



# STARTING WITH REPTILES and AMPHIBIANS



# Guide to Starting with Reptiles & Amphibians

*I was given my first snake for my fifth birthday, over thirty five years ago, and I have since kept and bred a great many reptiles and amphibians. I have written this booklet for those of you thinking about keeping these fascinating animals for the first time. The fact that you have picked up and are reading this booklet shows that you may be interested in and are, perhaps, considering keeping reptiles or amphibians as pets. If so please read this booklet carefully before purchasing your new pet. I hope that within the limited space available I have been able to provide an outline of what is involved in keeping reptiles and amphibians as pets. Perhaps it will put you off the idea, perhaps it will encourage you. Whatever the outcome, I hope that it will be of help to you.*

*If you are keen to start keeping reptiles and amphibians as pets, please do more research before you buy your first pet. Go and visit some pet stores and ask more questions and do get a book on your chosen animal before you take on the responsibility of owning one.*



**Chris Newman,**  
Editor Reptilian magazine  
Chairman Federation of British Herpetologists (FBH)

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**The Federation of British Herpetologists (FBH)** exists to promote and support the responsible keeping of reptiles and amphibians by individuals in the UK.

The FBH represents the legitimate interests of UK reptile keepers at national and international level and opposes unwelcome regulation / legislation, whilst creating and maintaining a strong positive image for private reptile keeping.

Membership is open to everyone with an interest in reptiles and amphibians, including Clubs and Societies, Retail Traders & Corporations, Manufacturers & Wholesalers as well as individual members.

For further details about the FBH, including how to join, please send a stamped self-addressed envelope to: the FBH, C/O Cotswold Wildlife Park, Burford, Oxfordshire, OX18 4JW

Alternatively, check out our website at: [www.f-b-h.co.uk](http://www.f-b-h.co.uk). This website gives links to other sites that may be of interest and provide further care information.

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## Introduction

Within the confines of these few pages it is impossible to go into great detail and cover the entire range of animals and equipment available. The principal aim of this publication is to present the information needed in order to make the right decision when considering whether a reptile or amphibian is the right pet for you.

I have selected a number of animals I consider to be some of the best species for the beginner. Making this selection was an almost impossible task, as there are so many different species of reptiles and amphibians to choose from. If an animal is not listed here it does not mean that it should not be considered, as many other species are also eminently suitable for beginners. The aim of this booklet is to provide an overview of those animals which are easy to care for, readily available from many pet shops (or specialist reptile shops) and which should be expected to thrive in captivity.

Many reptiles and amphibians are now bred in captivity in ever increasing numbers and I have given these species particular emphasis, as they are probably best for people new to this hobby. This does not mean that wild-caught animals are necessarily unsuitable, but I would strongly recommend you start with a captive-bred specimen. These should be disease and parasite free, unlikely to suffer from stress and present no problems with acclimatisation.

The object of this booklet is to make you stop and think about precisely what is involved in keeping a reptile or amphibian and it should raise more questions than it answers. After reading this booklet, and considering which animal to buy, ask your local pet store for advice; they will normally be delighted to help you and advise about suitable equipment. You will probably require a more in-depth book about your chosen species and there are some excellent publications available which are inexpensive and informative. The most important question you should ask yourself is "Why do I want to keep a reptile or amphibian?" If the answer is to impress or scare your friends then think again, as keeping any animal involves a great deal of responsibility and commitment. On the other hand, if the answer is that reptiles are fascinating, attractive and interesting to keep, then read on.

