



Eastern Newts

Notophthalmus viridescens

INTERMEDIATE · 2.5–5 IN ADULT · 10–15 YR LIFESPAN · COOL WATER · EASTERN NORTH AMERICA

A newt that lives three lives. Eastern newts hatch as gilled aquatic larvae, spend one to three years on land as bright orange-red efts, then return to the water as adults and mostly stay there. They're small, cool-water animals with toxic skin, and they're common enough in the wild that plenty of the ones for sale were scooped out of a pond. Buy captive-bred, don't collect your own, and check your state's law first.

AT A GLANCE

Difficulty	Intermediate
Water temp	60–70 °F
Air temp	60–72 °F, 55–65 °F night
UVB	Low level, beneficial
Setup	Semi-aquatic, land access
Diet	Bloodworms, brine shrimp, worms
Feeding	Every 2–3 days
Adult size	2.5–5 inches
Lifespan	10–15 years



Eastern newts turn up at NARBC amphibian tables every show. Buy captive-bred stock and check your state's rules first.

Photo: Erik Schiff / iNaturalist · CC0

01

Toxic Skin, Hands Off

Eastern newts carry tetrodotoxin in their skin. That makes this a look-don't-touch animal. Handle only when you truly must, with clean wet hands or a soft net, and wash up afterward every single time, before you touch your face, a cut, or your dinner. Nothing else shares the tank: not fish, not frogs, not other newts. The toxin doesn't stop a tankmate from trying; it just means both animals lose. Keeping one is legal in most states and restricted in others, so check yours.

02

Three Homes, One Animal

Plan for three homes, not one. Larvae live in shallow water. Efts want a terrestrial tank, damp leaf litter and moss over a soft floor, with a shallow dish. Adults get a mostly aquatic setup with land access: a cork raft or a sloped bank they can haul out onto. Same-species groups are fine in a generous footprint; no other species, ever. Floor space beats height, so no newt belongs in a rack. Lid it tightly. A dry newt on the carpet is a dead one.

STAGE	MINIMUM	PREFERRED	NOTES
Larva	12×8×8	18×10×10	Aquatic larva, terrestrial eft, aquatic adult: three setups, one animal.
Red eft	18×12×12	24×12×12	Terrestrial phase; the orange-red is a toxicity warning, not decor.
Subadult	24×12×12	24×12×18	Back to water after 1–3 years as an eft; add depth and a haul-out.
Adult	24×12×18	36×18×18	Mostly aquatic with land access; cool water at 60–70 °F.

Habitat-OS life-stage guidance. Footprint beats height at every stage, and the eft phase and the adult phase want different tanks.

03

Cooling, Not Heating

This is a cool-water animal, so your job is usually cooling, not heating. Air sits at 60–72 °F by day and 55–65 °F at night; hold the water itself at 60–70 °F. A basement or the coolest room in the house beats any lamp, and heat rocks have no place here. In a summer heat wave, float a frozen bottle and run a fan across the surface. A low-output UVB lamp is a real benefit, but keep it low and keep shade under it.

04

Water Quality & Filtration

Their skin drinks whatever it sits in, so the water is the husbandry. **Every drop that touches a newt gets dechlorinated first: chlorine and chloramine kill through amphibian skin.** Run a cycled sponge filter, keep the current gentle (these are pond animals, not stream animals), and change a quarter of the volume weekly. Test ammonia and nitrite until the readings bore you. Never let soap, polish or hand sanitizer near the tank.

05

Substrate, Plants and Cover

Efts want a soft, damp floor: coco fiber or sphagnum topped with leaf litter, plus cork bark to crawl under. On the aquatic side, go bare-bottom or use river stones too big to swallow; loose gravel is a gut blockage waiting to happen. Then plant it heavily. Java moss, hornwort and floating cover give a newt somewhere to feel unseen, and a newt that feels unseen is the one you actually get to watch.

06

Feeding

Carnivores, and unfussy ones: bloodworms, brine shrimp and small worms, offered every 2–3 days. Adults take food underwater and hunt by scent as much as sight, so tong-feed or target-feed and give the slow eaters their turn. Efts feed on land, on the tiny stuff: springtails, flightless fruit flies, pinhead crickets. Pull anything uneaten straight back out. Leftover bloodworms rot fast, and a fouled tank hurts a newt long before an empty stomach does.

07

Health Red Flags

Watch the skin and the water together. Cloudy or reddened patches on the belly and limbs, white cottony fuzz, constant sloughing, bloating, or a mostly aquatic adult that refuses to enter the water are all early flags. So is a newt that goes off food and stays off it, or hangs listlessly at the surface. Test ammonia and nitrite first, do a large dechlorinated water change, then find a vet who sees amphibians. Most newt illness starts as a water problem.

Husbandry data: Habitat-OS species library. Structure follows the NARBC show handout series. Every animal is an individual - when in doubt, ask the breeder at the table or a reptile veterinarian.