



POISON DART FROGS (DENDROBATIDAE) - Care Sheet

Species logistics: All the following is in reference to the larger, frogs such as *D. auratus*, *D. galactonotus*, *D. azureus*, and the various *D. tinctorius*. Poison dart frogs, members of the Dendrobatidae family, wear some of the most brilliant and beautiful colors on Earth. Depending on individual habitats, which extend from the tropical forests of Costa Rica to Brazil, their coloring can be yellow, gold, copper, red, green, blue, or black. Their elaborate designs and hues are deliberately ostentatious to ward off potential predators, a tactic called aposematic coloration.

Some species display unusual parenting habits, including carrying both eggs and tadpoles on their backs. Although this “backpacking” is not unique among amphibians, male poison arrow frogs are exceptional in their care, attending to the clutch, sometimes exclusively, and performing vital transportation duties.

Dendrobatids include some of the most toxic animals on Earth. The two-inch-long (five-centimeter-long) golden poison dart frog has enough venom to kill 10 grown men. Indigenous Emberá people of Colombia have used its powerful venom for centuries to tip their blowgun darts when hunting, hence the genus’ common name.

Enclosure: Poison dart frogs need a spacious tropical terrarium. It can be as simple as a 10 gallon aquarium with soil, a few clippings of pothos and a water dish, or as complex as a 100 gallon custom-made enclosure with running water, timed lighting and many different kinds of exotic tropical plants. Generally, it’s best to start with an aquarium in the 15 to 30 gallon range for your first dart frog terrarium. A standard 20 gallon aquarium that measures 24 inches long by 12 inches wide by 16 inches high (61 cm by 30 cm by 40 cm) is usually large enough for two to four adult frogs. A natural vivarium with live plants is always the best choice for dart frogs. A common error is to give your frogs too much ventilation. Dart frogs do not need ventilation, at least no more than from opening the lid for feeding and any needed maintenance. A glass lid is essential for every tank, screen lids simply allow too much ventilation and thus dry out the enclosure. Misting is not required, as long as the tank is properly moistened, you will have a high humidity, and with no ventilation there will be no evaporation. Occasional misting to keep the tank clean is fine, just don’t do this right before feeding, as the food will get into the water and drown.



Poison dart frogs are territorial animals and often fight over important breeding spots or feeding areas. Some species, such as *D. tinctorius*, often do best when housed in male-female pairs rather than groups. If groups of frogs are housed together in one terrarium, it’s important that there is plenty of extra room, visual barriers, and hide spots. Most dart frogs only become territorial once they reach sexual maturity, so juvenile frogs can be raised together until they are large enough to be paired off and placed in separate enclosures.

Climate: Keep your frogs enclosure in an area with a temperature between 70 and 80 degrees, and give it background light (don’t get it in the sun!). A standard UVB light is necessary for plant growth and the standard 10-12 hour photo period needed for proper growth and vitamin D production.

Water: A bowl or aquatic section with clean water is needed and should be set up to allow enough room for the frogs to rest in but not sink. As dart frogs are not known for their swimming prowess.

Food: The best food source is flightless fruitflies. This involves a minimum of time and expense. Dart frogs will also accept pinhead crickets. Other food items that can be used include springtails, termites, and rice flower beetles. The amount of food per frog depends on the size of the insect and the size of the frog. A large *D. tinctorius* can easily eat 50 pinhead sized crickets in one sitting, but if larger crickets are used smaller quantities can be offered. Normally, between 15 and 40 insects can be fed per adult frog every other day, although this amount varies depending on the size of the frog and the size of the insect. Young frogs do best when offered food once a day in smaller quantities. Use high quality reptile vitamin and mineral supplements to ensure nutritional requirements are met.