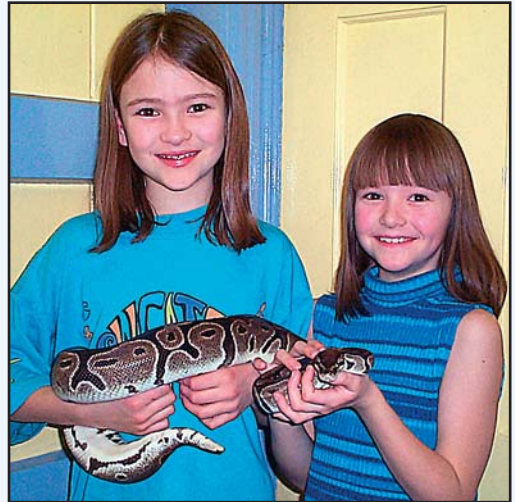
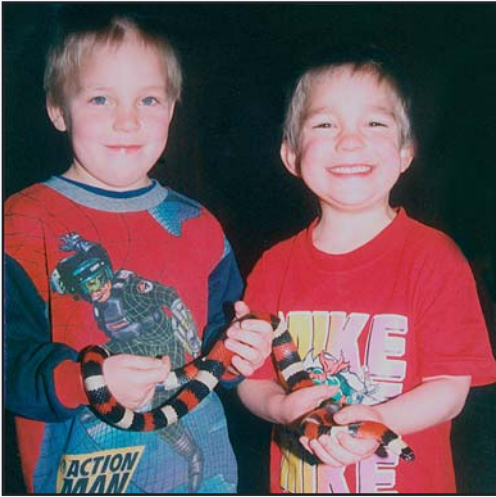
Acquiring a reptile or amphibian as a pet is a long-term commitment and should not be undertaken lightly. Whilst it is true that caring for a reptile or amphibian is less time-consuming than many other pets, it does take time and money and if you are not prepared to commit both, then you should reconsider your decision to acquire your new pet.



## Are reptiles and amphibians suitable pets for children?

Reptiles and amphibians are very suitable for children for a variety of reasons. They do not have hair or feathers so they are ideal for children with allergies. They generally require comparatively little maintenance and are, therefore, an ideal way for children to learn the responsibilities of looking after pets with modest adult supervision. Reptiles and amphibians don't make much mess, and do not require time-consuming daily maintenance, but can still become as much part of the family as a more conventional pet.

If the animal is intended for children it is essential that you choose your pet carefully and your pet store or breeder will be only too happy to assist you with your selection.



### A word of caution

There has been much talk in the media about pet reptiles and salmonella which has spread some alarm. It is true that reptiles and amphibians can carry salmonella, but the risk of catching this from your pet is very small. Catching zoonoses (diseases which can be transmitted from animals to humans) is far more likely to occur from dogs, cats, birds or farm animals than from reptiles. Potential owners should, however, be aware of the problem, however small, in order that suitable hygiene measures can be put in place. Simple precautions like washing hands thoroughly after handling reptiles, never putting reptiles in (or near) mouths, not sharing utensils and maintaining a good standard of cleanliness should eliminate any risks. It is really only a matter of applying common sense and hygiene. Your pet shop or breeder should also be able to advise on suitable hand-wipes or alcohol-based "hand-rubs" which can be used after handling your pet.

## Why do I want to keep a reptile or amphibian?

### Some important issues to consider before acquiring your new pet are:

How much money am I prepared to spend (not just on the animal but also on housing and care)?  
What do I want from my new pet? Do I want an animal that I can handle and interact with, or do I want an animal that I can simply watch in its environment?

## Which animal should I choose?

How much money you are prepared to spend on looking after your new pet is extremely important. If the budget is tight, there is no point considering a lizard such as a bearded dragon, as the cost of housing and maintenance are relatively high. An amphibian, such as an axolotl or an Argentine horned frog, is much less expensive to house and maintain, but is not really suitable if you want to handle your pet as amphibians have sensitive skin and handling should be kept to a minimum. The most popular lizard for beginners is the leopard gecko, which are bred in captivity in a wide range of beautiful patterns and colours.

Snakes are extremely popular and are generally less expensive to keep than lizards or amphibians, which need to be fed more frequently. There is a huge choice for the potential snake-keeper from small garter snakes, which are relatively inexpensive to set up and maintain, to some of the larger pythons and boas which need a lot of space and a much more elaborate set-up. Some types of boas and pythons grow large, need a spacious vivarium and require more warmth. Providing the right conditions for a large, tropical snake (or lizard) will obviously be more expensive than keeping a smaller snake. Many people find feeding frozen defrosted rodents to snakes is unacceptable and in this case a snake which feeds on fish, such as the garter snake, would be a more suitable choice.

An excellent snake to start with (and, arguably the best snake of all for beginners) is the corn snake. This species is easily the most popular pet snake as it is of moderate size, is attractive and is very placid and easy to handle.

What you want from your pet and what you are prepared to spend are two important considerations, so please think long and hard before making your decision.

## Handling

Amphibians have delicate skin and are not suited to regular handling. Warm, dry hands may damage the amphibian, so if you do need to handle your pet, always wet your hands prior to doing so. Some amphibians exude toxic secretions through their skin so hands should always be washed after handling.

