

Raising Tadpoles

Materials: 20-litre fish tank, gravel, larger rocks, aquatic plants, dip net, bucket

Procedure: (Direct Experience) Before collecting tadpoles, it is important to set up the tank. Children love building homes and creating a healthy habitat for the tadpoles will encourage their interest and compassion. We have 5 species of frog, here on the Island, and all except the green frog, which is much larger and spends over a year as a tadpole, will thrive in a well-prepared fish tank. It is important not to overcrowd your tank, so make sure that you only keep 15-25 tadpoles per 3.5L of water. I recommend raising a small number of tadpoles and taking good care of them. Overcrowded tadpoles may become carnivorous and begin preying on one another. I learned this lesson the hard way.

Preparing the tank:

- 1) Begin by cleaning the tank and rinsing it thoroughly. Cover the bottom of the tank with gravel and then place larger rocks on top. Gravel and rocks collected from a local stream are best.
- 2) After you've had your tank set up, collect water from the same water source you'll be gathering the tadpoles from to fill your tank. Don't use tap water because it contains chemicals that can harm tadpoles. Additionally, water from a natural water source generally contains mosquito larvae which can serve as another food source for the tadpoles.
- 3) Add just enough water to begin covering the rocks. The rocks will provide a place for young frogs to rest, eventually allowing them to climb out of the water. Without rocks, young frogs will drown.

Collecting tadpoles:

The best time to collect tadpoles is late spring. Wood frogs begin mating on the first warm days in early April and by mid May the tadpoles are growing rapidly. Pretty much every vernal pool, ditch and pond will have tadpoles. If there is persistent water and some plant life, there will be tadpoles and the smaller the pool the easier it is to catch the tadpoles. The best tool for catching tadpoles is a dip net but a bucket is just as useful.

- 1) Gently push the bucket into the pool and as it fills, the tadpoles will be sucked in with the water. Alternatively, letting the children muck about and capture tadpoles by hand is also very fun.
- 2) Place the tadpoles in zip-lock bags with some of the pond water.

- 3) Finally, collect some aquatic plants. Most aquatic plants can be dug up easily using your hands, as they are generally very shallowly rooted in mud. Rinse the mud off the plant's roots before placing them in a bucket.
- 4) Before putting the tadpoles in the tank, add the plants you gathered. Simply tuck their roots in the gravel. Let the sediment settle and then add the tadpoles.
- 5) During the first couple of weeks, the tadpoles will eat the algae on the gravel and rocks and on the plants, you placed in the tank during setup. After that, you'll have to boil lettuce to feed them in tiny pieces or order algae wafers or aquatic frogs and tadpole food to feed them. They should be fed every three to four days. If they're not eating all of the food between feedings reduce the amount you're feeding them to keep the water from getting cloudy.

It will take between 6 and 12 weeks for the tadpoles to reach full maturity. About midway through their cycle, you'll notice their back legs forming. At this stage, tadpoles become carnivorous and will need to be fed fish food and make sure that they can climb onto the rocks in the tank.

When the frogs are ready to be released, let them go in tall, damp grass near the nursery pond where they were collected. If school ends before the tadpoles have completed their complete lifecycle, simply release the tadpoles with the students.