

# QUICK FISH GUIDE **harrogate aquatic** AQUARIUM & POND SPECIALISTS

Welcome to the hobby! Choosing the livestock for your tank is one of the most exciting bits about keeping fish, but it's a bit of a minefield deciding what can live peacefully together and what would end in tears. I would take a whole book to list every possible species of fish, so this guide is just meant to give you some things to think about when you're planning your dream aquarium.

**SIZE MATTERS**—it is a BIG FAT MYTH that fish only grow to the size of their tank! If you raised a baby elephant in a tiny flat, you would soon have a very messy flat and a full-sized elephant! Large fish kept in unsuitably small tanks will be unhealthy and possibly aggressive, but they will definitely still be large. Choose carefully—if your tank is small (less than 60 litres) then you need to choose groups of tiny fish. If your dream fish tank is one with large fish: buy a large tank. It's not rocket science!

**WATER OF LIFE**—the ancestors of our aquarium fish come from all around the world and thrive in different water conditions. Make sure you know what your aquarium conditions are (pH, temperature and hardness) and choose fish that will thrive in those conditions, OR adjust your water to suit the kind of fish you want to keep. It's not good enough to wing it and assume that if you've bought them from us and you only live 2 minutes down the road that the water will be the same. We spend hours every week testing/changing/balancing our water and you will need to put in 10 minutes a week checking your levels and making sure they are right for your community. The pH and KH changes over time, especially if you use certain gravel, rock or wood, so you need to be on the ball. We offer free water testing while you're learning the ropes and will be happy to show you what to do.

**A NUMBERS GAME**—many fish, particularly the smallest ones, feel safest in groups of their own kind. This doesn't mean they can't live with other fish, just that they would be miserable, shy, naughty or even get poorly if they aren't kept in numbers that make them feel relaxed enough to behave naturally. The best group size is 10+, but you definitely shouldn't keep them in groups of less than 6. The bigger the group, the brighter their colours will be and the more you will see them confidently swimming in the open.

Fish in this category are the TETRAS, BARBS, RASBORA, DANIOS and MINNOWS.

**SINGLETONS**—some fish prefer to be the only one of their kind in the tank, often because they are fiercely protective of their territory. They can live among and share nicely with other species, but may react badly to other fish that look the same as them or try to live in the same area. Make sure your tank has lots of different caves/hides, and avoid keeping more than one of these fish per tank. SHARKS and SIAMESE FIGHTERS are like this.

**SPECIES-ONLY FISH**—these are fish that won't share peacefully with other types of fish at all, but can sometimes share with their own kind. PUFFERS often come into this category, as do OSCARS unless they are in an 8 foot tank!

**BOYS & GIRLS**—some fish don't mind living in mixed-sex groups, some prefer it, and some hate it! Male fish are nearly always keen to show off to their ladies, and this can range from polite swimming displays, to aggressive chasing games. Bear in mind that in the wild, fish have the space to choose to swim away from unwanted attention but in an aquarium they are forced to put up with it, and this can result in stress/bullying/illness. A pair of fish that like each other and want to breed can also become territorial/aggressive with their tankmates as they start to guard a nesting area, so think carefully before you buy fish that are likely to pair up and breed: do you have a plan for separating fish if there is drama or you suddenly have 100 babies?! Some fish, like SIAMESE FIGHTERS, would naturally only come together briefly to mate, and can't stand the sight of each other the

rest of the time, so should not be kept together. Territorial breeders are: GOURAMIS, CICHLIDS, CATFISH. Fish that give birth to live young and can fill your tank with babies in the blink of an eye are: GUPPIES, MOLLIES, SWORDTAILS, PLATIES.

**TOP TO BOTTOM** — different fish have evolved to live and feed in different depths of water. To make the most use of the space in your tank, try to choose a mix of fish that live in each 'zone' so they aren't competing for space or food. Top-feeders like GUPPIES, MOLLIES, GOURAMIS, HATCHETS, KILLIES and SIAMESE FIGHTERS tend to have their mouths pointing upwards. Mid-swimming fish like BARBS, TETRAS, RASBORAS, MINNOWS, DANIOS, and CICHLIDS have mouths pointing forwards. Bottom-feeding fish have mouths angled downwards, often with whiskers or barbels that they use to forage for food. These include CATFISH, LOACHES, GOBIES, CORYS and PLECS. Their mouth position is also a clue for the type of food they need: floating food for top-feeders; slow-sinking food for mid-feeders and sinking food for bottom feeders.

**CLEAN-UP CREW**—there are lots of fish and critters that can help you keep the aquarium looking clean and tidy, but bear in mind that you still need to feed them a high-quality food—they can't do their job if they are only eating leftovers, debris and algae! Good options for hovering-up food that other fish miss from the bottom are CORYS, LOACHES and SHRIMP. For cleaning algae off the glass and decorations, you need a mix of sucker-mouthed fish like SUCKING LOACHES, OTOS, PLECS or GARRAS, and some snails like RAMSHORNS, RABBIT SNAILS or ZEBRA/ONION SNAILS.

**PEST CONTROL**—some fish like PUFFERS or LOACHES are useful for helping eat unwanted snails. There is also a predatory snail called an ASSASSIN SNAIL that is good for hunting pest snails—but bear in mind these also hunt useful snails and shrimp.

**PICKY EATERS**—some options for adding to your community can be tricky to feed, either because they have an unusual diet or they are a bit shy about getting to the food before their tankmates do. PUFFERS tend to need a constant supply of live snails and fresh/frozen bloodworms. GLASS CATFISH and DWARF FROGS need live or frozen bloodworms.

**FIN-NIPPERS**— some fish can't seem to resist nipping at the fins of other fish, especially long, trailing tails! This is often more like rough-play than persecution, but it's certainly not nice for the owner of the long fins and can lead to stress and illness/infection. Some fin-nippers seem to do it when they are kept in unsuitably small groups, but behave themselves in larger groups. These often include TIGER BARBS, BLACK WIDOW TETRAS, SERPAE TETRAS, REDEYE TETRAS and DANIOS, but can easily apply to many more species that are unhappy with their environment or community. To avoid trouble, make sure you aren't keeping too many for the space you have or too few to make them feel safe. Have a really densely planted tank to break up line-of-sight and help them to relax. Always avoid keeping really long-finned or frilly fish like GUPPIES or SIAMESE FIGHTERS with fin-nippers. ANGELFISH and other larger CICHLIDS are also notoriously nippy.

**REMEMBER LESS IS MORE**—if you only have a 60 litre tank, you will have a much better chance of a healthy, colourful and relaxed community if you have a group of 12 small fish and a handful of cleaners than if you try to cram in a hotchpotch of different fish that might not enjoy sharing space. A happy and relaxed group of fish will show off their best colours and behaviour, which is much more enjoyable for you and your family than watching unhappy fish chase or hide. We are always happy to advise on compatibility and capacity, and often recommend you buy less than you had planned to— advice is ALWAYS given with welfare and best practice in mind, even if it results in us losing out on selling you something.



Got questions? Talk to us!



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