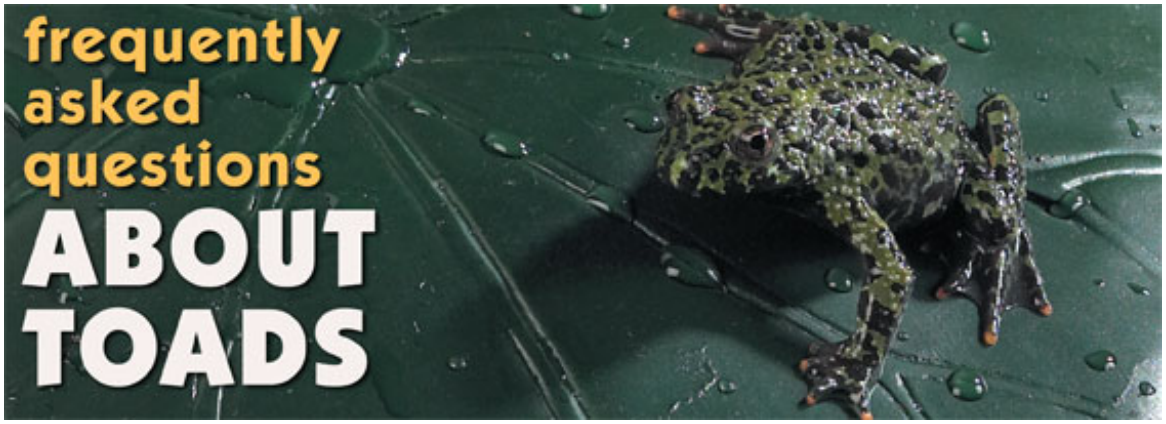
FAQs: Toads

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



- What is the difference between a toad and a frog?
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- What kind of substrate should I use?
- What kind of water should I use?
- How do I keep the water clean?
- How deep should the water be?

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- How warm does the habitat need to be?
- How do I maintain proper temperatures?
- What kind of lighting does my toad need?

What is the difference between a toad and a frog?

All toads are actually frogs, but they have drier tougher skin that retains moisture better, which allows them to live further away from water. Toads also have shorter, stubbier legs that enable them to crawl and hop short distances, but not to leap high like frogs.

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Do toads give people warts?

Warts are caused by a virus, not by touching toads, so no, a toad cannot give you warts.

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Are toads poisonous?

Some toads, such as toads in the Bufonidae family, have parotoid glands located on the sides of their heads adjacent to their eyes. These glands secrete a toxin when they feel stressed or threatened. Some toads secrete a toxin that is only mildly irritating to human and animal skin or makes them taste terrible to whatever predator is trying to eat them. Other toads, such as the Cane Toad, are highly toxic and can cause serious reactions or even death in humans and pets.

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What kinds of toads are kept as pets?

There are three main genera of toads kept as pets. They are Bombina toads (e.g.: Oriental Fire-bellied Toad), Bufo toads (e.g.: Common Toad, American Green Toad), and Pipa toads (Surinam Toad).

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What do Bombina toads look like?

Bombina toads such as the Oriental Fire-bellied Toad, the European Fire-bellied Toad, and the Yellow-bellied Toad all have flattened, stocky bodies with a vividly colored ventral surface (belly) that ranges in color from yellowish orange to red and has black spots. They vary in size. The Oriental Fire-bellied Toad, which is the Bombina most commonly kept as a pet, grows to about 2" to 2-1/2" in length.

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What do Bufo toads look like?

Bufo toads vary widely in color and size, and they are found all over the world. There are more than 500 species in over 35 genera. However, all Bufo toads

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are characterized by a stocky body, short legs, thick warty skin, and horizontal pupils. They have no tail or teeth, and they have parotoid glands located on the sides of their heads.

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What do Pipa toads look like?

Pipa toads have a very unique look. They are flat like a leaf, and they have broadly webbed feet. Their front toes have appendages that resemble stars. These toads are a mottled brown or gray in color with a lighter underside. The size varies by species.

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What diet should I feed my toad?

