

Ch-ch-ch-changes

So, springtime in NYC, right? Bubbling brooks? Well, not unless you count those streams of turgid slime that run between the subway tracks, you know, the ones the mice play in (or are they baby rats?). Flowers pushing through soft soil? Maybe at that uptown park, but downtown, let's see how long those tulips last in Tompkins. The first red-breasted robin? Yeah, I saw her perched (or was she impaled?) on the barbed wire fence across the street. Baby robins cuddled in their nests chirping for food? Take the 7 train and keep going. But there is a way you can watch the miraculous rebirth of spring in your own little tenement right here in the city. Pet stores all over town have

just received their spring shipments of tadpoles. You know those funky lookin' fish you caught as a kid, as soon as the ice melted on the backyard stream, and kept in a jiffy jar until they turned into frogs and jumped out. I've always found it close to a religious experience watching these blobs of brown flesh metamorphosize into angular athletic frogs, almost like a resurrection, or at least a million years of evolution captured in a couple of months in my Jiffy jar. Feeding is fun, easy, and economical, especially after they become frogs. Freeze-dried bloodworms and live crickets can be had for a pittance in the pet stores, but half the kicks of having frogs is catching their meals. Flies are fab food for frogs—throw a piece of old meat on the kitchen floor, open a window, and get out that butterfly net little Ricky sold you on a slow day last winter. Worms work too. I trained last year's frog (Gregor) to pull the worm right from my fingertips (Gregor was pulled right from his bowl by Quack, a friend's duck—but that's another story). If your exterminator came at the usual mid-morning, midweek hour last month and the cucarachas are back, feed 'em to the frog. But not if you've got Combat in the house. That stuff festers in their stomachs and is gastronomically transmissible. If you've tired of your frog (and you won't) you can always hop a train to the park and let him go in one of the ponds (without ducks).

Cooler than watching a houseplant grow, cheaper and less hair-raising than seeing a kid through puberty, your tadpole can be purchased for \$1.29 at Aqua World, 176 Hester Street, 925-0062; and \$1.98 (large) at JBL Discount Pets, 151 East Houston Street, 982-5310.

BY TOM O'NEILL

ADAM MASTOON

