The tomato frog’s appearance is guaranteed to grab your attention.

Among all the popular amphibians in the pet trade, tomato frogs (*Dyscophus* spp.) stand out as some of the most appealing. For one, they’re bright red. Combine this with their rotund body structure, unique skin secretions and cute microhydrid faces, and their popularity is more than understandable.

**Found by the French**

Alfred Grandidier greeted the African island of Madagascar for the first time in 1865. Mapping the landscape as he hiked across muddy trails, he found a marvelous amphibian foreign to his French homeland and the world population in general.

Grandidier picked up the big red frog and preserved it in a jar. In 1877 he described it as *Dyscophus insularis var. antongili*. Now we know this frog as *Dyscophus antongili*, a variety of tomato frog.

**Distinguishing Between Species**

Three species in the *Dyscophus* genus are regularly called the common name “tomato frog.” Frequently exported from Madagascar and occasionally bred in captivity, *Dyscophus guineti* is the most common tomato frog in the pet trade. This species is occasionally called the “false tomato frog.” Males are a yellowish-orange, but females have a more vibrant red skin tone. A faint reticulated pattern coupled with
FIVE-ALARM FROG
two dark dorsolateral lines break up their coloration. Females are capable of reaching 3.7 inches, and the males grow to about 2.5 inches.

*Dysophus antongili* is the most colorful of the three tomato frogs. Females have a stunning vermillion to fire-engine-red dorsal side. A pair of dark lines extending along the sides of the body beneath the dorsolateral folds interrupt this frog's coloring. Coupled with a circular body shape, *D. antongili* essentially looks like a flattened tomato with stubby legs and two small eyes. It also is the largest tomato frog. Females can grow up to 4.1 inches, and males are smaller and generally more subdued in color. It's been suggested that *D. antongili* and *D. guineti* are, in fact, color variations of the same species because they are genetically very similar.

The third tomato frog, *D. insularis*, differs from the other two in both color and size. In this small species the largest individuals measure about 2 inches long. Rather than an orange or red
A Sticky Defense

All tomato frogs employ an interesting defense mechanism when they feel threatened. First, the alarmed frog inflates with air, puffing up to try and scare off the threat. When continually harassed, tomato frogs release a white, sticky mucus from their skin, making them unpalatable to potential predators. This substance is mildly toxic and unpleasant to come in contact with. Occasionally, it causes an allergic reaction in certain people, so use moist gloves if you have to handle a tomato frog.

Tomato Territory

All three tomato frogs are terrestrial, but they occupy somewhat different appropriate for the common name "tomato frog." *D. insularis* is instead a grayish-brown, sometimes with attractive symmetrical dark blotches and patterning. These frogs are uncommon in captivity, and only rarely are they exported from Madagascar.

Female Dyscophus antongilii grow up to 4.1 inches and are considered the largest of the tomato frogs.

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habitats in the wild. *Dyscophus antongili* is common only in the Antongil Bay area of northeast Madagascar, but a few other populations are found farther south. In the town of Maroantsetra they live in gardens and ditches near urban areas, but they also inhabit lowland and coastal forests. Because of their small distribution and strong appeal to the pet trade, they are listed under CITES Appendix I and are no longer exported from Madagascar. *Dyscophus guineti* has a much larger range, and it can be found throughout forests and swampy areas of the eastern half of the island. *Dyscophus insularis* lives opposite the other two species. Occurring along the western coast, it is common in a variety of environments, such as dry forests, tropical savannas and even areas heavily disturbed by humans.

**Housing Simplicity**

The simplicity with which tomato frogs can be kept is one of their most appealing qualities. Their care is relatively undemanding once an appropriate cage setup is designed. A pair can comfortably live in a standard 10-gallon aquarium, and a group of four or more does well in a 20-gallon tank. Young tomato frogs are best kept in smaller enclosures, as they can easily find food. Use a screen cover to provide good ventilation and airflow. Because tomato frogs are terrestrial, the substrate you choose for them is important. It must allow them to burrow, properly osmoregulate (maintain water balance), and be either safe if accidentally ingested or too large to swallow.

