



Pacman Frogs

Ceratophrys spp. (C. cranwelli)

BEGINNER · 4-5 IN ADULT · 10-15 YR LIFESPAN · AMBUSH PREDATOR · SOUTH AMERICA

The pacman frog is a round, grumpy ambush predator, mostly mouth. It earned its arcade name honestly. The pet-trade staple is Cranwell's horned frog from South America's Chaco, bred into a catalog of color morphs. It's genuinely beginner-friendly, with one honest catch: this is a watch-me pet, not a hold-me pet. A content pacman spends its day buried to the eyeballs, waiting for dinner to walk past.

AT A GLANCE	
Difficulty	Beginner
Adult size	4-5 inches
Lifespan	10-15 years
Ambient temp	78-82 °F day, 70-74 °F night
Warm spot	82-85 °F
UVB	Low output, beneficial
Humidity	60-80%
Diet & cadence	Insects/worms/mice, every 5-7 days
Representative	Cranwell's horned frog



A predator shaped like a paperweight. Captive-bred pacmans in a spread of color morphs are a fixture on NARBC show tables.

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01

Temperament & Handling

Pacman frogs are ambush hunters: they bury themselves, leave two eyes showing, and lunge at whatever moves past. That includes fingers; a big female bites hard and means it. Just as important, amphibian skin drinks in whatever it touches. Handle only when truly necessary (moving day, health checks) with wet, clean, well-rinsed hands, never after soap, lotion, or sanitizer. The payoff is feeding time, which is genuinely worth the ticket.

02

Housing by Life Stage

Floor space is what counts. Height is wasted on a frog that never climbs. A froglet starts in an 8×8×8, a juvenile does well in 18×12×12, and one adult lives comfortably in an 18×18×12, with 24×18×18 preferred. These are ambush predators, not roamers; a modest, secure footprint with deep substrate beats a huge bare tank. House strictly one to an enclosure: pacman frogs eat anything mouth-sized, including each other.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Froglet	8×8×8	12×8×8	Care nearly identical to the ornate horned frog (<i>C. ornata</i>).
Juvenile	12×12×8	18×12×12	Base stock for most pet pacmans; 'albino' and many morphs from this species.
Subadult	18×12×12	18×18×12	Tolerates slightly drier conditions than <i>C. ornata</i> .
Adult	18×18×12	24×18×18	From the Chaco of Argentina/Paraguay; the most common pacman in the trade.

Habitat-OS life-stage guidance (benchmark: Cranwell's horned frog, *C. cranwelli*). Floor space beats height; keep it horizontal.

03

Heat & Light

Keep the enclosure at 78–82 °F with a warm spot of 82–85 °F, and let it drop to 70–74 °F at night. Use a low-wattage heat source on a thermostat and keep it gentle. Strong overhead heat cooks the moisture out of the substrate a buried frog depends on. Bright light is stress, not enrichment: a normal room day/night cycle covers the schedule, and low-output UVB is beneficial rather than mandatory.

04

Humidity & Water

Hold humidity at 60–80% with daily misting and substrate that stays moist, never swampy. Poor swimmers, pacmans need a shallow water dish they can sit in with their heads clear. The rule that keeps amphibians alive: **every drop of water they touch must be dechlorinated**; chlorine and chloramine go straight through permeable skin. Use a conditioner that neutralizes both, and keep soaps, cleaners, and aerosols away from the enclosure.

05

Substrate & Enrichment

Substrate is the furniture. Use moist coconut fiber or a coco-soil mix, deep enough for the frog to bury itself with just its eyes and brow horns showing; digging in is the behavior, so let it happen. Skip gravel and small bark: a lunging pacman swallows whatever its dinner was sitting on, and coco fiber passes where gravel doesn't. Low plants and leaf litter add cover, but expect them rearranged into one frog-shaped crater.

06

Feeding

A pacman is an appetite with legs, and obesity is the classic keeper mistake. Feed every 5–7 days: gut-loaded insects and earthworms as the staple, with mice as an occasional treat for large adults rather than a routine. A buried frog gets no working UVB, so dust every feeding with phosphorus-free calcium plus D3; add a D3-free multivitamin twice a month. Offer food on tongs, clear of mouthfuls of substrate. It will beg convincingly. It is lying. Track body shape, not the begging.

07

Health Red Flags

A frog that lives to eat and stops eating is your first alarm. Check temps, humidity, and water quality the same day. Take equally seriously: bloating or edema, reddening on the belly or thighs, cloudy eyes, restless pacing instead of burying, and dry, crusting skin as a too-dry frog starts to cocoon. Fix the obvious causes immediately; if any sign lasts more than a couple of days, that's a visit to an amphibian-savvy reptile vet, not a wait-and-see.

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.