Some lizards, such as bearded dragons, seem to positively enjoy your company. They are robust and are a good choice for children but, like all animals, must be handled with respect and adult supervision as they could easily be injured by rough handling. Many lizards shed their tails if they are handled roughly. This looks alarming but it is a natural mechanism for defence in the wild and does not usually harm the animal. The tail will grow back, but will not be as attractive as the original, normally losing colour and becoming a rather dull grey to black. All baby lizards are fragile and must be handled with particular care. Baby leopard and other geckos are particularly susceptible to losing their tails in the first few months, so handle them sparingly when they are young. As lizards mature, they will become accustomed to you and settle down, facilitating more frequent handling.

Snakes are probably more robust than lizards but can still be injured by rough handling. It is particularly important not to squeeze them, as their ribs can easily be broken. Again young snakes are more fragile than adults. Of all the snakes corn snakes are perhaps the best if you wish to handle them.

Remember these creatures are quite unlike mammals, even if they are bred in captivity, and they should not be considered domesticated in the same manner as cats and dogs. If a reptile becomes alarmed it will defend itself the only way it can - by biting you. If handled correctly, and treated with respect, reptiles rarely bite, but it can happen. Fortunately, in the event of a bite, most non-venomous reptiles, even snakes, do relatively little damage. They may draw blood but the bite itself should not be too painful, being similar to several slight pin-pricks. In the event of a bite, wash the area carefully and apply some antiseptic, as you would with any minor injury. It is a fact that reptiles have been shown to be the second safest pet animal after tropical fish.

## Housing

Living quarters for reptiles are generally referred to as vivaria and those for amphibians as terrariums, but this is not a hard and fast rule. The term vivarium will be used for both in this booklet for simplicity. The type of vivarium will, obviously, depend entirely on the type of animal you are planning to keep. For most amphibians, a simple glass fish-tank is adequate. The aquarium hood will generally need to be replaced with a more secure lid, which will prevent the inhabitants from escaping, and allow for provision of lighting. There are now a variety of such conversion kits commercially available. For lizards and snakes wood or melamine faced vivaria are the most commonly used form of housing but, alternatively, and increasingly, there are now specialised plastic vivariums, which make routine cleaning and maintenance very simple. Plastic tanks, often referred to as fauna boxes, with perforated lids are available in many pet stores and can provide excellent housing for a variety of smaller species.



## Heat and light

The provision of light and heat will be necessary for most reptiles and amphibians and the equipment required to supply them will probably be the most expensive items which you will need to purchase, often costing more than the animal(s). Generally, amphibians require less heat than reptiles, indeed many species will require little more than normal room temperature (15-20 degrees Celsius). Some amphibians, such as fire salamanders and axolotls, require no heat at all. These species should be kept cool and can happily live outside in secure housing in the garden all year round (with adequate protection from frost). Most amphibians require no supplementary lighting for their well-being as they are usually nocturnal (i.e. they are active after dark), but the provision of lighting will enhance their appearance and make the vivarium more aesthetically pleasing. If the vivarium is to be furnished with live plants then appropriate lighting must be used.

Requirements for reptiles (especially lizards) are more exacting. Most types of snake do not normally require any kind of specialist lighting, but will require some form of supplementary heating. The most common way to heat vivaria for snakes is by use of a heat mat, which are readily available from any reputable reptile stockist or pet shop. A separate thermostat will also be necessary if the device does not include an internal control. Ask your shop for advice if you are unsure what you need.



It is also possible to use ceramic lamps, but these are very powerful and are usually only used for large vivaria. It is essential that these are controlled by a reliable thermostat and that some form of guard, to prevent the animal from coming into direct contact with the heater is used. Spot lamps and basking lamps are also a useful way to heat and light vivaria and can be used on their own or in conjunction with other heat sources. Providing a hot spot, under which the animal can bask to raise its body temperature, is a good idea, as is providing a variation of temperature within the vivarium, which will allow your reptile to regulate its body heat as it requires. The animal will also require warmer and cooler spots to hide within the vivarium.