Coconut husk fiber is an excellent choice, and it can be mixed with a little play sand and milled sphagnum moss, so it better retains moisture and holds its form. Long-fiber sphagnum moss is another good option, and it can be used alone or in addition to soil. Use several inches of substrate, so your frogs can dig into it and feel secure. Soil mixes should retain enough moisture to hold their form when they’re squeezed together, but they should never become waterlogged or fully saturated. Avoid using gravel, fir bark or other substrates that can easily

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**Breeding in the Rain**

Tomato frogs breed in stagnant water and sometimes in temporary pools fueled by seasonal rainstorms. Not explosive breeders, they spawn throughout the rainy season as water is available, mainly after heavy rainfall.

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— David Schrimpf, CEO

COMING NEXT SPRING.
be ingested by tomato frogs and may be difficult for them to pass.

Provide a water dish large enough for your frogs to soak. This can be a ceramic bowl, saucer or plastic dish, and it should be at least an inch deep. If tap water is used, treat it with an aquarium water conditioner to remove harmful chloramines and chlorine.

Other than the water dish, the cage can remain fairly bare, but offering a curled piece of cork bark or driftwood as a hide spot is a good idea. For aesthetic purposes, you can use artificial plants. Live plants can be grown, as well, if proper lighting is provided, but they are best left in their pots, which prevents the frogs from uprooting them. Hardy choices include pothos (Scindapsus aureus), philodendrons (Philodendron spp.), small-leaf spiderwort (Tradescantia fluminensis) and aluminum plants.

As the most colorful of the tomato frogs, Dyscophus antongili displays a bright red coloring often interrupted by a pair of dark red lines along the side.

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(Pilea spp.). Make sure they are free of pesticides, fertilizers or other potentially harmful chemicals before adding them to the setup.

Temperature and Humidity Tolerant

Tomato frogs are tolerant of a range of temperatures, but avoid drafty conditions or situations where the temperature fluctuates often. Ideally, their captive environment should offer a temperature range between 75 and 82 degrees Fahrenheit during the day. At night, the entire cage temperature can drop about 5 degrees. You can heat the cage using a small incandescent light bulb if needed, but first use an accurate thermometer inside the tank to determine the temperature.

If the substrate is kept moist, the tank will remain humid enough without having to frequently mist it. Several times a week, add water to the substrate, so it remains damp. If the frogs are kept in a particularly dry room, ventilation can be restricted, and the cage can be misted with water once a day to ensure humidity levels do not drop.
Directly after misting, the humidity level can reach nearly 100 percent. As water evaporates and the cage dries, the ambient humidity level can fall to between 40 and 70 percent.

Nocturnal Feeders

Tomato frogs are primarily nocturnal, so they move about mainly at night. Although not particularly active animals, they awaken as daylight fades and their invertebrate food becomes abundant. They catch their prey with a small lunge and quick dart of the tongue. Tomato frogs' gluttonous appetites fit their fat appearance.

A wide variety of food items should be offered in captivity. Crickets and earthworms can make up the majority of the diet. Offer adults a few twice a week. In addition, waxworms, mealworms, small roaches, silkworms and fly larvae can be offered periodically. Juvenile tomato frogs also accept flightless fruit flies, and they should be fed on a daily basis.

Use a shallow dish to feed worms and grubs, which have a tendency to burrow into soil and moss substrates. In order to meet nutritional requirements, use high-quality vitamin and mineral supplements on these frogs' food every couple feedings.

The Ideal Frog

With their stunning coloration and ease of care, tomato frogs make outstanding captive amphibians. Not only are they an excellent addition to an advanced herpkeeper's collection, but they also make a good choice for a first frog. Start with captive-bred frogs, provide them with a suitable habitat, and feed them a varied diet. You will enjoy keeping them for years.