



A Guide to Keeping FRESHWATER FISH

TYPES OF PET FISH

There are several different species of fish that can be kept as pets. The main groups are saltwater fish and fresh water fish. Fresh water fish are further divided into tropical and cold water fish.

These three groups have vastly different requirements in environments, including salt content and water temperature, and cannot be kept in the same aquarium.

This Guide is mainly devoted to fresh water fish like gold fish and tropical fish.

SETTING UP A NEW FISH TANK:

WATER QUALITY:

When setting up a new tank, do not add all your fish to it on the first day. New tanks have to go through a process called the nitrogen cycle before it is safe to house your pet fish.

Set up your tank with the filter, substrate and ornaments and fill it with dechlorinated water. To start the cycle you can either add one fish by itself or use filter material or fish poo from an existing tank.

Water quality needs to be tested every second day with test kits for ammonia, nitrite and nitrate. This tells you when the cycle is finished and the tank is safe for your fish.

First you will see Ammonia levels rise as this is a waste product from decomposing fish

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poo and leftover food. Bacteria develop to turn ammonia into nitrite and we see a drop in ammonia and rise in nitrite. Other bacteria convert nitrite into the less toxic nitrate.

Once the ammonia and nitrite levels have dropped to 0 and we have a low level of nitrates, your tank has finished the cycle.

Cycling can take a few weeks to months to finish, so set up your tank with plenty of time to spare before getting the fish.

WATER TEMPERATURE:

Goldfish and other cold water fish can tolerate temperatures between 16-24°C depending on the season and rarely need a heater in the tank. Watch out for higher temperatures during summer though, the fish tank may need to be moved to a colder room or basement if temperatures rise beyond 24°C.

Tropical fish are best kept at a constant temperature of 24-25°C. An aquarium heater is great to make sure temperatures stay the same during day and night.

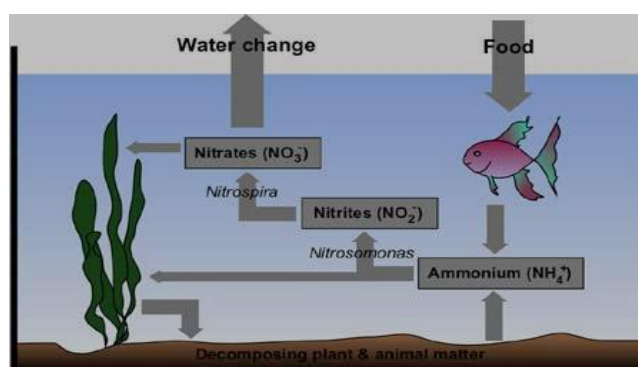
FILTERS:

Depending on tank size and fish numbers, you can get under-gravel filters, internal filters or external filters. External ones are best for large tank setups; internal filters can only cope with smaller tanks. When cleaning your filter material only ever wash it in water from your tank, never use tap water as this kills the beneficial bacteria established in the filter and causes a dangerous spike in ammonia and nitrite.

To reduce stress on your filter use a siphon to remove 10 - 20% of tank water at least weekly and siphon up left over foods, fish poo and other decomposing material from the bottom of the tank. Use a water dechlorinator like "Stress Coat" in the tap water before adding it to your tank.

LIGHT, PLANTS AND ORNAMENTS:

A light on your fish tank is essential when keeping live plants and also makes the fish tank look nice. Turn it off during the night though so your fish can sleep too. Fish love hiding places and variety, so make sure you provide plenty of ornaments and



plants for your fish to play in. Bubble walls are also a nice feature in your tank.

FEEDING YOUR PET FISH:

Never feed your fish more than they can eat within 3-5 minutes. It is better to add small amounts at a time as any uneaten food can cause spikes in ammonia and nitrite which are toxic for your fish.

There is a variety of diets available like floating or sinking pellets, flakes and frozen food depending on the type of fish. Frozen foods like bloodworms make great treats but should be defrosted before use.

HEALTH PROBLEMS IN PET FISH:

Stressed fish are more likely to catch diseases. Stress can be caused by poor water quality, aggressive tank mates, over or under feeding and inappropriate water temperature.

It is important to provide a stable good quality environment as fish can't escape from a tank if the environment doesn't suit them. They are relying on you to keep their tank clean!

New fish can also bring diseases, so before you add new fish to your existing fish population, put the new fish into a quarantine tank. Any sick fish from the existing tank can also be placed in here. The most common fish diseases are fungal, parasites, bacterial and nutritional as well as wounds.



SIGNS OF ILL HEALTH:

- floating on the surface, sometimes upside down or on the side
- off food and keeping away from tank mates
- gasping at the top of the tank
- torn, droopy or frayed fins
- lacerations, lesions or cotton-wool like substance on the body
- leaping out of the water or rubbing against solid objects
- swollen abdomen
- sudden death



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