



African Clawed Frogs

Xenopus laevis

BEGINNER · 4-5 IN ADULT · 15-25 YR LIFESPAN · FULLY AQUATIC · SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

This all-water frog from the ponds of Sub-Saharan Africa has no tongue, no eyelids, clawed hind feet, and a comic habit of shoveling food mouthward with both hands. African clawed frogs never need to leave the water, they're famously hardy, and among the easiest amphibians to keep well. The catch: this is an aquarium project, not a terrarium one, and they'll eat anything that fits in that mouth, tankmates included.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Beginner
Adult size	4-5 in
Lifespan	15-25 years
Water temp	68-75 °F (65-70 °F night)
UVB	Not required
Diet	Pellets, worms, small fish
Feeding	Every 2-3 days
Adult tank	36×18×18 min · 48×18×18 pref
Native range	Sub-Saharan Africa



Clawed hind feet shred, little front hands shovel. Captive-bred *Xenopus* are easy to find at NARBC shows.

Photo: Marius Burger / iNaturalist · CC0

01

Fully Aquatic, Hands Off

Xenopus never leaves the water and never needs to. No land area, no misting, just a good aquarium. Hardy and beginner-friendly, but this is a watch-me pet: that permeable skin absorbs whatever it touches. Move the frog with a soft net (wet, rinsed hands only when there's no other way) and keep soap and chemicals away from the tank. Before you buy: this species is banned or restricted in many US states, including California, Arizona and Oregon, so check your regulations first.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Floor space beats height. Clawed frogs live on the bottom and rise only to gulp air, so a long, shallow tank serves them better than a tall one. Keep depth modest enough for an easy trip to the surface, and leave an air gap under a tight-fitting lid: these frogs are legendary escape artists, and a dried-out runaway rarely survives the night. Upgrade as the frog grows; the table below gives minimum and preferred tanks per stage.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Froglet	12×8×8	18×10×10	Fast growth; appetite appears early.
Juvenile	18×10×10	24×12×12	Voracious feeders; will eat tankmates.
Subadult	24×12×12	36×18×18	Solitary or single-species tank only.
Adult	36×18×18	48×18×18	Banned/restricted in many US states (CA, AZ, OR); check regulations first.

Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Footprint is what counts: these frogs live on the bottom, so go long and shallow, never tall.

03

Temperature & Light

Room temperature does the work here: aim for 68–75 °F, easing to 65–70 °F at night (an unheated tank in a normal home sits right in that band). Cool suits them; heat is the danger. Warm water holds less oxygen and speeds up every problem in the tank, so a summer heat wave is a bigger threat than a chilly room. Skip heaters unless the room runs genuinely cold, and skip basking lamps entirely. UVB isn't required; ordinary room light on a steady day–night cycle covers the lighting.

04

Water Quality & Cycling

Water is this animal's air, and everything in it crosses that skin. **Treat every drop of tap water with dechlorinator before it touches the tank: chlorine and chloramine are lethal to amphibians.** Run a gentle, cycled filter that holds ammonia and nitrite at zero, and back it with regular partial water changes. Keep the flow low: clawed frogs read the water through a lateral line, and constant current is constant noise. No soap or sprays near the tank; rinse gear in plain water only.

05

Substrate & Furnishings

Skip gravel: it's the classic clawed-frog killer. These frogs lunge at anything that smells like food and swallow whatever comes with it, and a gulped pebble means impaction. Fine sand or a bare bottom is the safe call; bare glass is plain but easy to keep clean. Add smooth caves, driftwood and shaded corners. A frog with cover is a bolder frog. Live plants get uprooted and shredded, so pick tough anchored species like anubias, or go silk.

06

Feeding

A carnivore with no off switch. Sinking pellets are the staple, varied with earthworms, bloodworms and the occasional small fish; feed every 2–3 days, only what vanishes in a few minutes. They hunt by smell and touch, cramming food in with those busy little forearms, and they'll keep eating as long as you keep offering. Portion control is your job, not theirs. The same appetite is why tankmates fail: anything smaller than the frog is dinner eventually.

07

Health Red Flags

Most clawed-frog emergencies are water problems in disguise, so test the water the moment something looks off. Take seriously: a red flush on legs or belly (classic red-leg septicemia), cotton-white skin patches, cloudy eyes, sudden bloat, frantic surface-hanging, or refused food in a frog this greedy. Red leg and bloat move fast. Make it a same-day call to an amphibian-experienced exotics vet, with a partial water change while you wait.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual — when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.