

Care Sheet for Juvenile Dart Frogs

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The simple requirements of Dendrobatid frogs are often misunderstood by beginners. Much of the literature available on these frogs is inaccurate, or skims over important areas of their care and requirements. In this care sheet I will provide specific methods and information on the requirements of these frogs, particularly young or juvenile dart frogs. Several areas are covered, and once the concepts presented here are understood the only challenge left in raising these frogs is obtaining a good food supply and finding some healthy frogs to start with, and you are in the right place for that.



First some information on what different terms regarding size and age of dart frogs mean, and what size frogs you can expect to receive from us. All the following is in reference to the larger, more common frogs such as *D. auratus*, *D. galactonotus*, *D. azureus*, and the various *D. tinctorius*. Many vendors sell one and two month old froglets, or babies, which are between one half inch and three quarters of an inch in length. These are often referred to as froglets. I sold my frogs at this size in the past, it is certainly possible for you to do well with this size frog, but these frogs are much less sturdy than the larger one inch frogs we generally sell here now, and in particular if you are a beginner, you should think carefully before purchasing such small frogs. At this size the froglets are often shy, and some are not aggressive hunters. It is critical that food be regularly supplied, once a day or more, for good growth, and in some froglets it seems that even feeding every day is barely enough to keep the weight on. At this size they can be quite delicate, and we think it is best if they are not moved or shipped.

At between two and four months, the froglets reach about one inch, and have become bolder, and much sturdier. At this point I consider them juveniles, and consider it safe to ship them. They are much more resistant to the mistakes that beginners make at this size. Depending on how things are going, we often put a bit more size on them before shipping them, and the frogs we ship are sometimes up to 1 & 1/4 inch by the time they are shipped.

Housing for young dart frogs is best kept simple, especially for the first month or so that you have the frogs. It is very important for you to be able to monitor the frogs daily, and see that they are eating and appear healthy. Large enclosures (anything larger than a ten gallon) are risky. Probably the best temporary set up is a "sweaterbox", one of the plastic boxes made by Rubbermaid or the Sterilite Company. I know many of you are appalled at the idea of taking your beautiful frogs and putting them in a plastic box! Don't worry you won't be keeping it there for long. Cover the bottom of the shoebox with carefully folded paper towels and add a small piece of cork bark or some other hiding spot that the frog can get under. A couple of magnolia or other large dry leaves are good as hide spots, or a pothos type cutting can be laid in the container, it will get moisture from the substrate and while it might not thrive, that's not the important thing, you are providing some cover for the frog. Moisten the paper towel with de-chlorinated water. Do not soak the paper towel, just get it damp. A spritz of water from your spray bottle every day or two can keep the humidity and moisture level up.

Another substrate that can be used is a thin layer of gravel (about one half inch), with sheet moss over it. Sheet moss is the dried green moss that most nurseries sell. Moisten the moss and piece it in over the gravel. Any plants that you add can be rooted in the gravel, which should have a little water added to it. Any variation on this design is fine as long as the lid is tight fitting, the substrate moist but not soaked with water, and the tank is not more than a square foot or two in size. Depending on the size of the frogs you are receiving, and the species, you may be able to go ahead and put them in a simply set up ten gallon also, but you should inquire as to whether the frogs you are getting are going to be large enough for this to be safe.

Sphagnum moss can be used, the long fiber type, but if so I'd cover it with a good bit of leaf litter, and change it monthly, it seems to build up bacterial loads if not changed every few weeks. Another disposable substrate I've used a lot of is hardwood mulch. Make sure you are sourcing a product that doesn't contain dyes. The "big box" hardware stores won't usually carry this, but you can often find it at a nurseries.

If you have set the tank up with gravel/moss, you probably don't have to completely break it down until you move your frogs to their permanent home, but if you are using the paper towel, make sure to change it every few days, it can become fouled quickly.

One of the most common mistakes made is to give your frogs too much ventilation. Dart frogs do not need ventilation, at least not beyond opening the lid every couple of days. With the sweater box type of setup you can carefully monitor your frog and make sure it is eating and settling in to its new home. If using a ten gallon tank, a glass lid is essential, screen lids are a big no- no. If you are using one of the front opening cages (an exo-terra 12 x 12 x 18 or similar) you can seal the screen lid with tape and saran wrap over the screen, or have a piece of glass cut to cover the screen. In this sort of setup frequent misting is not required, as long as the tank is properly moistened, you will have a high humidity, and with no ventilation there will be no evaporation. Occasional misting to keep the tank clean is fine, just don't do it right before feeding, as the flies will get into the water and drown.

The next subject to tackle is setting up a food supply. The best way to go here is probably going to be for you to culture flightless fruitflies. This is not hard to do, and involves a minimum of time and expense. We offer a full line of fruit fly supplies , and a caresheet dealing with them. Another food item is crickets, which can be purchased through cricket farms and possibly your local specialty reptile store. Crickets can be expensive, and really only work for larger collections, since they are generally sold in quantities of five hundred minimum, and by the time you have fed out a few of the crickets they will often have outgrown the frogs! But crickets do offer excellent nutrition, and they seem to make frogs grow faster than fruitflies do. They are an excellent fallback food supply, and if you have a gap in your production of fruitflies, then crickets could be an option. Be aware though that very few stores will sell the correct size crickets for dart frogs, especially juveniles. Most beginners are unable to visually tell a cricket that is too large for a dart frog, and most stores don't carry this size, even though they may say they carry "pinheads". Stick with fruit flies!

However beware of trying to feed your frogs crickets only, particularly if you are planning to get them at the local pet store, as this has been the down fall of many frog keepers. Cricket supplies are often not reliable and the sizes are often too large for your frogs, leaving you without food for your frogs for days at a time. Tiny differences in the size of the crickets may make them too large for your frog to eat, and you may wind up with a starving frog that cant eat the food you are trying to offer it. The frogs I sell are generally eating a one week old cricket when they leave here.

Whatever you are feeding, it will need to be "dusted" with mineral and vitamin supplements . Probably the best combination, are the products, Rep-Cal and Herptivite. Please be careful when obtaining these products, especially the Rep-Cal, since there are a couple of products with similar names. Use the two in an equal mixture, in a clean tall cup. Add the food, and shake or swirl till the food is coated in this mixture. Then carefully shake the food into your frogs enclosure. With a little practice you can do this with out spilling much of the dust!

Your frogs will be fairly flexible regarding how often they need to eat. The best policy is to feed them as much as you can, as often as possible, up to a couple of times a day, while they are still young, and growing. However a fat healthy frog can easily go a week between feedings, with no apparent ill effect, so don't panic if you run out of food and wont have any for a few days, as long as your frog is fat to start with. Dart frogs will eat a lot of food, and since their prey is so small, it can take dozens of food items per feeding, which is one reason crickets are not a good idea! This is particularly true if you are feeding every other day or so, which is also an acceptable feeding regimen, as long as you give the frogs plenty when you do feed them. If you are feeding twice a day, an appropriate portion would be more like a dozen or two fruit flies per feeding.

Keep your frogs first enclosure in an area with a temperature between 70 and 80 degrees, and give it background light (don't get it in the sun!). Under these conditions your frogs should quickly grow and be ready for a bigger tank in just a couple of months. Information on setting up larger tanks is available on other caresheets.



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