

Modern developments in aquarium design have made the keeping of tropical aquarium fish easy and lots of fun.

Aquariums are basically a miniature underwater garden in which fish provide colour and movement. To appreciate the full beauty of tropical fish it is necessary to put them in the right setting, with underwater plants and rocks, the complete scene being lit with fluorescent or other lamps mounted in a cover over the aquarium.

WHAT YOU NEED

Basically, the aquarium, a stand, gravel, rocks, plants, a light, heater, thermostat, thermometer, a filtration system, some water conditioners and water from the tap.

THE TANK

These come in a variety of sizes; choose the largest you can afford because bigger volumes of water are usually more stable and give plants and fish the best conditions. Many tanks come with built in filter systems.

Water is heavy, so be sure to choose the right spot for your aquarium before you fill it. Place the tank on a strong rigid, flat surface; you must cushion the weight by placing a sheet of expanded polystyrene between the base and the stand. Choose a place which is away from a window as aquarium displays look better in dark areas and because excessive light encourages the growth of algae.

THE EQUIPMENT

The heater and thermostat should keep the water at a steady temperature of about 25°C. The filter and/or airpump circulate the water and help keep it clean. Your aquarium or pet store will assist with the selection of a suitable heater and filter for your situation.

The lighting equipment displays the aquarium scene and is essential for stimulation of plant growth. Aquarium lights should be on for 8 - 10 hours every day. Regular light hours are important for plant growth. A printed background adds a nice finishing touch to the display.

GRAVEL AND ROCK

This should be obtained from your pet shop as the composition of gravel and rock from other sources is of an unknown quality, so beware. Both should be washed thoroughly before placing in the tank. An under-gravel filter system, if being used, should be installed beforehand and the gravel should be graded to be higher at the back of the tank and slope down to the front. Rock can be slightly submerged in the gravel. Other filters, airline from the pump, heaters etc can now be put in place, but DO NOT turn on any electrical equipment until after the tank is filled with water.

FILLING THE TANK

To avoid disturbing the gravel when filling the tank, place a saucer in the aquarium on which to pour the water. Remove it when the aquarium is nearly full. Plants can be added to the aquarium at this point.

WATER

Leave the water to settle for several days before fish are introduced. A water treatment preparation may be added to assist the process and cut down the waiting period, but about a 24 hour period is necessary to make sure equipment is working properly and the correct water temperature is being maintained. Water testing kits, which are necessary to monitor water quality, are available at your aquarium store. Test the water and adjust the pH suitable to the fish you are purchasing, 7 – 0 is neutral.

CHOICE OF FISH

There is an enormous choice of fish but it's important to only introduce varieties recommended by your pet store. Consideration must be given to compatibility, size, food requirements etc. The vast majority of tropical fish on display in most stores make good community tank inhabitants.

HOW MANY FISH?

Your aquarium or pet store can advise on how many fish your aquarium will hold. One of the

most important things to remember is that it takes about a month to establish sufficient, good, water purifying bacteria, to keep the tank in some sort of balance. It is therefore essential that you start with only a few fish and don't stock the tank to capacity until after this 3 – 4 week period. If you add bacteria start to your aquarium you can reduce the time delay.

MAINTENANCE

The most important thing to remember is that fish are directly affected by their environment. If there is anything wrong with the water it will affect the inhabitants.

WATER CHANGES

These should be carried out by changing 20% of the water fortnightly. If you use a siphon cleaner, only clean half the gravel so that the bacteria are not all cleaned away. Siphon clean the back half of the pebbles one fortnight and the front half the next. This is to remove waste, which would otherwise build up in the water.

TAP WATER

Many town water supplies are now chlorinated and this can be very harmful to fish. It can be removed by adding an anti-chlorine agent (from your pet store).

FEEDING

Tropical fish should be fed two to four times a day, but only the amount they can consume within two minutes. Generally fish should be fed small amounts often.

OVERFEEDING

Overfeeding is the greatest single hazard faced by the new aquarist. Fish will only eat food, which is not decaying; even scavengers will reject polluted and decaying food. Remove any uneaten food after a few minutes if you have misjudged the amount.

HOLIDAY FEEDING

Holiday feeding blocks from Pet Shops are better to use than giving too much food before you go. Do not entrust their feeding to an inexperienced but well-meaning neighbour or friend.

CLOUDY WATER

Cloudy water is almost invariably caused by overfeeding or removal of all bacteria during a water change.

GREEN WATER

Green water is caused by too much light; usually coupled with overfeeding and/or overstocking.

ALGAE CONTROL

Excessive algae growing on rocks or glass is caused by too much light and is fixed by; reducing the amount of light to the aquarium, introducing algae eating fish, increasing the number of aquatic plants, or by using an algae-killing product.

HEALTH

Ensure that household chemicals such as sprays and pest strips are not used in the same room as the aquarium. No metal or foreign objects should be placed in the tank. Shells or coral should not be placed in the tank (except for marine tanks) as they leech lime. Before commencing treatment for any fish disease always check the fishes' environment for the following physical factors first:

- (1) Insufficient water changes
- (2) pH (too acid or alkaline)
- (3) Hardness (too soft or too hard)
- (4) Correct feeding (too much or too little)
- (5) Chemical contamination
- (6) Incorrect temperature
- (7) Crowded conditions
- (8) Incompatible fish

Fish problems that commonly affect aquarium fish can be simply divided into five groups:

- (a) Environmental – see previous list

- (b) Fungus – is always secondary infection caused by incorrect water conditions, physical damage, or some other disease. Treat by fixing original cause, and then use a recommended treatment.
- (c) White Spot – a common fish parasite appearing like little specks of salt over the fins and body; easy to cure. Treat with White Spot remedy.
- (d) Bacterial diseases – appear as if fins and body are rotting away, often accompanied by white slimy appearance around the mouth, back and base of tail. Treatment: only a few preparations are available that specifically treat aquarium fish bacterial diseases. Ask the advice of your pet shop and ensure the label states it treats bacterial diseases.
- (e) Parasitic diseases – caused by microscopic skin parasites causing fish to scratch on sand, plants or rocks. Fish appear pale in colour and fins often fray in the latter stage of the disease. Ask your pet store for a suitable treatment.

IMPORTANT

Whenever adding chemicals or medications to aquariums, ensure the directions are strictly adhered to. Know how much water your aquarium holds or an overdose may occur, and fatalities will be the result.

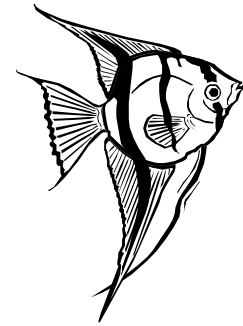
Fish keeping can provide lots of fun, but if problems occur see the experts – your pet or aquarium shop. Aquarium fish are easy to keep providing the few basic principles as outlined here are adhered to.

Remember this is basic information only. Ask your pet store retailer to recommend suitable books or products for your pet.

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TROPICAL FISH



The Pet Industry Association of New Zealand is a specialist trade group within the New Zealand Retailers Association Inc.