

# Barking Tree Frog

*Hyla gratiosa*



**LIFE SPAN:** Up to 7 years

**AVERAGE SIZE:** 5 – 7 cm

**CAGE TEMPS:** Daytime: 75 – 85 degrees  
Nighttime: 68 degrees

**HUMIDITY:** 60-70%

\* If temp falls below 65° at night, the enclosure may need supplemental infrared or ceramic heat.

**WILD HISTORY:** Native to the United States throughout the Coastal Plain of the Southeast, including all of southern and eastern South Carolina and Georgia.

**PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:** Barking tree frogs are generally olive green, brown, yellowish or gray in color with dark, round spots on the back. They have prominent toe pads for gripping, which are typical of tree frogs.

The barking tree frog is the largest of the native US tree frogs and has a loud nighttime communication call.

Its distinctive “barking” sound has been measured at 85 decibels, which is about as loud as a bus! A single specimen will “bark” roughly 8,000 times in one night. Be aware that your frog will not be a quiet housemate during the night, as their calls are generally reserved for the overnight hours.

Adults spend most of their time in the trees during the day, and will often bury themselves in sand to avoid high temperatures.

**NORMAL BEHAVIOR & INTERACTION:** Nocturnal (most active at night) and arboreal (tree dwelling). These frogs live in groups and will get along fine as long as there is proper space for each frog. A minimum of 4 gallons of tank space per frog is a good measure, but the tank should not be smaller than 10 gallons overall, even for one frog.

**NOTE:** Do not house barking tree frogs with other species due to the differences in environment, temperatures, and the fact that some species can be highly stressed in the presence of other species. Each species may also harbor different parasites/protozoans/bacteria (even a healthy reptile harbors a small amount at all times), which may make each other ill.

Do not handle your barking tree frog. The skin of tree frogs is very delicate and porous. Oils and chemicals on your hands can be transferred to the skin of your pet and make it ill. Also, since the skin is very delicate, it can tear easily.

**FEEDING:** Carnivorous (insectivorous) - live food

Barking tree frogs eat live protein sources such as: gut-loaded crickets, earthworms and wax worms. In the wild, they would eat smaller frogs and a variety of live insects.

Wild caught insects should never be fed, since they may carry disease. All insects should be gut loaded (fed a nutritious diet about 24-hours before being offered to your frog – see our cricket care sheet).

Be careful to feed the proper size prey for your frog’s size. A good rule of thumb is that a cricket should never be larger than the distance between the frog's eyes, or the distance from its eyes to its nose.

When feeding larger insects to your pet, try to make sure the insects have recently molted, as an insect with a large, hard exoskeleton is difficult to digest and may cause impactions.

Some reptile/amphibian owners find it easier and safer to feed their pet in a separate enclosure, free of bedding and furniture. This way you can be sure your pet eats all its insects, the prey cannot hide, and the frog will not pick up any bedding when grabbing prey and mistakenly ingest it along with the prey (which may cause impactions).

Do remember, however, that barking tree frogs are very delicate and their skin can tear easily. Take care in handling.

Feed at least three times a week. Feed as much as your frog will eat in 3-5 minute’s time, which will be about 6-12 insects.

**SUPPLEMENTS:** Dust food with calcium supplement and vitamin supplements. As a rule, a growing juvenile's food (and a pregnant/gravid female's) should be dusted more often than an adult's. Follow your veterinarian’s instructions for applying supplements to avoid over-supplementing food.

Our veterinarian recommends dusting insects with a good quality calcium supplement fortified with vitamin D3, 2-3 times a week. (Avoid using a calcium supplement with added phosphorous, unless specifically directed by your veterinarian, since this can promote kidney disease.)

Always consult your veterinarian for specific directions on supplementing your pet's food, since there are many variables that go into determining the best supplementation regimen for each animal.

