**YVCipedia AMPHIBIAN**

Tiger Salamander Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

The **Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*)** is one of the largest land-dwelling salamanders in North America, recognizable by its broad head, thick body, and striking yellow or olive blotches on a dark brown or black background. Adults typically grow to **6–10 inches**, though some may reach up to 13 inches.

These hardy, secretive amphibians are **terrestrial as adults**, with a subterranean lifestyle in the wild. They’re known for their longevity—**living 10–15 years or longer** in captivity—and can make engaging, low-maintenance pets when housed correctly.

## **Housing & Environment**

Tiger salamanders require a **terrestrial, humid environment** with deep substrate for burrowing. While they tolerate handling better than many amphibians, they are primarily observational pets.

### **Enclosure Setup**

* **Minimum tank size:** 20-gallon long for one adult
* Horizontal terrarium preferred
* Provide at least 4–6 inches of burrowable substrate (coconut fiber, organic topsoil, or a soil/moss mix)
* Include multiple hides (half logs, cork bark, rocks) and a shallow water dish
* Avoid gravel or loose materials that could be ingested

Clean soiled areas daily and fully change substrate every 4–6 weeks.

## **Heating, Lighting & Humidity**

Tiger salamanders are adapted to **cool, temperate environments** and do not require supplemental heating in most household settings.

### **Temperature**

* **Daytime:** 65–72°F
* **Nighttime:** 60–68°F
* Avoid temperatures above 75°F—prolonged heat can cause severe stress or death

### **Lighting**

* No UVB is required, but a low-output LED or daylight bulb can be used to simulate natural cycles
* Provide a 12-hour day/night light schedule

### **Humidity**

* Maintain humidity between **50–70%**
* Mist the enclosure lightly as needed
* Ensure substrate remains moist but not waterlogged
* Use a hygrometer to monitor levels accurately

## **Diet & Feeding**

Tiger salamanders are **voracious carnivores** and should be fed a variety of live prey items.

### **Feeding Schedule**

* Juveniles: Feed every 1–2 days
* Adults: Feed every 2–3 days
* Remove uneaten prey to maintain cleanliness

### **Common Food Items**

* Crickets
* Earthworms (nightcrawlers)
* Black soldier fly larvae
* Waxworms (occasionally, due to high fat)
* Small roaches or isopods

Prey should be gut-loaded and dusted with **calcium powder 1–2 times per week** and a **multivitamin once per week**, especially for juveniles.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Tiger salamanders are generally reclusive but may become active and responsive to feeding time or familiar stimuli.

* Limit handling—though less sensitive than frogs, their skin is still permeable
* If handling is necessary, **wash hands thoroughly before and after** or wear powder-free gloves
* Always handle gently, supporting their body, and return them quickly to a moist environment

They are **best kept solo**, as they may compete for food or injure each other unintentionally.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Tiger salamanders are hardy but susceptible to environmental stress and infectious disease if husbandry is inadequate.

### **Common Health Concerns**

* Skin infections from poor hygiene or excess moisture
* Metabolic bone disease from calcium or vitamin D3 deficiency
* Obesity from overfeeding
* Bacterial infections or “red leg” (septicemia)
* Mouth rot or jaw issues if fed oversized prey

### **Signs of Illness**

* Loss of appetite
* Skin discoloration or lesions
* Unusual swelling or bloating
* Lethargy or hiding excessively
* Difficulty walking or uncoordinated movement

Annual veterinary exams are recommended for long-term monitoring.

## **Enrichment**

Tiger salamanders appreciate a **naturalistic, burrow-friendly environment**. They are not overly interactive but benefit from habitat enrichment.

### **Enrichment Ideas**

* Deep substrate for digging and tunneling
* Rearranged hides and terrain
* Moist leaf litter or moss to explore
* Varied prey types and occasional hand-feeding
* Observation of their bold feeding responses

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Tiger salamanders are **strictly terrestrial** once they metamorphose from their aquatic larval stage
* They are one of the **largest native salamander species** in the U.S.
* Their skin secretes mucus and mild toxins—avoid contact with mouth, eyes, or cuts
* Unlike many amphibians, they may **recognize routine and feeding times**
* Lifespans can exceed 15 years in well-maintained environments

## **Supplies Checklist**

* 20+ gallon horizontal tank with secure lid
* Deep, moist substrate (4–6 inches)
* Hides and natural décor
* Shallow water dish with dechlorinated water
* Gut-loaded live prey
* Calcium and vitamin supplements
* Thermometer and hygrometer
* Cleaning tools and gloves for maintenance
* Powder-free gloves for safe handling
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*