

AVOIDING PROBLEMS

harrogate aquatic 
AQUARIUM & POND SPECIALISTS

Keeping fish should be an easy and rewarding hobby, but we frequently hear horror stories of new hobbyists getting off to a bumpy start. Usually this is a result of taking bad advice (increasingly from Facebook and YouTube!) so we hope this leaflet helps you to avoid the most common pitfalls.

ADDING NEW FISH

Before adding any fish, make sure you have added water conditioner and some live bacteria to help mature the tank, and tested the water (at least the ammonia, nitrite and pH level). If you need help setting up the tank, please refer to the 'Getting Started' leaflet or ask us.

At least 7 days after you filled your tank with water, you can introduce a few hardy fish, (approximately 1 small fish per 10 litres for tropical). Choose your first fish carefully in terms of compatibility as certain fish will limit your choice in the future (e.g. some fish would nip the fins of long-finned fish). Tetras are usually a good bet - colourful, hardy, good natured and they won't outgrow your tank!

When you get your fish home, it is really important to acclimatise them slowly to any differences (temperature or water chemistry) between our water and yours at home. Open the bag and roll the edges down so you can float the bag in your aquarium, dunking it every 10 minutes to allow some of your water into the bag. After 30 minutes gently tip the bag so the fish can swim out. Leave the lights off while you do this and for a few hours afterwards. Don't try to feed the new fish until they are swimming around confidently.

Test the ammonia and nitrite levels every other day. If you haven't got enough good bacteria, the levels will rise and can peak after a few days while the filter bacteria works on breaking down all that fish waste. Add a double-dose of bacteria daily and eventually the levels will start to drop. When the levels are safely back to 0 you can introduce a few more fish. Remind us when you visit of the volume of your tank, how long it has been running and which fish you already have so we can advise you on your next fish choice.

Take things slowly! It may take a few months to fully stock your tank but the reward of a healthy well-balanced aquatic community is worth the wait. Bear in mind that some species of fish are more delicate than others and can only be added to a mature tank. Add any territorial fish last so that they aren't tempted to guard their space against newcomers!

FEEDING

Feed your fish sparingly twice a day. They are usually greedy and absolutely capable of eating a huge sprinkle of food in one sitting but most fish food is very nutritious so they only actually need a tiny amount to get the energy they need. As an example, one Neon Tetra needs this much food per day →○. If you let your fish eat until they lose interest, you have over-fed them! If this happens, they can't fully digest all of the food so will suffer from constipation or just excrete partially-digested food. This pollutes the water - both the uneaten food and increased fish waste make the water cloudy and will cause algae. It also causes high ammonia and nitrite levels which can be fatal to the fish. Remember, just like us, fish would prefer to eat several small meals a day than gorge on one big meal every 2-3 days! Using a good quality high-protein food will help keep your water looking crystal clear. It also makes sure your fish grow at a healthy rate, boosts their immune system and helps to bring out their natural colouring. Make sure you remember to give sinking food to fish that like to eat from the bottom and floating food to fish that eat from the surface! Feed live food a couple of times a week—it's a healthy treat and it's good to encourage natural hunting/foraging behaviour as an enrichment activity.

MAINTENANCE & CLEANING

Do nothing for at least the first month or you'll interrupt the natural maturing process in the tank. If you get algae building up on the glass or decorations you can scrape/wipe it off but try to resist cleaning the filter sponges or changing any of the water. After 4-6 weeks do a 25% water change using a gravel cleaner. Rinse the filter sponges in the water you remove from the tank (not under the tap as the chlorine in the tap water will kill your filter bacteria and you'll be back to square one!). Remember to add dechlorinator and bacteria to the water you replace.

CLOUDY WATER & ALGAE

Cloudy water is not uncommon in a new tank and should clear quickly as the tank matures, however it may be a symptom that you are overfeeding. It can also be a sign that your filter sponges are clogged and need cleaning (which can be a knock-on effect of over-feeding!). If you're not sure how much to feed your fish, ask us to show you on your next visit.

Every tank will grow algae at some point. Most types of algae are unsightly and annoying but completely harmless and can just be wiped/scraped off the glass. Algae is like a simple version of a plant: it needs light and nutrients to grow. Too much light or too many nutrients (over-feeding and over-stocking!) will cause it to grow quickly. Make sure your tank is not lit for more than 7-8 hours a day and isn't positioned in direct sunlight. If algae is a recurring problem, ask us for help—don't suffer in silence! Plenty of live plants to compete with algae for nutrients will also help—see the *Preventing Algae* leaflet for more tips and tricks.

WATER TESTING

Test your water regularly, particularly the ammonia, nitrite and pH levels. Nitrite is a by-product of fish waste (ammonia) decomposing and is toxic to fish. Levels can increase after adding new fish or if the filter bacteria is lost (e.g. cleaning the sponges under the tap or letting them dry out if you get distracted while cleaning). pH is a measure of how acidic or alkaline the water is. Most fish thrive at pH7 (neutral). Water in the aquarium usually gets more acidic over time so it is important to make sure it isn't dropping too low. If you buy fish that have been used to living in pH7 water and your pH is 6 (10 times more acidic) they will suffer severe stress which makes them vulnerable to disease and parasites. People often assume that because the new fish are ill and the older fish are fine that the new fish are at fault or have introduced disease, but it's actually just that the older fish have become gradually used to the deteriorating conditions so there is no outward sign of trouble. Check the pH, ammonia and nitrite weekly and always before adding any new fish. See the *Solving Problems* leaflet for more info.

VIGILANCE

Check your tank daily for potential problems—prevention is the best cure! The earlier you detect a problem, the best chance you have of solving it. Look for your fish losing appetite or colour, being less active or hiding, hanging near the surface, gasping, or lurking on the bottom. If your fish are swimming with fins clamped to their sides or rubbing against objects in the tank, they may be suffering from parasites. Most problems can be prevented by diligent water testing and adding live bacteria and water conditioner whenever you change the water or clean the filter sponges.



Got questions? Talk to us!



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