**WATER:** All water given to amphibians for bathing, swimming or drinking, as well as water used for misting must be 100% free of chlorine and heavy metals. (Not all home water filtration systems remove 100% of the chlorine and heavy metals from tap water). We recommend that you use unflavored bottled drinking water or bottled natural spring water; never untreated tap water. If tap water is used, you should treat it with a de-chlorinating treatment (available in the fish department). If you do not want to chemically de-chlorinate the water, you can leave an open container of tap water out for at least 24 hours. The chlorine will naturally dissipate. Do not use distilled water, which can cause severe medical problems, since it lacks minerals that are essential to important body functions. Change the water in your frog's enclosure every one to two days. A daily misting or two with chlorine-free water will also be appreciated. However, care should be taken not to allow the enclosure to become damp. Also, do not mist less than two hours before turning the heat lamps off for the day, as the droplets may not have time to dry and may contribute to respiratory disease.

**SHEDDING:** Frogs do shed their skin. Your frog may crunch his body up into an uncomfortable-looking crouching position. He will puff his body up to try to loosen the skin, then he will convulse as if he is coughing. As the skin is shed, he will eat it. It has many good nutrients, and your frog knows it.

If the tank humidity is low, your frog may not shed properly (see "Water" above).

If your frog still has a hard time getting the shed completely off its toes, tail or head and if the retained shed is severe and cannot be removed easily, see your exotic veterinarian. It is best not to handle the frog yourself to try to remove the shed, as the skin is thin and can tear easily.

Remember to wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling your frog.

### **RECOMMENDED SUPPLIES:**

20 High or other taller glass tank.	UVB fluorescent bulb & housing
large ceramic crock or plastic container for a water area	Temperature / humidity gauge – do not stick to side of tank
Several small hide houses	Coconut fiber substrate, moistened
Live plants – see amphibian safe plants below	Reptile heat pad
Metal mesh tank cover	De-chlorinator
Calcium supplement	Sturdy climbing branches
Small dome and 25 - 50 watt reptile bulb for heat. (does not need to be a basking bulb)	Barking tree frog book

**HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT:** Your frog(s) need a warm, humid environment in their enclosure. A twenty-gallon high glass tank (for two frogs) with a metal mesh cover will work fine.

If you lose too much humidity through the metal mesh cover, you can tape plastic sheeting (thick plastic bag, preferably translucent) over part of the mesh. However, be sure NOT to block the UVB light with the plastic, as it will filter out all the important rays before they reach your pet(s). Also, be sure that any hot lights do not come in contact with the plastic, or sit too closely to the plastic.

There are several ways to set up a barking tree frog enclosure. Some people prefer to create a primarily aquatic environment, with a bit of land area. Others create a more terrestrial tank with a bit of water area. From our experience, the frogs prefer to be more on land (in "trees") than in deep water, so for our purposes, we will diagram a primarily terrestrial enclosure.

**ENCLOSURE SIZE:** A minimum of 4 gallons of tank space per frog, although a minimum of 20 gallons High is recommended. Remember that barking tree frogs are TREE frogs; they are arboreal; so a tank that supplies more height than width is always a better choice, such as a 20 High or 40 High.

**HEAT PAD:** Reptile heat pads can be adhered directly onto the underside of the glass bottom of the tank. Stick it directly on the glass on one of the very far ends of the tank (opposite the water dish). For safety reasons, make sure to attach the rubber feet (contained in the box) at all four corners of the underside of the tank. This will allow air to circulate underneath the tank and prevent the heat from being trapped under the tank. Leave the heat pad ON 24 hours a day.

Heat pads specifically manufactured for reptiles are safe to leave on 24 hours a day (which should be done for these enclosures). DO NOT use reptile heat rocks. They heat unevenly and have caused severe thermal burns in reptiles. A human-grade heat pad may be used on the low to medium setting. Do be sure to allow for proper ventilation for safety reasons. \*\*\*Be sure to purchase a heat pad without automatic shut-off, which are still available.

