

Setting up a Freshwater Aquarium

Starting a freshwater tank is fun, rewarding, and relaxing! Here are the basics:

Tank Selection

Freshwater aquariums can range from a few gallons to hundreds of gallons, but the principles are the same. When choosing a tank size, we say "the bigger – the better"! The larger the tank, the slower any change will take place. For instance, if your heater malfunctions, a drop in temperature would take longer to occur in a 75 gallon tank than in a 10 gallon one. You will have more time to notice a problem and take measures to correct it.

Gravel

We have a variety of colored and natural gravel. You will need a minimum of one pound of gravel per gallon of water (about an inch). If you intend to grow freshwater plants add another inch or so of gravel.

We do not recommend sand – it compacts and does not allow oxygen to reach the "good bacteria" growing in your substrate. (read handout entitled "What is this Cycle my tank is going through?" for further explanation of "good bacteria") We do not recommend crushed shell – its calcium carbonate base will cause a rise in your tank's pH. The rise can be too extreme for most freshwater fish and kill them.

Filtration

Filtration is a critical aspect of any tank. We suggest you purchase a power filter or canister filter that moves at least 5 gallons of water an hour per gallon of tank water. For example, a 30 gallon tank would need a filter that moves at least 150 gallons of water per hour ($5 \times 30 = 150$). The filter cartridge needs to be changed about once a month.

Lighting

In a "fish only" tank, one light strip is needed to illuminate your tank. A good bulb brings out the colors of your fish.

Lighting – Plant Tank

Proper lighting (intensity, duration, color spectrum) is crucial to the success of a tank with live plants.

Light intensity or brightness is the most critical value in a plant tank. The rule of thumb is 5 watts per gallon of water. But remember these points:

- Cloudy water reduces light.
- Fluorescent light tubes lose much intensity in a short period of time, so bulbs should be changed once a year.
- Keep your glass top, plastic bulb covers, and bulb clean. Any dirt reduces light.

Use more wattage per gallon of water on tanks with a height of more than 20 inches.

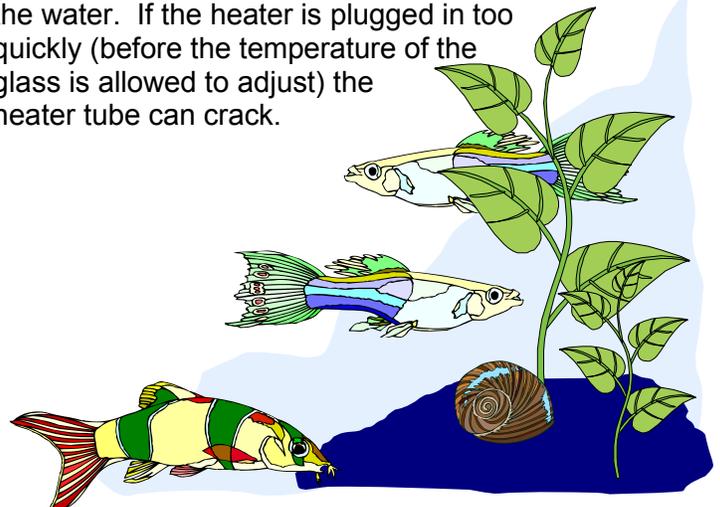
Water Conditioning

Chlorine in tap-water kills the germs and makes it safe for humans to drink – but that same chlorine is toxic to fish. Always use a dechlorinator when adding water to your aquarium.

Since the tank is new, add aquarium salt to your water (one tablespoon per five gallons). This will help reduce stress on your fish and cause them to build a thicker body slime. A thicker slime coat will protect them from the changing water chemistry in a new tank.

Temperature

A heater should be used to keep the temperature within a range of 72° - 78°. The general rule of 3 to 5 watts per gallon should be followed. For example, a 30 gallon tank should have a 100 to 150 watt heater. Remember to position your heater and then wait 15 minutes before plugging in the heater. This allows the glass heater tube to adjust to the same temperature as the water. If the heater is plugged in too quickly (before the temperature of the glass is allowed to adjust) the heater tube can crack.



Maintenance

Maintenance is not difficult. A freshwater tank should be algae wiped and gravel washed twice a month (See handout "Basic Information on Water and Water Changes"). An algae pad should be used to scrub the glass and decorations. Never use a pad that has been exposed to detergent.

A gravel washer is a vacuum cleaner which siphons water, uneaten fish food, and fish waste – which results in a water change. We carry many sizes to accommodate every size tank.

The most often overlooked form of maintenance is "water changes". Once a month after the cycle is complete, change about 20% of the water in your tank. (See handout "Basic Information on the Aquarium Cycle"). Remember, the water that is replacing old tank water must be the same temperature or slightly warmer than the water in the tank. A sudden drop in temperature may stress your fish and leave them open to disease.

When water evaporation occurs – remove the same amount of water that has evaporated - then replace it all. When water evaporates the minerals in the water do not leave and will build up. The result could be "hard" water in your tank. (Some species of fish are not tolerant of hard water.)

Setting up the Tank

- Select a "water tolerant" area in your home. Even the most careful hobbyist has an occasional spill. Set your tank on a stable, level stand. Use a carpenter's level to be sure. If the stand is not stable or level a leak may occur from uneven pressure on the silicone seams of the tank.
- Next, put the gravel in the tank. First rinse the gravel in the sink, since even pre-washed gravel will have some dust. The filter will clean out any cloudiness overnight. After your gravel is spread in the tank add any decorations, rocks, or plastic plants, to your tank.
- Next, place a plate or saucer in the tank. Pour de-chlorinated water **slowly** into the tank onto the plate. The plate will deflect the force of the water and your decorations will stay in place.
- After the tank is filled, place the power filter on the back of the tank. Rinse all filter parts before placing them in your tank. Insert the filter cartridge – fill the tank of the filter with water and plug it in. You will hear a "swooshing" sound as the filter primes itself. After a minute or two the water should began to pour into your tank.
- After the filter is in place, put the heater in an area near the intake tube of the power filter. This will allow warmed water to be dispersed to a greater area of the tank. Remember to wait 15 minutes before plugging in the heater.

In the first 4 – 6 weeks:

- Read the hand-outs on "The Cycle" and "Water Quality" – so you know what is happening in the aquarium.
- Feed fish every other day. Only what they will eat in 3 – 5 minutes. Remove excess with a net.
- Check the temperature – should be at 72° – 78° degrees.
- Do not disturb the gravel – the "good" bacteria are growing there!
- Bring a sample of aquarium water to the store for a free water test.
- If water evaporates, add tap water to the tank – but be sure to put a couple of drops of de-chlorinator in the pitcher or bucket first!
- The water might be cloudy for the first week or two – which is to be expected. There are biological changes going on in the water.
- Do NOT clean the filter cartridge. "Good" bacteria are growing there, too! (After a good bacteria bed is established in your gravel you may clean your filter cartridge as needed.)

After the first 4 – 6 weeks:

- Bring a sample of aquarium water to the store for a free water test.
- Talk to any salesperson about how to properly maintain (clean) the aquarium. You will begin normal tank maintenance (gravel washing and water changes). You will need a few additional supplies at this time: a gravel washer and an algae pad.
- Feed fish one to two times a day only what they will eat in 3 – 5 minutes. Remove excess with a net. At least one of these feedings should be something other than staple flake food. (See handout "Why are there so many kinds of fish foods?")

Please Note: The information in this handout is meant to provide basic information only. Please see a salesperson for more information.

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