Toads are carnivores, and most require a diet consisting of feeder insects such as live crickets, mealworms, silkworms, earthworms, waxworms, and moths. Larger toads may eat the occasional pinkie mouse or feeder fish, such as a guppie. All toads need to be given a vitamin and mineral supplement, which should be used to dust their food. You will need to research your toad to determine which insects are best, how often to feed him, and how much to feed him.

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What kind of habitat does my toad need?

The habitat your toad requires depends on what species he is. Most toads require a terrestrial setup with a water area or one or more shallow water bowls throughout the habitat. For example, Oriental Fire-belled Toads will need a semi-terrestrial habitat that contains equal parts land and water. Some toads, such as the Surinam Toad in the Pipa genus, are aquatic toads, and they require a fully aquatic setup.

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How big should the habitat be?

This will vary widely depending on the size of your toad and how many toads you are keeping. While a pair of Bombina toads will be comfortable in a 10 gallon enclosure, a single Common Toad would need the same amount of space. Research the adult size of your toad and speak to your veterinarian to pick out an appropriate sized enclosure. Always remember that if you are keeping more than one toad in an enclosure, it will need to be larger.

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What should I put in the habitat?

This too will vary by species, but all toads will require multiple hiding places within their habitats. In a terrestrial or semi-terrestrial setup, hiding places can be made from smooth rocks, decorative branches, driftwood, cork bark, and live or artificial plants. In an aquatic setup, you can use large, smooth rocks and pebbles that are secure places, aquarium decorations, PVC pipes, and terracotta flower pots.

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What kind of substrate should I use?

In a terrestrial or semi-terrestrial setup, substrate is generally some combination of moss, potting soil, gravel, and bark chips. Whatever substrate you choose should allow your toad to burrow, which is what many toads will do to cool themselves off or pass the time during the day. In an aquatic setup, you can use gravel or sand.

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What kind of water should I use?

Any water that you put into your toad's habitat absolutely must be free of chlorine. Toads are very sensitive to chemicals, and using water straight from the tap can kill them. You can use bottled spring water, or you can use tap water that has been sitting out for at least 24 hours or that has been treated with a water conditioner.

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How do I keep the water clean?

If you are using water bowls, remove them from the habitat, empty them, clean them, and fill them with clean water daily. If your toads have a water area, you will need to use a quality filter and do partial water changes approximately once a week or as needed.

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How deep should the water be?

The depth of the water will vary by species. Oriental Fire-bellied Toads aren't very good swimmers, so their water should be no more than 1-1/2" to 4" deep, depending on their size. The Common Toad will need a water bowl deep enough so that when filled, the water reaches to just below their nostrils. Regardless of how big your toad is, make sure you set up the water bowls or water areas in such a way that your toad can easily exit or enter the water.

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How warm does the habitat need to be?

The preferred optimum temperature range (POTR) depends on the individual species.

Bombina toads	64° to 75°F overall cage temperature, 74° to 85°F basking area, 76° to 78°F water temperature
Bufo toads	The POTR varies widely because these toads are found all over the world. Tropical species tend to need a range between 75° and 80°F, while species from more temperate climates do well at around room temperature.

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Pipa toads	75° to 78°F water temperature

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How do I maintain proper temperatures?

For those toads that need warmer water in their aquatic setup, you will probably have to use a submersible aquarium heater to maintain the POTR. You can use incandescent low-level lights in terrestrial or semi-terrestrial setups to increase ambient temperature. We recommend that you avoid the use of under tank heater and mats, as toads that burrow under the substrate can burn themselves on those heating products. If your toad needs a warm basking area, use a heat lamp or basking lamp to create it. Using a timer with these lamps will help to create a natural cooling down period at night as well.

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What kind of lighting does my toad need?

Some toads are nocturnal, while others, such as the Bombina toads, are diurnal. While toads don't require special lighting, we still recommend the use of UV lights with a low UVB output because it more accurately simulates a natural environment, which reduces stress. Use a timer to provide 12 hours of light each day, and use special nocturnal bulbs if you want to view your toads at night.

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