



African Dwarf Frogs

Hymenochirus boettgeri

BEGINNER • 1-2 IN ADULT • 5-10 YR LIFESPAN • FULLY AQUATIC • CENTRAL AFRICA

A frog the size of your thumbnail that spends its whole life underwater. African dwarf frogs are gentle, busy little amphibians. They hang in midwater, paddle to the surface for a gulp of air, and the males hum faintly at night. The honest headline: this is aquarium keeping, not terrarium keeping. Master dechlorinated, well-filtered water and a small group will thrive for years; neglect the water and nothing else you do matters.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Beginner
Adult size	1-2 inches
Lifespan	5-10 years
Water temp	72-78 °F, 68-72 °F at night
UVB	Not required
Diet	Bloodworms, brine shrimp, pellets
Feeding	Every 1-2 days
Water quality	Dechlorinated, gently filtered
Social	Groups of 3-5 ideal



Hymenochirus boettgeri: all four feet webbed, which is how you tell a dwarf frog from a clawed frog at a NARBC vendor table.

Photo: Marius Burger / iNaturalist · CC0

01

Temperament & Handling

Dwarf frogs are peaceful to a fault and belong in a group of their own kind, ideally three to five. Community tanks are trickier than the store lets on: these are slow, nearly blind feeders, and quick fish will beat them to every meal unless you target-feed. This is a watch-only pet; permeable skin absorbs whatever it touches. When you must move one, use a soft cup, or wet, clean hands for seconds, not minutes.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Think long and low, never tall: these frogs are clumsy swimmers that must paddle to the surface for every breath of air, so a wide footprint with modest depth beats a deep show tank. The table gives glass-aquarium sizes by stage; a 36×12×12 holds a proper group of 3-5. Coming from still wetlands, dwarf frogs hate current. Keep filtration gentle. Finish with a tight-fitting lid: an escaped frog dries out fast and rarely survives the trip.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Tadpole/frog let	8×8×8	12×8×8	Water quality is everything at this delicate stage.
Juvenile	12×8×8	18×10×10	Fully aquatic; feed sinking pellets or frozen bloodworms.
Subadult	18×10×10	24×12×12	Can be kept in groups.
Adult	24×12×12	36×12×12	Gentle filtration; groups of 3-5. Don't confuse with larger clawed frogs.

Tank sizes in inches (L×W×H) from Habitat-OS life-stage guidance for the African dwarf frog.

03

Heat & Light

Keep the water at 72–78 °F, easing toward 68–72 °F overnight. In a warm room that may mean no heater; otherwise a small, guarded aquarium heater set low does it. Small tanks swing fast, and a sunny window or an oversized heater can cook one in an afternoon. Run a thermometer you actually read. UVB isn't required. Ordinary room light or a modest aquarium lamp on a steady day–night cycle is all they ask.

04

Water Quality & Cycling

Their skin is a membrane, and the tank water flows straight through it. **Every drop that touches a dwarf frog must be dechlorinated.** Chlorine and chloramine are lethal, so treat all tap water with a conditioner before it enters the tank. Cycle the aquarium before the frogs arrive, then hold ammonia and nitrite at zero and change a quarter of the water weekly, temperature-matched. Never let soap, lotion or cleaning sprays near the tank; rinse equipment in plain water only.

05

Substrate & Planting

Go with fine sand or a bare bottom; mid-size gravel is the classic mistake. These frogs strike at food and swallow whatever comes with it. Their skin scrapes easily, so keep everything they touch smooth. Live or silk plants earn their keep: dwarf frogs drape themselves over leaves near the surface, and a frog floating spread-eagled in the plants is resting, not dying. Add a cave or two so nobody has to feel exposed.

06

Feeding

Dwarf frogs are carnivores with a bottom-feeder's habits: frozen-thawed bloodworms, brine shrimp and sinking carnivore pellets, offered every 1–2 days. Food that floats might as well not exist. It has to land in front of them, and a pipette or feeding dish puts it there before the filter or tankmates claim it. They hunt by smell, not sight, so give slow eaters a few minutes. Remove what's left; uneaten food is tomorrow's ammonia spike.

07

Health Red Flags

Sudden body-wide ballooning (bloat) is the dwarf-frog emergency; white cottony patches, reddened legs or belly, and skin peeling in ragged sheets are close behind. Frantic surface-gulping or listlessness usually means the water has gone wrong: test it, then do a partial change with dechlorinated, temperature-matched water. A frog that still looks wrong a day later needs an amphibian-savvy exotics vet, not a forum thread.

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.