



\*Raija Hansen

## Tiger Salamanders (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) and (*Ambystoma mavortium*)

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### **Big and Bold**

Tiger salamanders are large, stocky terrestrial salamanders which belong to the larger family of Ambystomatidae, or the mole Salamander family, and tend to be secretive and fossorial as adults. They are large, stocky salamanders with broad, rounded heads and bodies. Ground color can be blackish, brown, or olive usually with numerous irregular yellow, tan, to cream colored spots, stripes, and dashes. Due to their heavily burrowing, fossorial nature, tiger salamanders are adaptable and widely ranging salamanders that may be found in areas where most other salamanders avoid. During the rainy, wet weather in spring and fall, many tiger salamanders will emerge from or return to their temporary ponds and wetlands to breed or overwinter, and are often found crossing roads and other open areas. Some populations of tiger salamanders can also be paedomorphic, meaning they retain their aquatic, juvenile larval features as adults depending on their local environmental conditions.

### **Taxonomy**

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

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

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

**Class:** Amphibia

**Order:** Caudata/Urodela

**Suborder:** Salamandroidea

**Family:** Ambystomatidae

**Genus:** Ambystoma

**Species:** *Ambystoma tigrinum*\* and *Ambystoma mavortium*\*

\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the proper care, tiger salamanders can attain longevity of 10 to 15 years or more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

Tiger salamanders in general are wide ranging, from southern Canada, central and eastern United States, and northern Mexico depending on the species. The eastern tiger salamander (*A. tigrinum*) occupies a wide variety of agricultural, residential, savannah and grassland, forested, and wetland areas of the Midwestern, south central, southeastern, and eastern United States, and into southeastern Canada in Ontario. The Barred tiger salamander (*A. mavortium*) is found in the

moist, lowland deciduous and coniferous forests, fields, grasslands, meadows, and semi-deserts from British Columbia Alberta, and Manitoba in western Canada to the western United States.

### **Conservation Status**

*A. tigrinum* and *A. mavortium* are IUCN Red List Least Concern (LC).

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

*Ambystoma tigrinum stebbinsi* Endangered Species Act of 1974 listed species (AZ). Also consult with your local, municipal, and state ordinances and regulations for any ownership restrictions.

### **Experience Level Required**

Novice/Beginner.

### **Size**

Tiger salamanders are large, stocky salamanders which typically can range from 6 to 13 inches as adults.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

Housing must be sealed and escape proof with a secured lid or aquarium hood. A single adult tiger salamander can be housed in a 10 to 20 gallon aquarium or other enclosure with coconut husk, chemical free potting soil, or cypress mulch substrate. Provide a large, shallow water dish and change frequently or when dirtied. Due to their sensitive skin, water with heavy metals, chlorines, or contaminants should \*not\* be used. Artificial plants, cork bark hides, and driftwood can also be included as cage furnishings and additional hiding places. Floor space is more important than height for these salamanders.

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

Tiger salamanders 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). Maintain these salamanders within a temperature range of low 60's to mid-70 degrees F. Do not exceed 80 degrees F. 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**

***Insectivorous to Carnivorous;*** Tiger salamanders are insectivorous, and in the wild they will feed on a variety of insects, worms, and other invertebrates. They will also occasionally consume smaller vertebrates as well, and can also be cannibalistic under certain circumstances.

In captivity, tiger salamanders have voracious appetites, but should not be overfed in order to prevent obesity and other health related concerns. Providing variety is important, and tiger salamanders can be fed chemical and pesticide free earthworms, waxworms, silkworms, crickets, or roaches. Small, pre-killed rodents can also be given on occasion, but give these sparingly, if at all. No additional vitamin, mineral, or nutrient supplements are required to maintain tiger salamanders if the above varied diet is followed, although gutloading or supplementing with calcium and vitamin D3 can still be beneficial for their optimal health and well-being. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit

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one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

### **Handling**

Tiger salamanders are delicate, soft bodied amphibians with sensitive, permeable skin as with most amphibians. Wash hands thoroughly before and after handling them, and avoid wearing any lotions, creams, or oils before handling any amphibian. Handling tiger salamanders should be minimized whenever possible and only when absolutely necessary.

**\*\*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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