



Terrestrial Salamanders

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Common terrestrial salamander species kept as pets are tiger salamanders (*Ambystoma tigrinum*), and fire salamanders (*Salamandra salamandra*). Tiger salamanders are hardy and often interactive animals that make good pets. Tiger salamanders are native to North America and can be found coast to coast in the US, as well as in Canada and Mexico; however, they are difficult to breed in captivity and almost all are wild caught. Most fire salamanders are wild caught. They are a European species which is strictly protected in the EU, so typically imported to the US from Eastern European countries like Ukraine. Fire salamanders are poisonous if ingested, so best kept away from cats, dogs and small children for all involved!

Health Care: Salamanders can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend biannual exams and fecal float. Weighing your pet at home can be a good way to catch illnesses early. Please bring them in to see us if their weight changes by 10%, or more. Common problems include: nutritional deficiencies from diets lacking variety, wounds, fungal infections.

Husbandry concerns: House new amphibians by themselves until cleared by your veterinarian, often a quarantine period of six months. Keep handling to a minimum as the oils in human skin are harmful to amphibians. Always wash your hands before and after handling. Be sure the lid is well fitted and does not contain any holes through which the salamander can escape as they can be very crafty and are good climbers. Fill 2 inches of aquarium gravel, topped with sterile potting soil (available from plant nurseries), topped with a piece of turf or moss. Provide multiple cave hides. A large shallow water dish that the salamander can climb into is required. The humidity must be kept high; moss and live plants can help with this. Additional heat may be provided using an under tank heating pad. Heat lamps can often make enclosures too hot and dehydrate the salamander. Monitor the temperature with a digital thermometer. Any heating element should be placed at one end of the tank to allow for a temperature gradient and the salamander should not be able to touch the heating element. Either a mesh top or rows of drilled quarter inch holes should provide some airflow to decrease pathogen growth in the habitat. Mist animals daily. Clean bedding out on a weekly basis. Provide climbing objects, but remember there is no good way to fully clean wooden items, and they should be periodically thrown away and replaced. Salamanders do not generally tolerate high temperatures well and should be kept between 58 and 65F. White lights should be turned off at night. Temperatures can decrease by as much as 12F at night. Cages

More on the back!

should be lit with a UVB light of 5% or less for 12hrs per day. Be careful with the use of disinfectants when cleaning and wash them off very well, as they can be toxic if absorbed through amphibian skin. In water dishes and tanks, always use dechlorinated water or bottled water as chlorine can be harmful to amphibians.

Diet: Terrestrial salamanders generally find their food by watching it. Food items should be rotated and varied to provide a balanced diet. Food should be smaller than the salamander's head is wide, with the exception of soft worms. Earthworms, beetles, pill bugs, moths and other insects are good. Do not feed fireflies as they are poisonous! Provide food for any insects left in the cage so they don't chew on the salamander! These insects should be misted in a zip-loc bag, then shake-and-baked with a calcium-only powder coating before feeding to the amphibian (we recommend using Tums crushed into a powder. Tiger salamanders are excellent diggers and will often bury themselves, so that new tiger salamanders may need to be gently dug up to feed them. Gently tapping on the aquarium whenever you feed the salamander can be a good signal for the salamander and most catch on quickly that this means there is food near by. Salamanders, particularly Tiger salamanders, are prone to obesity. High fat foods such as mealworms or pinky mice should be limited to occasional treats, but can be useful to get a new, shy salamander to eat.