Many species of lizards require specialised lighting as they need certain light wavelengths to maintain good health. Full-spectrum (i.e. containing all wavelengths, including ultra-violet) fluorescent tubes will be necessary for most species, with the exception of most geckos and skinks which are nocturnal. The appearance of species, which do not require special lighting, will, however, be greatly enhanced by being displayed under a good quality light tube. It is essential to buy a fluorescent tube specifically designed for reptiles, as normal tubes will simply not provide the correct conditions for long-term good health. Skimping on this can have disastrous consequences, with lizards developing long-term health problems. Your tube will need a starter unit and, again, you should choose one designed for use in vivaria. It is important to remember that full-spectrum tubes will need to be replaced every 6-12 months as the ultraviolet emission deteriorates with time (see manufacturer's recommendations for this).

## Substrates and decor

There are many different substrates (vivarium floor covering materials) for reptiles and amphibians on the market and which to use is largely a question of personal choice. Obviously consideration must be given to the type of environment the animal would naturally inhabit. For example, it would be inappropriate to use a sand substrate for an amphibian which requires damp conditions; moss, bark chips or even soil would be more suitable. Desert species, on the other hand, would obviously be better suited to a sand-based substrate such as proprietary "calci-sand"..



Many reptile keepers choose to use newspaper or kitchen towel as this is easily replaced when soiled and is, thus, very hygienic. This is particularly popular with juvenile snakes and also avoids problems with animals accidentally ingesting substrate particles with their meal.

The range and choice of vivarium decor is vast. You may choose to use natural products, such as cork bark or drift wood, rocks and stones or even live plants, or you may use artificially produced products such as hide rocks, logs or plastic plants. There are certain factors that must be taken into consideration when choosing decor. It is, for example, imperative not to use anything which could injure or hurt the animals, so sharp-edged rocks should be avoided. Also avoid using live plants, such as cacti which, have sharp spines or thorns. Some animals will attempt to eat just about any plant you put in with them, so if you do use live plants make sure they are not toxic. Animals that climb (and many snakes and lizards do), need to be provided with suitably sized branches. All reptiles and amphibians will need places to hide in and at least one hide should be allowed for each of the vivarium inhabitants.

## Feeding

The correct diet is critical for the health of your pet and is also an important factor when considering the type of animal you wish to keep. All snakes are carnivorous (eat other animals) and most will require whole mammalian prey. Garter snakes, as an alternative, also eat fish and worms. Moderate-sized snakes, such as corn snakes & king snakes, eat mice. Larger snakes, like boa constrictors, feed on rats or even small rabbits. All pet snakes will feed on frozen and defrosted foods obtained from your local pet store. Don't buy a snake if you feel uncomfortable about their feeding habits.

Lizards mainly feed on invertebrates, mainly insects, but some species are largely herbivorous (eat plants). Larger lizards, such as monitors and tegus, are carnivorous and will need to be fed on rodents. Many pet shops sell live foods (most commonly crickets, mealworms or locusts) for feeding reptiles and they are also available from a number of specialist mail order companies. Some lizards, such as the bearded dragon, will accept a mixture of invertebrate and plant matter and these, and many other lizards, will also eat ready prepared dry foods. These foods can be a convenient and healthy addition to your lizard's diet.

Most amphibians feed on invertebrates, such as worms and crickets, but larger frogs will also include small mammals (young mice) in their diet. Most lizards need, and amphibians and snakes will benefit from, vitamin and mineral supplements added to their diet. Always be sure to choose a supplement specially formulated for reptiles as their needs are quite different from mammals or birds.

## Cleaning and health

Keeping your pet's environment clean is obviously important. Regular cleaning of the vivarium is essential for the long-term health of your animals. Never use regular household disinfectants - they may well be toxic to your animals, instead choose a cleaning product that is safe and effective for use with reptiles. There are many such products manufactured specifically for this purpose and your local reptile shop should be able to advise.

The increase in popularity of reptiles and amphibians as pets means that many veterinarians are now quite happy to treat exotic species but in case of difficulty check the listing in the Reptilian magazine, or look on our web site.



## Species recommended for beginners

There follows a list of commonly available reptile and amphibian species that can be considered suitable for beginners. There is a price guide for each animal. This shows the cost to purchase the animal, the cost of suitable housing and estimated weekly feeding costs. These are only guides, as it is impossible to give totally accurate costs, with the many variables that could be included. The set-up costs shown are assuming that you are starting from scratch without any equipment. Generally, the lowest price quoted is for a young animal and the highest price for an adult, although even within this framework there is a wide price range. Always be prepared to shop around and don't be afraid to ask for advice.

The animals listed are all captive bred in large numbers, so will normally be available from specialist reptile shops and some pet stores. If you can't find the animal you are interested in don't be afraid to ask your pet shop, who may possibly be able to order your chosen animal for you.

