



Chinese Fire-Bellied Newts

Cynops orientalis

BEGINNER • 3–4 IN ADULT • 10–20 YR LIFESPAN • SEMI-AQUATIC • COOL WATER • CHINA

A palm-sized newt with a black back and a belly like a lit coal. Chinese fire-bellies spend most of their adult lives in water, which makes them closer to a fishkeeper's animal than a terrarium pet. They're beginner-friendly on one condition: keep them cool. These come from the forested hills and mountains of China, and an overheated room is the thing that kills them.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Beginner, with one hard rule
Temperature	62–72 °F ambient, 58–65 °F night
Adult temps	Cool, 60–70 °F
Layout	Paludarium, about 70% water
UVB	Low UVB, beneficial
Diet	Bloodworms, brine shrimp, pellets
Feeding	Every 2–3 days
Adult size	3–4 inches
Lifespan	10–20 years



Chinese fire-bellied newts wear a dark back over a bright orange belly. Habitat-OS covers the species for NARBC keepers.

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01

Watch Them, Don't Handle Them

These are display animals, not lap animals. A newt's skin is a permeable organ, so hand oils, soap residue and salt cross straight into the body. Move them only when you must, with clean wet hands or a soft net, and wash up afterward. Fire-bellies also carry skin toxins, and that belly is the advertisement: keep your hands away from your eyes and mouth until they are washed. Settled newts are bold, busy feeders, and that is the whole reward.

02

Build a Paludarium, Not a Terrarium

Footprint matters more than height. They work the floor and the water column, never the walls. Adults want a paludarium of roughly 70 percent water with easy land access, a current gentle enough that a 3-inch animal isn't shoved around, and a tight lid, because newts find every gap you leave. Skip tankmates. Fish nip at newt skin and beat them to the food, newt toxins can poison other amphibians, and mixing caudate species is how disease travels. Keep any group to one species, size-matched.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Hatchling	10×8×8	12×8×8	Larvae are fully aquatic. Smaller than Japanese fire-bellied newts.
Juvenile	12×8×8	18×10×10	Historically the most common fire-belly in the trade; buy captive-bred.
Subadult	18×10×10	24×12×12	Shifts toward a mostly aquatic life; deepen the water as they grow.
Adult	24×12×12	36×18×18	Mostly aquatic, about 70% water. Hold 60–70 °F. Quarantine new arrivals.

Habitat-OS life-stage guidance for *Cynops orientalis*. Horizontal footprint beats height; none of these stages suit rack systems.

03

Cool Water, Modest Light

Forget heating and think cooling. The ambient range is 62–72 °F, dropping to 58–65 °F at night, and adults do best held at 60–70 °F. **Sustained temperatures above 72 °F are what kill captive fire-bellies**, so plan for July before it arrives: a room air conditioner, a clip fan across the water surface, or a chiller. Light stays modest. A low-output UVB bulb is beneficial rather than required, and a planted tank appreciates it anyway.

04

Water Quality Comes First

This is the section that decides everything else. Use dechlorinated water, always. Chlorine and chloramine burn amphibian skin, and a newt breathes partly through that skin. Run a cycled tank with a sponge filter or baffled flow, change part of the water weekly, and test ammonia and nitrite instead of guessing. Keep soaps, lotions and aerosols out of the room. Newts are mediocre swimmers, so give them plants and wood to rest against near the surface.

05

Layout, Plants, and Quarantine

Skip pea gravel. Anything a newt can fit in its mouth eventually goes in it, so run a bare bottom or river stone too large to swallow. Plant heavily. Java moss, anubias and floating cover turn a nervous animal into a visible one, and the land side needs only cork bark, moss and a sloped exit. Quarantine every new arrival. Bsal, the chytrid that destroys salamander skin, is why captive-bred stock is worth waiting for and why tank water never goes down a storm drain.

06

Feeding

Fire-bellies are carnivores with poor table manners: bloodworms, brine shrimp and sinking newt pellets, offered every 2–3 days. Target-feed with tongs or a turkey baster so the slow ones actually eat, then lift out anything uneaten, because leftover food wrecks water quality faster than anything else you'll do. Vary the menu; bloodworms alone are not a complete diet. A well-fed adult is as broad as its head, with no ridge showing along the spine.

07

Health Red Flags

Most newt emergencies are water emergencies, so test the tank first. Watch for cloudy or ulcerated skin patches, cottony white growth, skin sloughing in strings, a sudden refusal to eat, and an animal that sits on land or hangs at the surface for days. The belly is red by nature, so read the legs and tail base for a flush that wasn't there before. Fix water and temperature, then find a vet who treats amphibians: skin disease in a salamander moves fast.

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.