eating, see an exotic vet.
- 3. Bad advice from the shelf.** *What you see:* heat rocks, sand floors, "all-in-one" kits or the wrong food. *Why it happens:* retail displays often show setups that are cheap rather than correct. *What to do:* compare any product claim against the species guide. *When to ask for help:* call a reptile- or amphibian-savvy vet if the animal is lethargic or not eating after correction.
- 4. Heat mistakes.** *What you see:* panting, hiding in the cool end, scorched belly or sluggish digestion. *Why it happens:* no thermostat, a bulb placed too low or an unverified thermometer. *What to do:* use a thermostat and an infrared temperature gun, then recheck at several spots. *When to ask for help:* burns, blisters or refusal to bask warrant a vet visit.
- 5. Humidity and water mistakes.** *What you see:* stuck sheds, dry skin, or mold in the substrate; for amphibians, curled skin, a cloudy tank or sudden illness. *Why it happens:* wrong humidity for the species, untreated tap water or an unfiltered tank. *What to do:* measure with a hygrometer, use conditioned water and keep to your cleaning schedule. *When to ask for help:* if a shed does not come off in a day or two or skin looks red, ulcerated or cloudy, see a vet.
- 6. Handling stress.** *What you see:* gaping, hissing, thrashing, tail dropping, going dark in color or freezing. *Why it happens:* too much, too soon or the wrong grip; amphibians are stressed by any handling. *What to do:* back off for a week, then try short, calm sessions with reptiles only. *When to ask for help:* a reptile that refuses all food for weeks after handling changes should be checked.
- 7. Social species kept lonely or kept together wrongly.** *What you see:* bites, bullying, missing toes or an animal hiding all day. *Why it happens:* many species are solitary and some males fight; others, like some dart frogs, do better in groups. *What to do:* follow the species guide on group size and never mix groups. *When to ask for help:* any injuries or a thin animal in a shared tank means separating them immediately and calling a vet.
- 8. Mixed species in one enclosure.** *What you see:* a bigger animal eating a smaller one, or one animal sick while another is fine. *Why it happens:* reptiles and amphibians need different temperatures, humidity and water, and carry different pathogens. *What to do:* house each species separately, and never keep a reptile with an amphibian. *When to ask for help:* if any animal shows weight loss or lesions after being housed with others, see a vet.
- 9. Finding a vet.** *What you see:* an animal that is sick and a local clinic that says no. *Why it happens:* exotic vets are scarce. *What to do:* locate one in advance and save the number. *When to ask for help:* right away for open-mouth breathing, swelling, bleeding, prolapse, seizures, weakness or sudden refusal of food.
- 10. Rehoming.** *What you see:* a family that can no longer keep the animal. *Why it happens:* lifespan mismatch, space, cost or lost interest. *What to do:* contact the seller, a rescue or a herpetological society, and never release it. *When to ask for help:* if you are struggling, ask before the animal pays the price.

SECTION 11

Routine Care at a Glance

Frequency	Reptiles	Amphibians
Daily	Check temperatures, lights and water; feed per schedule; spot-clean waste; look the animal over	Check temperature and humidity; refresh water with conditioned water; feed per schedule; remove uneaten food
Weekly	Wash dishes and décor; replace soiled substrate; offer a soak if the species needs it; weigh smaller animals	Partial water change (25-50% for aquatic setups); wipe glass; test aquarium water; trim and tidy plants
Monthly	Deep-clean the enclosure; check equipment and replace bulbs as needed; record weight and length	Test water thoroughly; clean the filter in old tank water; check hygrometer and thermostat calibration
Annual	Veterinary exam, with a fecal test; replace UVB tubes on the maker's schedule; review enclosure size	Veterinary exam with a fecal test; replace filter media as needed; review tank size and group makeup

For species-specific schedules, see the individual care guides linked in the tables above, or visit the reptile and amphibian group pages.

SECTION 12

FAQ

What is the difference between a reptile and an amphibian?

Reptiles have dry, scaly skin, breathe with lungs from birth and lay shelled eggs on land; amphibians have thin, moist skin that absorbs water and oxygen, lay soft jelly-like eggs, and usually have a larval stage (such as a tadpole) before becoming adults. In practice, that means reptiles tend to want warmth, light and dry or semi-humid conditions, while amphibians want cool, damp, clean conditions and little handling.

