

## Frogs as Pets

**There are many advantages to keeping frogs as pets. They don't need much space, don't shed hair on the couch, don't leave their droppings around the back yard, won't cause allergies and don't need to go for a daily walk. However, they also won't cuddle up on the sofa to watch a movie, fetch the ball or greet you at the gate with their tail wagging. Keeping frogs is definitely not for everyone but for some, they are ideal.**



Green Tree Frogs (*Litoria caerulea*) are the most popular and common pet frog. They are a bright green colour but can also change to olive green. They have adhesive pads on their toes which enables them to climb up surfaces and have distinctive horizontal pupils in their eyes. During the night they make a deep throated 'croak' noise which can be an issue for light sleepers.

As an adult, Green Tree Frogs can grow up to 10cm and can live for 25 years. They adjust well to life in confined spaces and don't mind a little bit of handling. They enjoy their own company so although two or three can be kept together, just one will be happy on his own.

Green Tree Frogs are found throughout most of Australia except arid areas and colder southern parts. They are often seen around moist areas of the home including ponds, pools, rain water pipes and shady garden beds but with protective legislation now in place, it is an offence to collect frogs from the wild or interfere with frogs, tadpoles or spawn (frog's eggs).

When buying a Green Tree Frog, find a licensed breeder and visit their premises to ensure that their animals are kept in a hygienic and humane manner. Choose a young frog as this would be less likely to have been collected from the wild and will obviously provide more years of enjoyment.

### Frog Enclosures

Glass aquariums are possibly the best enclosures as they are easy to clean, last a lifetime and offer clear viewing. Plastic enclosures can be less expensive but can corrode over time

from UV light. For up to three frogs, a 90cm aquarium would be suitable.

Line the base with washed gravel and include rocks, pieces of wood and palm peat. Aquarium plants and under-storey plants from the tropical rainforests will provide visual interest and also areas for frogs to hide under and sit on. Some bromeliads, small ficus and palms will do well in an indoor enclosure but care must be taken with the soil as it may become waterlogged and then be a breeding ground for bacteria. Keep plants in small pots that sit on pebbles inside a larger container or tray to allow excess water to drain from the soil and be captured and emptied before it becomes stagnant. Of course, plastic plants will give the same effect and are much easier to maintain.

The enclosure must be secure to prevent the frog from escaping. A tight fitting frame with fly wire attached provides both security and ventilation and still allows the UV light through. Place the enclosure out of direct sunlight and away from areas where there are cooking fumes, cigarette smoke or aerosol sprays.

### Temperature

The frog enclosure needs to mimic the temperature of their natural environment so it is essential that it is warm and moist. Frogs may die if kept in temperatures below 10°C for a prolonged period of time. The most effective way to heat an enclosure is by using an aquarium heater placed in the water. Heating the water to between 24°C and 26°C should result in an air temperature of around 18°C and also put moisture into the air. Including some sort of water feature such as a waterfall will increase evaporation and create an optimal level of humidity as well.

## Lighting

Green Tree Frogs are nocturnal meaning that they are more active at night however during the day they shelter in areas that receive sunlight so a suitable UV light above the frog enclosure is essential for their health. Better Pets and Gardens has a wide variety of lamps available and not all are suitable for keeping frogs but the staff will be able to offer advice on which is the best for your frog.

Lights should be placed on a timer and be on for at least six hours a day to give the frog the level of UV rays that it needs as well as to keep the plants lush. Fluorescent fittings should always be around 40cm from the floor of the tank as UV rays will only emit that far but be careful if having the light pass through glass or plastic before entering the enclosure as its strength will be magnified.

## Water

Green Tree Frogs are amphibians. They don't drink but absorb water through their skin so a healthy supply of water must be available at all times. Tap water without treatment contains too much chlorine for frogs so needs to be treated with a frog friendly chlorine-neutralising and water conditioning product which is available from Better Pets and Gardens. This will improve the water quality and prevent fungal infections.

A 90cm aquarium holding three frogs should have a container that covers at least half of its base and which allows for a water depth of between 10cm and 15cm. The water in the enclosure should be changed regularly but if all of the water is changed at once, the temperature of the enclosure will be affected. If the heater isn't powerful enough to bring the water up to the required temperature quickly, the water can be warmed in a stainless steel saucepan to the required temperature. Do not use hot water from the tap as this contains traces of copper from the pipes which is toxic to frogs. A small water filter can be used in the enclosure but it should be one that is quite gentle.

Include sticks and rocks in the water to help the enclosure look natural but also to offer young frogs escape routes up on to dry land. Although frogs can climb glass, youngsters don't always have the strength and may drown if they can't escape.

## Feeding

Frogs are insectivorous and will eat a variety of flies, moths, crickets and cockroaches to give them the vitamins and minerals that they need. A variety of live insects and invertebrates is

available from Better Pets and Gardens. Catching insects around the house can be a problem if there is a risk that they have been in contact with household or garden chemicals. Most frogs are active at night so let the insects loose just before going to bed and watch them eagerly catch their dinner. They can also be fed live insects on a tweezer.

Calcium deficiency can be avoided by dusting insects with a calcium/multivitamin powder every two or three feeds prior to placing in the enclosure. Avoid offering meat as this will put extra strain on the organs potentially causing damage or even death.

Adult frogs will eat almost anything that moves and that fits in their mouth and will devour about 20% of their body weight in food over two to three feeds each week. During winter they will need less food, perhaps only once a month. Remove dead insects so that they don't rot in the tank or water.

## Breeding

Green Tree Frogs will reach breeding size at about 10 to 12 months and spawn in as little as 10cm of water producing between 2000 and 3000 eggs at a time. Of course, the eggs will hatch into tadpoles which should then be removed into a different container.

Tadpoles are easy to keep in a container in a warm place without too much direct sunlight. They will tend to eat each other or unhatched eggs especially if the container is too small but plant material such as boiled lettuce should be available. Change the water in the tank at least once a week, treating with the appropriate chemicals, and provide sloping rocks for them to climb onto when they turn into frogs.

## Frog Licence

In WA, a Pet Herpetofauna Keeper's Licence must be held to keep any type of frog and records must be kept of your activity. The cost and licence required depends on the species with one for a Western Green Tree Frogs costing \$20. Information and application forms can be obtained from the Department of Conservation and Land Management or at their website. <http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/871/808/>