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# North American Spadefoot Toads (*Spea spp.*) and *Scaphiopus spp.*

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## Nature's Miniature Excavators

The North American spadefoot toads include two (2) genera of small, fossorial (burrowing) and terrestrial toads. They consist of 7 North American species. They can be highly variable in color depending on species, ranging from blackish, brown, olive or olive brown, pale green to yellowish, reddish or reddish brown, to pinkish. All are fairly small, rotund toads with vertical pupils, smooth skin with few to no warts, and lacking paratoid glands. The most defining feature are their hardened, keratinous spades on each of their hind feet used for burrowing backwards into loose, sandy soil.

## Taxonomy

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum/Sub Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Amphibia

**Order:** Anura

**Suborder:** Mesobatrachia

**Family:** Scaphiopodidae

**Genus:** *Spea* and *Scaphiopus*

**Species:** *Spea spp.\** and *Scaphiopus spp.\**

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

## Lifespan and Longevity

If provided the proper care, spadefoot toads can have the potential to attain longevity of 5 to 10 years, or more in captivity.

## Species

Species in the genus *Spea* (the Western Spadefoots) include the Plains Spadefoot (*Spea bombifrons*), Western Spadefoot (*Spea hammondi*), Great Basin Spadefoot (*Spea intermontana*), and New Mexico Spadefoot (*Spea multiplicata*). Species in the genus *Scaphiopus* (the Eastern/Southern Spadefoots) include the Couch's Spadefoot (*Scaphiopus couchii*), Hurter's Spadefoot (*Scaphiopus hurterii*), and Eastern Spadefoot (*Scaphiopus holbrooki*).

## Distribution and Habitat

<http://www.madisonherps.org>

Spadefoot toads range across much of North America, southern Canada, and Mexico. They favor dry, arid to semi-arid deserts, scrublands, grasslands, and other microclimates with loose, sandy or loamy soil for burrowing. Depending on the species, they may range from the western and southwestern, south central, to eastern and southeastern United States, northern Mexico, and south central Canada.

### **Conservation Status**

Conservation status dependent upon the species. Some species are IUCN Least Concern (LC). Some are IUCN Near Threatened (NT). Generally in need of updating.

### **Legal and Regulatory Status (\*Subject to Change)**

Consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner.

### **Size**

Most North American spadefoot toads reach 2 to 3 ½ inches as adults.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed and escape proof with a secured top or aquarium hood. A single adult toad can be comfortably housed in a 10 to 15 gallon terrarium, enclosure, or appropriately sized plastic container with a securely fitted lid or top. These toads are also very seldom cannibalistic under most circumstances, and they can be housed communally in accordingly larger enclosures or setups. Spadefoot toads are also semi-fossorial, and will burrow as well. Provide several inches of a nontoxic particulate substrate that can help establish and maintain the necessary humidity levels that stays moist but not overly wet, and burrowing opportunities that can be used include coconut husk fibers, Eco earth, cypress mulch, live/sphagnum moss, play sand, and pesticide/fertilizer free potting soil or mixtures of any of these substrates. Paper towels can also be used for a less attractive, yet utilitarian substrate for these toads. These toads will also benefit from daily misting as well. Other furnishings to provide can include live or artificial plants for added aesthetics, and hides such as upturned plastic or ceramic plant pots, log or rock hides, cork bark, or similar hides. Also provide a large, shallow water dish in the enclosure and change at least 2 to 3 times weekly. Spot clean daily and clean the enclosure at minimum every 2 to 4 weeks.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Spadefoot toads have simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it in moderated amounts can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. For any supplemental heating that may be needed, use a low wattage incandescent or UVA/UVB bulb, radiant or ceramic heat emitter, or UTH (under tank heating element). Spadefoot toads require moderate to higher humidity at around 60 to 80%. Be sure to mist the enclosure at least once daily as well. Maintain these species of toads at around 70 to 85 degrees F and provide a 12 to 14 hour light cycle if overhead lights are used. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

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***Insectivorous***; In the wild, most North American spadefoot toads are insectivorous, and will eat insects, arachnids, and other invertebrates they can catch. They will occasionally catch and consume other smaller vertebrates as well. Some of these species of toads will even scavenge leftover dog or cat food if left outdoors. In captivity, feed most species of spadefoot toads a variety of appropriately sized feeder insects such as crickets, roaches, mealworms, superworms, and waxworms. They can also be fed microfauna such as isopods, springtails, and fruit fly cultures as well if small enough. Feeder insects should be gut-loaded in order to increase their optimal nutritional value. These toads also require additional calcium and vitamin D3 supplementation 1 to 2 times weekly or as otherwise directed for optimal health and development. This is in order to prevent Metabolic Bone Disease (MBD) and other growth and nutritional deficiencies. They can also sometimes be large enough to be given small, pre-killed rodents, but sparingly, if at all. Their feeding frequency will depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

### **Handling**

Spadefoot toads are a shy, secretive, and fossorial species that will spend much of their time burrowed in their substrate and therefore do not make suitable display animals. Spadefoots can be handled carefully for short period of time, and are not aggressive or prone to biting, but in general are not tolerant of frequent and/or prolonged handling.

**\*\*Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens\*\***

### **Contact**

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at [info@madisonherps.org](mailto:info@madisonherps.org)

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