

# Somethin's Fishy Around Here!

Your guide to  
setting up a tropical fish  
aquarium!

Your first aquarium can be a 10 gallon or 300 gallon tank, as long as you have a balanced self-contained world. In the wild, fish live in a much larger body of water and nature filters out waste materials. In your aquarium, however, the single greatest killer of fish is the build up of waste materials, such as excess food and fish wastes. These wastes must be filtered out or changed into harmless compounds to prevent poisoning of your fish.

The basic item for the home aquarium is the container to house your fish. There are many tanks on the market today, tanks made of glass or plastic, tanks in all shapes and some that even double as coffee tables or lamps. But, whatever tank you choose, you will need the same basic equipment: a tank with a hood containing a light source to control the length of day and season, a heater to control the

temperature, and a filtration system to aerate and clean the water.

One of the best filters for conversion of waste is the undergravel filter, a plate with water lift tubes that is placed under the aquarium gravel. Water is drawn down through the gravel and up through the lift tubes causing the waste to be trapped in or filtered through the gravel, where bacteria can convert the wastes into harmless compounds. Another type of filter is the outside power filter, which operates outside of the aquarium and pulls water from the tank and filters this water through a medium of sponge foam and charcoal before returning it to the tank. Outside power filters remove large, floating waste particles from the water and are recommended when messy fish, like goldfish, are kept.

Many people prefer a combination of an undergravel filter (for bacterial action) and an outside power filter (to remove large waste particles); this combination makes tank upkeep much less work.

Your choice of fish is a matter of personal preference, but there are a few basic rules to follow:

1. **Do not put too many fish in your tank!** Overpopulation stresses fish and is the #1 cause of disease and other problems.

2. **Buy inexpensive fish for your first try.** If the fish die, you are not out a lot of money.

3. **Choose fish that require the same water conditions, temperature and food.** Fresh and salt water fish do not belong together. Also check to make sure you put only aggressive fish together and non-aggressive fish together. Both in the same tank could be trouble!

4. **Buy young fish and watch them grow.** Immature fish cost less and small fish are less likely to overcrowd your tank.

Do not feed your fish more food than they can eat in 5 minutes. Feed them once or twice a day. Remember, healthy and hungry fish are active fish.

The care and upkeep of your tank will depend on your filtration system and the number of fish you have. If your filter controls the poisons caused by fish wastes, you will only have to replace water lost through evaporation, do a basic clean up and one-third water change about once a month. If you overfeed your fish and have an inefficient filtration system (like a small, inside corner filter), you will have to change your water more often to keep your fish happy and healthy.

Your local fish store is your best source of information about fish, equipment and aquarium care. Even in today's hurried world, there are still full service, owner-operated fish stores that care about your aquarium fish. Shop around to find a local store that will analyze your aquarium water, diagnose and treat sick fish, repair faulty equipment, and give you complete and detailed information and advice on fish and fish care.