\*\*\* Although your frog will most likely NOT spend much time on the floor of the enclosure, the heat pad will help contribute to the overall humidity and ambient temperature of the enclosure.

**HEAT LAMP:** Place the heat dome with the heat bulb on top of the cage directly on top of the metal mesh cover of the tank. The heat lamp should be turned on in the morning, and off at night. (See “Day/Night Light Cycles” below. Follow directions carefully with all products – READ THE INSTRUCTION SHEET!! Always choose fixtures with ceramic sockets and be careful to choose the socket that is properly rated for the wattage bulb that you will be using. Do not place the fixtures by dry wood or flammable fabrics. All heaters should be placed out of the reach of children and all pets – including cats and dogs. Be very careful to make sure that your caged pet cannot reach and touch the heating device in its own cage. A thermal burn to the face or body can be painful and life threatening.

**UVB LIGHT:** Exposure to UVB (ultraviolet B) light is critical in allowing an animal to synthesize vitamin D<sub>3</sub> in their skin and metabolize calcium in their body. If an animal is not exposed to an adequate level of UVB light, it will gradually develop physical problems from the result of mineral deficiencies such as low blood calcium (hypocalcaemia), soft eggs (females), stunted growth and metabolic bone disorder, which can be fatal if left untreated. In addition, recent studies have linked sub-optimal vitamin D levels with poor immune system function.

All day-active (diurnal) indoor reptiles, amphibians, birds and hermit crabs should be allowed self-selected exposure to UVB lighting for up to 8-12 hours a day. This means they should be able to bask in the light but also get away if desired, much as they might in the wild. Many twilight-active (crepuscular) and night-active (nocturnal) species do get some exposure to the sun and may also benefit from low levels of UVB, which helps regulate their photoperiod and vitamin D levels as well.

Please see our additional “UVB Lighting for Companion Birds and Reptiles” for specific instructions for your particular pet and the UVB bulb that we recommend for him or her.

**HIDING PLACES:** Barking tree frogs appreciate hiding places within their enclosure. Small huts, crevices and planted areas will give your frog a place to hide when it is nervous or needs to escape light.

**SUBSTRATE FOR LAND AREA:** We recommend a loose coconut fiber substrate, available in the reptile department and made by several companies. It is made from the husks of coconuts. This substrate is ideal for your frog, as it will help hold humidity in, allow the frog to burrow and is also a perfect substrate for plants. Keep the substrate slightly damp, but not watery. Plant your live plants right into the substrate. Small patches of reptile moss can also be dispersed along the surface of the substrate.

**WATER AREA:** About 40-50% of your frog’s enclosure should be water. For the water area, you can use a heavy ceramic crock or a plastic container. Push the water container snugly into the substrate. Arrange the substrate so it will not spill into the water container. The frog should be able to travel easily between the land and water areas. Barking tree frogs generally prefer to just sit in the water rather than swim, so be sure that you put a few smooth rocks in the water for the frog to sit on where he can be only half immersed in the water.

To keep your land area contained more neatly, you can use an aquarium divider (available in the fish department) designed for the size of the tank you are using. This will create a retaining wall for your substrate. Simply cut the divider down until it is roughly the same height as your water container. Again, smooth rocks and moss can be used to make the transition area easier to navigate. If a tank divider cannot be located, a firm piece of plastic can be used. Do not use wood, as the humidity in the tank will cause it to rot.

Using the water container makes it easy to lift the container out in order to clean it every one to two days.

**BRANCHES & PLANTS:** Branches must be included in the enclosure.

Sand blasted grape vine branches are available in the pet store; these serve as good sturdy climbing branches. Also available are reptile vines and plastic plants. Be careful of bringing in branches from outside, as they can house parasites. Live plants can help increase the humidity in your frog enclosure. Be sure to include only amphibian safe plants such as pothos, aloe, philodendrons, spider plants, ficus, and dracaena. They can be planted directly into the enclosure substrate and lightly watered a few times a week.

