

# welcome toads to your garden

Want to invite a guest to your garden who eats 50 to 100 slugs, flies, grubs, grasshoppers and cutworms every night? Well, the next time you see a toad, stop to say hello and welcome it to your garden. If it's happy and feels at home, it could stay for 20 years. And unlike some birds we know, this humble garden guest won't eat your crops for dessert.

## Frog? Toad?

People have confused toads and frogs for years. They *are* related and have similar diets, but toads have drier, rougher, more warty-looking skin than frogs. Toads can also tolerate a drier environment, making them easier to attract to most gardens. You don't have to worry about critters hunting

down your toads — they have skin glands that exude a bad-tasting substance. And don't believe that old myth that touching a toad will cause warts on humans. It's not true, but I still wouldn't kiss one!

## How to be a perfect host

The American toad (*Bufo americanus*) or one of its many cousins can be found from coast to coast. Most gardens can support several toads.

As long as a toad has shelter, moisture and food, it can stay for years. Here's how to provide these in your garden:

**Shelter** — Toads feed mainly at night, and they need shelter and moisture during the heat of the day. They take cover by burying themselves in damp mulch or hiding beneath low-growing plants. I gave a toad a home in my garden by setting the broken flower pot below in a shady spot. The clay pot already had

a chip, so I made the opening large enough for my toad friend by using a pair of tile nippers. Adult toads will need an opening at least 2 inches wide and 1½ inches tall.

In late fall, toads burrow as much as 3 feet below the soil's surface to hibernate until spring arrives.

**Moisture** — To cool off and stay hydrated, toads drink through their skin. Set a saucer of water level with the ground so a toad can jump into it. Make sure to keep it filled on hot days.

**Food** — Patiently lying in wait, toads quickly grab their food with their long, sticky tongues.

Anything that's smaller and slower moving than they are is fair game. Even as tadpoles, toads eat mosquito larvae in the water.

Adult toads feed mainly on insects, so it's best not to use pesticides. You'll be taking away their food supply; and many pesticides are toxic to toads. Always use the least-toxic organic insecticide or a cultural control, such as hand picking insects off your plants. Or do what I do — invite more hungry toads to feast in your garden. \*