An excellent way of finding out more about reptiles and amphibians is to join your local club or society. It is also a great way of meeting new friends who share your hobby. For a full listing of UK clubs and societies pick up the Reptilian magazine at your local reptile shop. Be sure you know the total costs involved before you buy your pet and don't skimp on things like lights and thermostats; it's not fair to the animals.

## Hermann's Tortoise

*Testudo hermanni*

Size 15 - 25cm.

Origin Southern Europe/Turkey

Price guide: Animal £150 plus.

Set-up £150 plus.

Weekly maintenance £3 - £4.

Lifespan up to 80 years

Important: all European tortoises are now fully protected and only captive-bred animals should be purchased. You must ensure you get the appropriate certificates when you buy one.



© Chris Mattison

Adult Hermann's (the familiar garden tortoises) tortoises can be housed outside during the summer months and hibernated during the winter, but young animals should be housed indoors in vivaria. A specialist UVB lighting tube and a spot lamp for providing a day time basking area are essential items in indoor situations. Tortoises feed daily on a variety of plant material but make sure food is free from pesticides, particularly when your animal is foraging in the garden. Provide a shallow dish of fresh water. Regularly use a good vitamin and mineral supplement, specifically for reptiles, as mammals and birds sometimes have different vitamin requirements to reptiles.



## Garter Snake

*Thamnophis sp.*

Size 60 - 90cm. Origin USA.

Price guide: Animal £15 - £50.

Set-up £50 plus.

Weekly maintenance £1 - £2.

Lifespan 8-12 years

Garter snakes are one of the simplest and most economical snakes to keep but they do have certain requirements that must be met.

A commercially manufactured fauna box or small vivarium (60 x 30 x 15cm) is suitable for one adult garter snake. The temperature needs to be 20-28°C during the day and it is preferable to drop this slightly at night. They will need a large bowl of clean water for an occasional bath, as garters are by nature very aquatic. Bark chippings make an ideal substrate.

Garter snakes feed every few days on worms, prepared "garter-grub", fish and some will also accept rodents. Some fish will need heat-treating to correct a vitamin problem, ask your reptile shop if in doubt. The fact that this is one of the few snakes that will accept non-rodent prey makes them desirable for many beginners.

## Corn Snake

*Elaphe guttata*

Size 100 - 140cm. Origin USA.  
Price guide: Animal £30-£90. Set-up  
£50 plus. Weekly maintenance  
£2 - £3. Lifespan up to 20 years.

Providing you are prepared to  
feed defrosted frozen rodents  
there is no better snake to start  
with. They are gentle, hardy, do  
not grow particularly large and are  
easy to keep.



© Chris Mattison

Thanks to selective captive breeding corn snakes come in a huge variety of colours and patterns; the ultimate designer snake. A plastic tank with a perforated lid or plastic storage box with small holes, or mesh grilles for ventilation is acceptable for young or small animals but they should be moved to a vivarium when adult. A vivarium measuring 90 x 30 x 30cm will house an adult pair of animals. The temperature gradient should be 20-28°C. A water bowl with clean water must be available at all times and should be large enough to allow for regular bathing. Note: snakes seem to take great delight in overturning water dishes, particularly just after the owner has cleaned out the vivarium, so ensure that a good, sturdy dish is used. Snakes periodically shed their skin and access to water is particularly important during this process.

Corn snakes will appreciate a branch to climb on and suitable decor will also make the vivarium aesthetically pleasing. Some form of hide facility is necessary to make them feel secure and many keepers use a small cardboard box or a piece of cork bark for the purpose. Corn snakes may be fed weekly on appropriate sized frozen defrosted mice.



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## Milk Snake

*Lampropeltis triangulum*



## King Snake

*Lampropeltis getula*

Size 70 - 120cm. Origin USA, Central & South America.

Price guide: Animal £50-£125. Set-up £50 plus.

Weekly maintenance £2- £3. Lifespan up to 20 years.

King and milk snakes are undoubtedly among the most attractive of all snakes.

Many subspecies are available, but Pueblan, Honduran and Sinaloan milk snakes and Californian king snakes are the most commonly seen. Selective captive breeding has resulted in some truly stunning animals, with rich, vibrant colours. All king and milk snakes can be cannibalistic, so should generally be kept on their own, except for breeding purposes. Never, in any circumstances, feed king snakes in groups as they will almost certainly try to eat each other!

