



## Great Crested Newt: *Triturus cristatus*

One of our three indigenous species of Smooth newt, the male Great Crested really lives up to his name as mating season begins in late Spring. Emerged from overwintering cover in compost heaps, rotten tree stumps and rocks, they have rehydrated themselves and are on a keen lookout for a receptive female.

As a semi-aquatic, amphibian species, they spend most of their adult life on the ground, but mating always occurs in water. The males are easy to distinguish from females during the mating season, as they develop a fantastic, rather outlandish crest along their back to demonstrate how healthy and desirable they are.

This crest, a newt version of a wild haircut, is accompanied by large, dark spots all over their back, flanks and tummy, which has already brightened to a deep orange colour. They also have a white flash on their tail, which they wave seductively when wooing a female, and use to waft their scent across the water to her. The opening to their male reproductive organs, the cloaca, also enlarges to give a much bigger, newt posing pouch. Males also have frilly toes when mature.

All these changes in the males are to display their health and strength, and increase their chance of being chosen by the female. She simply wants their offspring to have the best chance of survival.

The female lays fertilized eggs one at a time, and carefully wraps each one in a leaf to stop them being carried away by water currents. The eggs hatch in about 3 weeks, and these small larvae already have frilly gills, similar to tadpoles. As with tadpoles, these gills degrade as their internal lungs develop to allow them to breathe air on land.

Unlike frogs and toads, newts develop their front legs first, and then their back legs. Immature newts are called efts, and take up to three years to be fully mature, growing up to 6½ inches in length.

**Question: What do newts feed on as efts, and what do they feed on when fully grown?**

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