



Brief Description

Dart frogs (also called poison dart frogs) are the common name for a large number of species of small frogs native to the humid rainforests of Central and South America. They are so called because indigenous tribes have used the toxins secreted by the frogs for their blowgun darts. Interestingly the toxins are based on their diet so in captivity these frogs are not toxic or poisonous. There are a wide range of patterns, colors, and sizes with different species of dart frogs. As amphibians, they start life as aquatic tadpoles but are terrestrial as adults.

Despite being harmless, dart frogs should not be handled except when necessary because oils or household chemicals (even lotion or soap residues) on your hands can be absorbed through their skin and cause illness.

Lifespan

With proper care the average expected lifespan is 10-15 years although over 20 years has been reported.

Caging

A glass terrarium with little to no ventilation is necessary to maintain humidity. There should be about 10 gallons per adult frog and most species do not climb much so floor space is more critical than vertical space. The goal is to recreate a naturalistic environment with substrate and live plants to mimic the tropical environment of the rainforest.

Substrate

In a naturalistic vivarium the substrate typically consists of a drainage layer of hydroton (expanded clay pellets), then a barrier such as screen or mesh, then a well-draining substrate of coco coir and sphagnum moss or ABG mix at least 2-3 inches deep that is kept damp (not wet). The top should be covered in long fiber sphagnum and/or leaf litter and can be seeded with springtails and isopods to reduce organic waste material. Plants like pothos, bromeliads, ferns, moss, etc. should be planted directly in the substrate providing hiding spots and filtration of the environment.

The water used to keep the substrate damp should be kept clean and tap water needs to be treated for chlorines and chloramines with a water conditioner as amphibian skin is very porous and will absorb toxins from the environment easily. Bottled water is an alternative to treated tap water.

Lighting and Temperature

Dart frogs thrive in the mid to low 70s. They cannot withstand warm temperatures so the tank should not ever get above 80 degrees. Temperatures can get as low as 60 degrees at night. UVB lighting is often not used in dart frogs and they seem to thrive without UVB as long as D3 is supplemented orally. However, using UVB is not harmful.

Humidity and Water

Humidity should be kept at 80-100% at all times. A humidifier and/or automatic misting system is a very worthwhile investment for dart frog tanks. If a humidifier is used then the cage should still be sprayed down at least once daily. A shallow water bowl or pot saucer for fresh water is often appreciated by the frogs but not necessary. Dart frogs cannot swim well so should not have access to deep water.

Food

Due to their diminutive size the food offered to dart frogs should be very small such as flightless fruit flies (cultures are readily available at pet stores and online), pinhead crickets, etc. every day when young and at least every other day as adults.

Supplementation

Dart frogs do have high vitamin A and calcium requirements so at least 2-3 times a week the fruit flies should be dusted with a powdered supplement (my preference is Repashy Calcium Plus alternated with Repashy Vitamin A Plus).