

Frog-safe Guidelines for Raising Tadpoles in the Classroom

IMPORTANT: Raising tadpoles in the classroom carries a heavy burden of responsibility and a number of risks. The Amphibian Project Team does not endorse this activity unless you can comply with ALL of the below guidelines.

LAW: Before you decide to raise tadpoles, ***make sure that you understand your state's laws on collecting wildlife.*** Some states require a permit to collect eggs or tadpoles, others may not but may limit the number of animals you are legally allowed to take, while other states prohibit the activity altogether. These laws are in place to protect wildlife populations by preventing over-collection, accidental collection of threatened species, and disease transmission. Contact your department of natural resources to learn the applicable laws in your state.

SOURCE: ***Never purchase eggs or tadpoles from vendors of any kind.*** Tadpoles sold online or through biological supply companies are often not native to your area or even to your country! Such 'exotic' frogs can carry pathogens and diseases that may then be spread to amphibians in your area. Because frogs are easily susceptible to diseases, this is an extremely dangerous activity. In fact, it is believed that the chytrid fungus, which is now decimating amphibian populations worldwide, was initially transmitted through the global medical trade of African Clawed frogs.

If state laws permit amphibian collection, ***you should collect only common species local to your area.*** Because egg and tadpole identification is difficult, ***animals should be collected only by someone who is knowledgeable about amphibian identification*** and collection techniques such as a local nature center or DNR biologist.

SPECIES: It is extremely important to ***know what kind of tadpole you have***—some metamorphose quickly, while others take over a year. If you want to raise tadpoles within the school year, you will need to collect species which lay their eggs in late winter or early spring and complete their metamorphosis by early summer. However, many eggs and tadpoles look alike, so make sure to consult with your local DNR or nature center to collect them for you.

REARING: ***Tadpoles should be reared in isolation from other classroom animals*** – especially other amphibians or fish. Thoroughly clean and disinfect tanks and rinse well prior to use to reduce the risk of contamination from animals previously housed within them. Avoid touching tadpoles or froglets if possible and always wash your hands first if touching is unavoidable.

RELEASE: Generally, releasing frogs back into the wild is not recommended. However, if you choose to release your captively reared frogs, ***you should do so ONLY in the location in which they were collected.*** Introducing animals into new environments can introduce disease, even if your frogs are not sick. If any of your frogs do appear sick, do not release any of them back into the wild. Ask your local nature center or DNR biologist for assistance in assessing and releasing your froglets.

Think you can comply with the frog-safe guidelines? Then proceed on to learn about how to properly care for tadpoles in the classroom!



Tadpole Care Sheet

These tadpole care instructions were provided by the Long Branch Nature Center, Arlington, VA

- WATER:** Pond water or creek water from an unpolluted source is best. If you must use tap water, you need to treat it with a chemical dechlorinator, available in pet shops. Water should be changed when it becomes fouled. Indications that the water needs changing include a cloudy appearance/ unpleasant odor/presence of tadpoles lingering near the surface/waste settling at the bottom of the tank. Replacing a third to a half of the water at one time is usually sufficient. The new water must be the same temperature as the water already in the tank— drastic changes in water temperature can kill your tadpoles.
- FILTER:** A filter is not necessary, but can reduce the number of water changes that will be needed. The filter should not be so strong that it creates too much current— tadpoles are poor swimmers. Make sure the tadpoles won't be sucked up into the filter and that they don't have to swim constantly. This can be achieved by selecting the proper sized filter. A filter will list on its packaging the size of aquarium it is designed to handle. You can reduce the amount of food wasted and the frequency with which you need to clean the filter by turning it off during feedings.
- FOOD:** Algae from an unpolluted water source is best. However, fish flakes are in most cases a much more convenient alternative. In order to provide the correct diet, be sure to choose fish flakes with a high concentration of plant ingredients; such as spirulina. Avoid flakes that are made with animal matter. A few small pinches two or three times a day is better than one large feeding.
- TANK:** Do not overcrowd your tank with too many tadpoles. A general rule is less than one inch of tadpole per gallon of water. Remember your tadpoles will grow larger over time. Be sure to provide an area for the maturing tadpoles to crawl out of the water as their breathing apparatus changes from gills to lungs. This "land" area should be against an edge of the tank, not in the middle as some species will only look along the edge for a place to emerge, swimming until they become exhausted and drown. **Make sure your tank has a secure lid, as wet froglets and toadlets can climb glass.**
- RELEASE:** Timely release of tadpoles is critical. When your tadpoles begin to come out of the water to breathe, it is a signal that they have metamorphosed from vegetarian to carnivore. It is time to quickly release them. Return them only to the environment where you got them and only if you have permission.