**TEMPERATURES:** Cage temperatures should be monitored daily and kept at the temperatures listed at the top of this page. Use your reptile thermometer to check the temperatures in different places in the cage regularly to make sure they continually match the listed proper temperatures.

\* If the room temperature falls below 65 degrees at night, a supplemental infrared or ceramic heat fixture may be necessary. (These fixtures do not emit a light spectrum that is visible to the frog, so it will not disturb him at night, but they WILL provide the necessary supplemental heat.)

If your toad does not receive the proper heat at the proper temperatures along with UVB light, he may become sick with issues such as respiratory disease and will probably stop eating, as frogs have a hard time digesting their food without proper heat and light.

**DAY/NIGHT LIGHT CYCLES AND HEATING:** All amphibians must have distinct day and night periods in their enclosure to maintain their biological rhythms. Barking tree frogs need 8-12 hours of daytime and 8-12 hours of nighttime. However, as the daylight hours change seasonally outside, daylight hours inside the tank should reflect the same.

**The day period must be light, and the night period must be dark.**

A timer should be used to set day/night periods.

**HABITAT MAINTENANCE:** Daily maintenance should consist of spot cleaning by removing soiled substrate, cleaning water bowl thoroughly and wiping glass clean.

The entire tank should be cleaned thoroughly at least once every couple months with:

- A mild dishwashing liquid (a weak dilution) in warm water,  
THEN
- Vinegar & water (1:8)  
OR bleach and warm water (1:32)
- Cage “furniture” should also be scrubbed clean with the same dilution.
- RINSE OFF ALL SOAP AND BLEACH THOROUGHLY WITH PLAIN WATER BEFORE RE-INTRODUCING YOUR PET TO ITS ENCLOSURE!!
- NEVER MIX VINEGAR AND BLEACH – IT CREATES A TOXIC SOLUTION
- NOTE: water used for cleaning does not need to be de-chlorinated, as your pet will not be drinking it or bathing in it.

**GROOMING & HYGIENE:** To reduce the risk of contracting and spreading salmonella poisoning, all handlers should wash their hands after handling any reptile.

**SIGNS OF A HEALTHY ANIMAL:** smooth, even skin; no traces of mites (small, reddish brown spots around nostrils, near ears and eyes); clear eyes, rounded, full body; strong, even, smooth jaw line; bright eyes.

It is very important to keep a journal for each animal that records feeding, refusal, shedding, unusual behavior, changes in behavior and dates of bulb changes. This will help your veterinarian trouble-shoot any health issues.

**SIGNS OF ILLNESS:** Irregular skin; small reddish brown spots (mites) around mouth, eye area, ear area; irregular jaw line, ‘dents’ in mouth with or without cottage cheese-like material (mouth rot); cloudy eyes or dull colored body when not in a shed; bloating or thinned body; irregular feeding and defecating habits; a limp, thin body, lethargy, sunken eyes, pinkish patches or spots on belly or sides; obvious wounds from cage mates or prey.

**SOME COMMON PROBLEMS INCLUDE:**

<b>HEALTH ISSUE:</b>	<b>SYMPTOMS:</b>	<b>TREATMENT:</b>
<b>Mites, parasites</b>	Small reddish-brown spots around eyes, mouth & on body or in substrate. Pet may show no signs of harboring parasites besides declining health.	See exotic pet veterinarian (fecal parasite evaluation and appropriate medication)
<b>Skin issues – bacterial, fungal, abrasions</b>	Ulcers, patches or wounds visible on skin, lethargy or loss of appetite	Call exotic pet veterinarian. Optimizing cage set-up, topical and systemic medications
<b>Bloating disease</b>	Bacterial disease - Accumulation of fluid under the skin gives a bloated look to the frog.	See an exotic pet veterinarian immediately for antibiotic therapy.