A note of caution: king snakes and milk snakes are a little more nervous than corn snakes and can have a habit of voiding foul liquid over you if they are handled roughly.

Conditions and care - as for cornsnakes.

### Leopard Gecko

*Eublepharis macularius*

Size 20 - 25cm. Origin Pakistan, Afghanistan, India.  
Price guide: Animal £15-£35.  
Set-up £50 plus.  
Weekly maintenance £1- £2.  
Lifespan 8 years

This is by far the most commonly kept and bred pet lizard and its popularity is well-deserved.



© Chris Mattison

This must surely be the easiest-to-keep and most modestly-priced lizard you can buy, as well as being very attractive and endearing. They require virtually no specialist equipment, other than a heater and vivarium and, unlike most lizards, they do not need specialist UVB lighting. A plastic tank with a perforated lid, plastic storage box with holes for ventilation or a small vivarium (60 x 30 x 15cm) will be suitable for up to two animals. The temperature needs to be 22-30°C during the day but can drop 10-15 degrees at night. These animals originate from the arid regions of Pakistan and surrounding areas, so they need to be kept relatively dry, although clean water for drinking must be available at all times. Diet is small insects, crickets, mealworms etc. offered every few days. Use a good vitamin supplement once a week. A great animal to start with which is attractive, easy to keep and handleable. Highly recommended.



### Bearded Dragon

*Pogona vitticeps*

Size 50cm. Origin Australia.  
Price guide: Animal £50-£100.  
Set-up £150 plus.  
Weekly maintenance £4- £6.  
Lifespan 10 years

In recent years this species has become one of the most popular lizards for people to keep.

© Kevin & Sue Hanley

Bearded dragons are hardy, relatively easy to keep (with the right equipment) and, above all, have great personalities. They soon become part of the family and seem to enjoy regular handling. One word of warning, however, they have very large appetites and, in comparison with other reptiles, can be relatively expensive to maintain. Diet consists of insects, such as crickets, giant mealworms and locusts but they will also eat many kinds of fruit and vegetables every few days. It is very important to regularly use a good vitamin and mineral supplement which is high in calcium. Set up costs are more expensive than for the leopard gecko as this species will need a specialist UVB lighting tube and must be maintained at daytime temperature of 25-30°C, with a hotspot of 40°C, and a 10-15 degree drop at night.

Sand makes a suitable and attractive substrate for this desert species and vivarium decor may be also added. As for almost all reptiles, clean drinking water must be available at all times

### Blue-tongue Skink

*Tiliqua scincoides*

Size 60 -80cm. Origin Australia.

Price guide: Animal £75-£200.

Set-up £100 plus.

Weekly maintenance £2- £4.

Lifespan 15+ years

Large, placid and becoming very tame, the blue-tongue skink also makes an ideal pet lizard.



© Kevin & Sue Hanley

There are a number of species, but all require the same conditions. They are somewhat lazy lizards, but do need a spacious vivarium due to their large size (90 x 30 x 30 cm) is suitable for one adult. Temperature requirements are 25-28°C during the day with a drop to 18-20°C at night. Specialist UVB lighting is not strictly necessary but is certainly beneficial and will show them off to their best advantage. Blue-tongues are gluttons and will consume a large amount of food but as they are fairly sedentary make sure you do not over-feed them. These animals are fairly omnivorous and diet may include soft fruit and vegetables, insects and small rodents. You should also, as with most lizards, use a good vitamin and mineral supplement and ensure that a suitable dish of clean drinking water is always available.



### Axolotl

*Ambystoma mexicanum*

Size 30cm. Origin Mexico.

Price guide: Animal £6 -  
£25.

Set-up £30 plus.

Weekly maintenance £1-£2.

Lifespan 10 years.

Axolotls are salamanders that do not leave the larval stage and are, as such, totally aquatic.

© Chris Mattison

An aquarium measuring 60 x 30 x 30cm is ideal for up to 2 animals. The ideal temperature range is 10-20°C, but they can take lower temperatures, although the temperature must not drop to freezing or rise above 30°C as these extremes could prove fatal. Gravel will provide a good aquarium substrate and a clay flowerpot on its side makes a good retreat. A small power filter will keep aquarium maintenance to a minimum. Axolotls feed on worms, slugs, crickets or small aquatic insects and some can be trained to feed on fish pellets. Feeding should be once or twice a week for adults and more often for juveniles. Exceptionally they can live for up to twenty years in captivity, although five to ten would be more usual.



