

SALAMANDER CARE

Salamanders belong to the amphibian group and originate from North America. They live in forests, grasslands and marshy areas, near ponds or other water for breeding and in areas with soil for burrowing. Life expectancy ranges from 10-20 years depending on species.

Most species kept as pets start off as aquatic larvae, losing their gills and becoming terrestrial when they reach adulthood.

Housing

- Adult salamanders should be kept in a semi-aquatic environment with plant-enriched land and a shallow pool of water for bathing.
- The vivarium should be a minimum size of 90x45x45cm for a single salamander and larger for pairs.
- The recommended base substrate is a 5cm layer of pea gravel or worn slate with a 7-10cm deep top layer of substrate suitable for burrowing and holding humidity. Sterile potting soil, coconut husk or sphagnum moss are all suitable.
- The pool should be 2-5cm deep, with a ramp to exit safely. Water quality should be closely monitored and water regularly changed.
- Salamanders are thigmotaxic so require contact or near contact with objects. Hides are important in the environment. These can be provided with tall plants, rocks and bark.
- Salamanders are usually nocturnal but need a full-spectrum light during the day with the day length kept at what it would be in their natural habitat.

Temperature and Humidity

- Salamanders require at least 70% humidity as they absorb water through their skin. This needs to be balanced with clean air for good hygiene. The vivarium should be misted several times daily to ensure optimal humidity. A humidity meter can be used to monitor the environment.
- Day time temperature should be 18-24°C and at night it should be 10-15 °C.
- Heat should be provided by under tank heaters to avoid the risk of burning and they should be provided at only one end of the tank to generate a temperature gradient. Temperatures should be controlled by a thermostat
- Some species will hibernate during the winter months.

Companions

- Most species are best kept individually as they are very territorial and there can be a risk of cannibalism, especially if a large individual is kept with a smaller animal.

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- They can be kept as a pair for breeding but only around mating. It is important that water is provided if breeding as all larval stages are purely aquatic.

What to feed

- Salamanders are carnivorous animals with a good appetite.
- They prefer live food such as crickets, beetles, earthworms, wax worms and small millipedes.
- Occasionally pinkie mice may be fed to larger individuals.
- Feed as much as they will eat in one sitting every other day. Feed in the evening, as they are nocturnal.
- Dust food with calcium supplement and ensure that insects fed are gut loaded
- Obesity is common so care must be taken not to overfeed.

Handling

Direct handling of salamanders should be avoided as oils in human skin can interfere with their sensitive mucus layer and many species have toxic secretions. All handling should be done wearing moistened powder-free latex gloves.