How to care for fish

Introduction:

New hobbyists who have had problems keeping fish alive for even a few months are always shocked to find out that the normal life span of the typical aquarium fish is measured not in months but in years.

Although it varies from species to species, aquarium fish should live anywhere from three to seven years, or longer. Goldfish can live for 20 years or more.

Fish can actually live longer, healthier lives and sometimes even grow larger in an aquarium than they do in the wild.

In nature, a fish's food supplies come and go with the changing of the seasons and unusual weather patterns. The amount of food may be limited, and it often takes a lot of energy to find enough to survive.

Predators, including other fish, will keep nearly all the young of any species from reaching adulthood. Few fish get to die of old age in the wild. Fish that are too weak or slow will quickly become dinner.

Although aquariums have limitations, they can be an environment where fish are able to flourish.

Learn about the proper way to feed your aquarium fish on the next page.

Getting Started

Fish need an optimal environment. These general guidelines apply to most freshwater fish in pet stores but not to saltwater or tropical fish, which have different requirements.

What do I need to get started:

Things You'll Need

- Aquarium
- Aquarium Stand
- Light
- Cover
- Water Filter
- Heater
- Aquarium gravel
- Aquarium Plants and structures

Placement of the Tank:

Place the tank against an inside wall ' away from windows, doors and heating systems' to prevent drafts and sudden temperature changes. Depending on the type of fish you plan to keep you will need an aquarium heater. Your aquarium needs to have a light and a cover. The light provides uniform light for the fish and the cover prevents fish from jumping out of the aquarium.

Information before you get your fish

Start off with healthy fish. View every fish in that tank at the store before you purchase one. They should move about the tank with purpose and not display any signs of sickness, such as cloudy eyes or slimy-looking bodies.

Keep new fish in a quarantine tank with the same water quality as the main tank. They should stay there for at least two weeks (preferably three) before you introduce them to the new tank. When you start getting impatient, think about how much trouble it would be to treat the entire population for infection instead of just one fish.

Maintain the water quality. Test the ammonia, nitrite and pH levels regularly with a special kit. Chemical imbalances are a leading cause of sickness in fish. Once the water quality is acceptable, use a special filtered siphon to change 20 percent of the water every 10 days. A pet store that sells fish should also sell test kits and siphons.

Provide your fish with a diet of commercially prepared fish food. Store it in a cool, dry place for no more than a few months.

Remove waste and uneaten food with a net every other day. Rinse the net thoroughly before and after use to avoid the potential spread of infection.

Keep a canopy or hood over the tank at all times. Some fish are jumpers.

Don't let your fish get stressed by poor water conditions, drastic lighting changes or constant activity outside the tank. These things will lower their resistance to disease.

What Fish to Get:

Tropical or Coldwater fish. Coldwater fish include goldfish and minnows. There are zillions of tropical fish, from angel fish to corydoras catfish. Coldwater fish are usually a little more hardy, and will survive those first few mistakes. We recommend that you start with cold water fish and then if things go good you can move up to tropical or saltwater fish.

Start off with inexpensive fish, even if you can afford expensive ones. Inexpensive ones are very successful in their natural environment or so comfortable in captivity that they even breed regularly. In either case they do not die easily on their own or in pet stores. Try to get fish that are active and have color. This makes it enjoyable to watch them.

Do your research before putting different species together. Some species are compatible and others are not.

Different species may require different food.

Research before putting species together. Some fish are compatible others are not. One might speculate that fish would enjoy some activity in their lives, so don't get just one. (The fish need not be the same species; for some territorial fish, it is best that it isn't. An armored catfish can be a good "companion" for such a beast)

Make sure you can provide any specialized care the fish need. For example, different fish need different foods, and some fish require more frequent maintenance than others. Owning fish is a big responsibility

Some fish are perfectly happy with flakes and can be fed with an automatic feeder, which makes it possible to leave the tank unattended for a week or two (assuming the fish are small so the water doesn't need very frequent changing

Get an appropriately sized tank

Look up the minimum size tank for each fish.

For smaller freshwater fish, get one gallon per inch of adult fish

The larger freshwater fish require more room. The volume of a fish, and thus, roughly, the amount of food it turns into waste, increases not with its length but with the cube of its length. Therefore, you could keep two or three Neon Tetras, which grow to only an inch or so, per gallon of water, but three or four big six-inch cichlids would be more than enough for a fifty-gallon tank (assuming they aren't very territorial, in which case they might think only one or two is enough.

Only start with a few fish and build your population slowly. Every fish you add affects everything from food and water quality to the filtration system. Add slowly and let the tanl and fish population settle down before adding more.

Now you have you fish and need to take care of the fish and tank. We told you to change out the water each week, usually 20 – 30%. We need to replace that water or the fish will not have any water to swim in. You can not use water right out of the tap to replace this water. You need to fill up some gallon jugs with water and have them sit without a cover on them for a week. This allows the dissolved gasses to come out of the water. It also brings the water up to room temperature. The tank should be kept at a temperature of 74 to 78 degrees utilizing the tank heater