TROPICAL FISH

Tank Tips

The Top Tips To Choosing
The Right Tropical Fish Tank

Introduction

Tropical fish are among nature's most fantastic, hypnotizing creatures.

Bright colors, sleek motion, and relaxed life-style that can lull every fish-lover for minutes, or hours. Tropical fish can provide years of serene entertainment and education.

It starts with their home. For newcomers to the tropical fish hobby, there's a lot to learn to protect the investment, avoid frustration, and sustain a delicate ecosystem.

Aquariums aren't simply five pieces of acrylic or glass sealed together.

They're a unique ecology that demonstrates the aquatic life cycle and its interaction with the outside world.

Planning is key to building this hobby and there are a number of things to consider when deciding which tropical fish tank to buy.

What makes a quality tank and what are some of the common missteps aquarium owners take in choosing the proper tank?

Before discussing the particulars of tanks, a few assumptions have been made on what's been done so far.

Assumption #1 – The tank has a home.

There are external considerations to be evaluated. Is power available? Does the tank avoid direct sun light that'll cause temperature fluctuations? Is the floor strong enough to support a 100 pound (or more) aquarium and equipment? Is it out of the way enough not to get

knocked over or bumped into? Is the aquarium away from vents, doors, and windows so the temperature is consistent? Is there enough room around the tank to get to it for maintenance?

To give fish every best chance for success, the environment must match their needs, not the other way around. Dedicated stands and hoods are also nice considerations, not only to the aesthetic appeal, but for the ease of maintenance and to hide distracting equipment.

Assumption #2 – The owner knows what he/she wants.

Will it be home to saltwater tropical fish or freshwater? Or a reef tank? There's a lot more than clown fish for an aquarium. Some of the most beautiful specimens are also the most temperamental, in behavior and habitat.

Tanks can be too big or too small, so it's important that the tank fits the fish. Overcrowded or underpopulated aquariums can ruin an ecology once it's established. Many feel the bigger the tank, the better, with good reason. The more water, the more diffuse the toxins will be. Also visibility is enhanced as there's more square footage to see through. If a tank's too big, adding more tropical fish is easily done.

Assumption #3 – The budget's in place.

Aquariums for fresh- or saltwater fish can be pricey to buy, build, and maintain. Make sure the dollars match the desired outcome. Going premium on a uniquely shaped tank, but saving money on the filtration or heating system will cost more in the long run. If one isn't confident in being able to maintain a tank, there are plenty of reputable services available in most markets to do it on a regular basis, for a fee. Saltwater aquariums can cost two to three times as much as a freshwater tank to

setup and maintain. A reef tank can easily be five times the cost for the same sized freshwater aquarium.

Assumption #4 – The fish are permanent residents.

Owning fish isn't a 'set it and forget it process.' It takes weeks to establish a safe environment for tropical fish. That's why it's important to know how to build the ecosystem that's right for the species. Unlike goldfish dropped into a jar, tropical fish are dependent on variables that must be maintained over the long haul. Keep in mind, this home is permanent – never move a filled tank. Tanks simply aren't built to handle the flexing and twisting associated with moving when occupied.

Things To Consider Before Buying A Fish Tank

There are a few starting elements to consider in deciding what kind of tank to choose. Tanks are not all created equally; water-tightness, sturdiness, and composition are three things to consider. The first question is which to choose; glass or acrylic.

While plastic is an option for small tanks, they tend to be less durable, more difficult to filter, and to keep the plastic clean. With glass, there are two flavors – tempered and non-tempered. Tempered glass is heartier and thinner than non-tempered, but still thicker and heavier than acrylic. Acrylic formulas change with every manufacturer, which is why some acrylic aquariums are more prone to discoloration over time.

Check every review out there, and don't forget to ask the local pet store what they've experienced in the quality of manufacturers. Acrylic and glass both have strengths and weaknesses, so it's worth discussing for a moment:

Cost – Acrylic tanks are generally more expensive than glass, mostly based on shipping and maintenance over time. Since acrylic scratches much more easily than glass, panels may require replacement. Many shops will have tanks for as little as $30 for a 10 gallon tank, which is great for budding enthusiasts. Shop owners count on making their profits off the fish and other equipment needed over time.

Durability – Acrylic is easily scratched, even during shipment. Permanent scars on the acrylic surface make it difficult over time to clearly see inside the tank, which defeats the entire purpose. Glass, on the other hand, maintains its clarity. However, glass is much more prone to cracks and breakage.

Acrylic is susceptible to cracking or shattering with a sharp impact, but less so than glass. However, the impact is likely to leave an enduring mark on an acrylic tank. Glass tanks are sturdier in that they can generally support their own weight when filled. However, acrylic tanks need to be completely supported on the bottom. All tanks will bow to a certain degree if unsupported from beneath, but acrylic tanks can separate more easily at the seams if the stress is too great.

Shape and Clarity – The shape of a glass tank is typically rectangular, as curved glass will bend light and distort the view. It's not an impossible task to find a manufacturer that makes odd shapes, but it's costly – in dollars and weight. Acrylic can be bent and molded in as many ways that can be imagined, with much less visual distortion.

As noted above, acrylic is easily scratched, obscuring the aquatic scene within. One last note – if there are changes to be made to the tank, such as adding a hole for equipment, acrylic is the only real choice since drilling glass is difficult, expensive, and could potentially ruin the tank.