Is a frog a reptile?

No. Frogs are amphibians. They have moist, permeable skin, lay jelly-like eggs in or near water, and their young (tadpoles) look nothing like the adults. Turtles, tortoises, lizards and snakes are reptiles. The confusion happens because they are all cold-blooded and often sold side by side, but they need very different housing.

Which is easier to care for, a reptile or an amphibian?

Neither group is truly easy. A leopard gecko, corn snake or bearded dragon is among the easiest reptiles because the needs are well understood, while a pacman frog, White's tree frog or fire-bellied toad is a good amphibian starter. Amphibians have lower equipment costs but are sensitive to water quality and heat, while reptiles need more equipment but are usually more forgiving of small mistakes. Choose the species that fits your space, schedule and budget, not the group.

Can reptiles and amphibians live together?

No. Reptiles and amphibians need different temperatures, humidity and water, and each can carry bacteria and parasites that harm the other. Larger animals may also eat smaller ones. House every species in its own enclosure, and wash your hands and tools between tanks.

Which reptiles and amphibians are good for kids?

For children old enough to follow hygiene rules (generally 8 and up) with an adult in charge of care, the best reptile choices are the leopard gecko, bearded dragon and corn snake, and the best amphibian choices are watching animals such as the fire-bellied toad, White's tree frog or axolotl, where the child does not need to hold the animal. Avoid chameleons, iguanas, large tortoises, aquatic turtles and delicate frogs as a child's first pet, and remember that an adult is always the responsible keeper.

Do reptiles and amphibians carry salmonella?

Yes, both can carry Salmonella bacteria without looking sick, and it can pass to people through contact with the animal, its water, its enclosure or its droppings. Wash your hands with soap and water after every contact, never clean enclosures in kitchen sinks, and keep animals away from food areas. Households with children under five, pregnant people, the elderly or anyone with a weakened immune system should talk to their doctor before bringing one home.

Do amphibians need UVB like reptiles?

Generally not the strong UVB that basking reptiles require. Most amphibians are nocturnal or live in shaded, moist places and do well with a normal day-and-night light cycle and plants for cover. Some keepers use low-level UVB for certain daytime species, so check the guide for your species, and never use a basking-reptile lamp over an amphibian, because heat and strong light can harm it quickly.

Can I handle my reptile or amphibian?

Many reptiles tolerate calm, short handling, especially bearded dragons, leopard geckos, blue-tongue skinks, corn snakes and ball pythons, and you should always wash your hands before and after. Most amphibians should not be handled, because their skin absorbs oils, soaps and lotions and is easily injured; if you must move one, use a clean container or wet hands with treated water. Chameleons, aquatic turtles, box turtles and tortoises tolerate handling but rarely enjoy it.

Which reptiles and amphibians are illegal in Pennsylvania?

In Pennsylvania, the woodland (eastern) box turtle has a possession limit of zero, and it is unlawful to bring a native reptile or amphibian in from another state or to buy or sell one taken in Pennsylvania or its offspring; native turtles include painted, map, musk and mud turtles. Federally, turtles and tortoises with a shell under 4 inches cannot be sold as pets. Axolotls are banned in California, Maine and New Jersey, need a permit in New Mexico and have been allowed in Virginia since August 1, 2021. Check your state wildlife agency and your local rules for anything else.

How do I find a vet for a reptile or amphibian?

Look for a veterinarian who lists exotic animals, reptiles or amphibians on their website, and call to confirm that they see your species before you need them. Ask whether they do fecal tests, emergency visits and after-hours referrals. Local reptile clubs, herpetological societies and breeders can often point you to a good one. Save the number and keep a travel container ready.

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

SECTION 13

Every Purchase Gives Back

At Walnut Creek Supply, **10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters** across the country. That is not an afterthought. Before we earn a dime, it goes to animals that need a hand, because we believe that caring for one animal should help care for others.

Whichever animal you choose, choose it slowly, set it up right, and keep it for life. From our family here in Lancaster County to yours: welcome to the herd, the flock, the terrarium and the tank. Go gently, wash your hands, and enjoy every minute with your new neighbor. Pinky promise.