### **Argentine Horned Frog**

*Ceratophrya ornata*

Size 20cm.

Origin South America.

Price guide: Animal £20-£50.

Set-up £30 plus.

Weekly maintenance £1-£3.

Lifespan up to 10 years, average 3-5 years.

Sometimes called the Pac-Man frog, this species is straightforward to keep.

Horned frogs are not aggressive but they are always very hungry and anything that comes in front of their mouth is considered food, so be careful when you pick them up. A plastic tank with a perforated lid or a small aquarium will provide ideal housing. The temperature should be 20-25°C. Moss or leaf-litter is an excellent substrate for these animals but it is important to keep the moss clean as these animals produce a lot of excreta which will build up and become toxic. Many keepers use no substrate at all, just half a flowerpot for hiding, to make cleaning easier. When small they eat insects and as they grow they will take frozen defrosted mice. Regularly use a good vitamin and mineral supplement.

### **White's Tree Frog**

*Litoria caerulea*

Size 12-15cm.

Origin Australia.

Price guide: Animal £9 -

£30. Set-up £25 plus.

Weekly maintenance £1-

£2. Lifespan up to 12

years, average 4-8 years.

One of the largest of the tree frogs, White's tree frogs are great characters.



A tall vivarium with plenty of branches and sturdy plants (live or otherwise) is required for keeping White's tree frogs, as these frogs like to climb. Moss or bark chips make suitable substrates and a naturalistic set-up will suit the frogs and make an attractive feature in your room. A vivarium measuring 75 x 30 x 30cm would be suitable for housing a group of 3-4 adults. A large but

shallow water bowl is essential but it is very important that the water is kept clean and fresh. A temperature of 20-25°C during the day, with a drop to 18-20°C at night would suffice. Young animals will need specialist UVB lighting and adults will also benefit from its provision. The diet consists of insects, such as crickets and hopper locusts and you should regularly use a good vitamin supplement.

## **Species not recommended for beginners**

The species listed previously are a few examples which I would strongly recommend to newcomers to this fascinating hobby. They are commonly available, easy to keep and should be expected to thrive in captivity. There are, however, species that are also commonly available but which are not quite so suitable for beginners, not because they cannot make good pets, as many do, but because they are more suited to those with more experience. The following species could pose problems to the beginner and their size when fully grown must be taken into account.

One animal commonly seen in shops is the green iguana, which at fifteen-inches (the size commonly seen in pet shops) looks like an extremely cute and inviting pet. What many first-time buyers fail to realise is that at their maximum size of five, or even six feet, they are somewhat less cute! A six-foot plus lizard can be a daunting prospect, capable of inflicting a substantial nip. An animal of this size is also quite powerful, having formidable claws and a strong, lashing tail.

Previously Burmese, and other large python species, were often frequently seen in pet shops. Often purchased as a cute eighteen-inch hatchling, if these animals are properly maintained an eventual size of more than fifteen feet is not uncommon. Certainly an animal of this size is not suitable for beginners or children.

Some reptiles, including tegus, some monitors, anacondas, larger pythons (Burmese, African rock and reticulated pythons) and snapping turtles grow large and can be aggressive and/or difficult to handle. For these reasons I would strongly recommend avoiding these animals until you have gained sufficient experience with other reptiles and you are certain that you could properly accommodate the animal when it reaches its adult size. In any case, responsible dealers will strongly advise against this type of animal for first-time-buyers and may even be reluctant to sell them.

**Finally, before you purchase any reptiles or amphibians as pets please consider the following points.**

- Are you prepared to make the commitment to look after your new pet for its entire life?**
- Do you have all the equipment necessary to look after your pet properly?**
- Do you have enough information about the pet's requirements?**
- Do you have the time to care for your new pet?**
- Do you have a plan in place should your pet become ill or you can no longer look after it?**

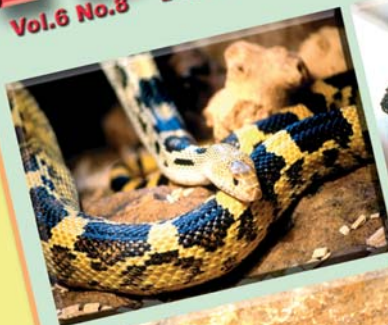
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