There's also the support system every tank requires. Lighting, filtering, heating, and testing kits, depending on the style of tank. Freshwater tropical fish can, over time, require more care than a saltwater or reef aquarium. This is because much of the filtration in a saltwater or reef tanks is accomplished within the established ecosystem. However, the initial investment in additional equipment and ongoing need for test kits offset the cost and care of one type over the others.

Filtration – From day one, a tank's filtration is paramount in sustaining the aquatic ecosystem. In the wild, waste is filtered, separated, and repurposed through nature, but in the confinements of a tank, those processes can't occur quickly enough. Decaying organic matter, excess food, and chemical reactions are all dangers to the habitat.

There are three widely sold types of filtering; chemical, biological, and mechanical (also known as particulate, or physical filtration). Chemical filtration typically uses carbon to remove toxins from water. Biological filters use bacteria, microorganisms, and plants to filter out toxic chemicals.

The most popular, and easiest method, is mechanical filtering. Mechanical filters are easy to maintain, low in price, and are supplied for a variety of circumstances, such as nitrate absorbers. Some filtration kits combine all three methods for optimal water conditioning. One thing to note is to have the right sized filtering system for the tank.

Also, UV sterilizers in reef or saltwater aquariums are a great addition to prevent microorganisms, fungus, virus, and other potential parasites from growing by sterilizing the water as it's filtered (note: UV sterilizers emit heat, which might require a chiller in reef tanks).

Lighting – There are two common types of aquarium lighting; fluorescent and incandescent. Fluorescent lighting is the better of the

two as it's safer, produces less heat at the water's surface, and saves money and electricity. The intensity and duration of having an aquarium lit depends on the fish species and live plants.

For example, tetras are native to murkier, darker waters and are sensitive to bright light, so their aquarium should only be lit eight hours a day. Guppies, betta fish, and cichlids like light eight to twelve hours a day. An automatic timer is a great, inexpensive piece of hardware to add to the tank's system. If live plants will be integrated into the habitat (and there are several good reasons to do so), make sure the light can supply 1.5 to 3 watts of light for every gallon of water.

Heating – Fresh and saltwater fish are sensitive to temperature changes. The choices are wide and vary in price and features. Some filters even include heaters. Cheaper is not good when it comes to heaters. In the low-cost hanging models with an element inside a glass tube, the glass may not be shatter-proof, the temperature is difficult to set properly, and an external thermometer is necessary.

However, for a few dollars more, a heater encased in hardened plastic can be submerged and placed where it looks best for the habitat, even buried in the substrate. Either way, it's important to acclimate the heaters before turning them on to avoid cracking the enclosures – about twenty minutes in the water before heating it up is good.

Testing and test kits – Any experienced hobbyist will say that the cleanest water can be toxic and the murkiest water the healthiest. Why? Because often the toxins are clear, such as ammonium and nitrites, yet deadly to the tropical fish living in it.

Typically, the most useful tests are for pH, nitrates, nitrites, and ammonia. If there are algae problems in the tank, testing the phosphate levels can be helpful to determine how to correct it. Keeping

a log of measurements is useful in knowing how the tank's ecology is trending.

For new setups, testing should be done daily for ammonia and nitrites to ensure filtering is keeping up with waste decay. After it's established, a tank should be tested on a weekly basis. Many retailers, such as PetSmart, will check your aquarium water for free.

Tips For Taking Care Of Your Fish Tank

There are some issues that can be avoided in deciding which type of tank and equipment to use. Visibility of the fish is an example. The standard 10 or 20 gallon tanks will provide about 10 inches of vertical viewing space once gravel or sand substrate is planted. A 29 gallon take will add six extra inches to the height, giving you more areas to establish. Here are some other tips:

Avoid rushing a tank's ecosystem. Never add fish the first day. Wait until the water's stable and warm. It can take a month or more to stabilize a tank's chemistry.

Never rinse activated carbon, substrate, or filter materials in tap water – always rinse in water removed from the aquarium.

Look at the labels on the food being fed. Lower cost flaked foods often contain more phosphates than more quality brands. Phosphates are detrimental to the aquatic environment.

Have an isolation wing for new residents. This ensures the health of others and gives the newcomers a chance to acclimate.

Don’t overpopulate the tank – the general rule of thumb is one inch of tropical fish for each gallon of water. Larger tanks change this ratio, so check with your pet provider to ensure you’re not overtaxing the tank by creating more waste than it can eliminate.
Don’t change out too much water at a time. Recommendations vary, but most seem to agree that changing out 10% a week, or 25% a month is okay for most tropical fish. Use a de-chlorinator if you’re using tap water in a separate container before adding it to the tank.

When filling a tank the first time, place a small dish or cup on the substrate and pour into it. This will help keep the substrate from being displaced.

Ensure electrical cords have a drip-loop, bell-shaped extra slack that water can drip from rather than going to an outlet.

Conclusion

Choosing the right tank the first time will lead to years of enjoyment for the owner and a comfortable life for the tropical fish.

Knowing what’s needed, before making the plunge, is key to setting up for success.

Serenity awaits under this new sea.

So if you want to get started on the right foot with your tropical fish tank, then I highly recommend taking a look at this page.

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