Setting up a Freshwater Aquarium



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Freshwater aquariums start out as a simple tank of water into which aquatic life are placed with the goal of creating the ultimate aquatic environment. A little extra care and patience in the beginning will go a long way towards creating a healthy and problem-free aquarium for years to come.

Location Before any work is done with the tank itself, determine the best location for the aquarium. It should be placed away from windows, outside doors, heat vents and air conditioners. Rapid changes in temperature are extremely stressful to fish, and direct sunlight will quickly turn your beautiful tank into a murky green algae farm. Also, remember water weighs about 10 lbs. per gallon. That means that a 20-gallon aquarium will weigh almost 200 lbs, and a 75-gallon will weigh close to a whopping 750 lbs! Be sure your floor will support this amount of weight. Some rental agreements limit the size of aquariums allowed. Place your aquarium in a room where you spend large amounts of time. Check for nearby electrical outlets. Most tanks will need at least three, depending on how much equipment the aquarium needs.

Set up the tank

- 1. Rinse out your tank to get rid of any dust or debris inside.
- 2. Set your tank stand into place, check if it's level, and adjust accordingly. If you don't have access to a carpenter's level, place the tank on the stand and fill with one to two inches of water. Check to see that the water is an even distance from the top of the stand on all four sides. An unbalanced aquarium can be extremely hazardous. Also, placing a tank on an uneven or tilted surface increases the risk that the tank will crack or leak. Using anything other than a manufactured tank stand may void your tank's warranty.
- 3. Make sure there is enough space between the wall and the back of the aquarium to adequately fit filters and to allow easy access for maintenance.
- 4. Affix your background to the tank.
- 5. Fill the tank approximately 1/3 full. Carefully dry off the bottom edge of the tank and the stand. Now check for leaks. Look for water beading up on the bottom edge or running down the sides of the stand. If the tank leaks, empty it and return it to the store for a replacement. You can attempt to fix it, but repairing a leaky tank is difficult, with no guarantee of success.
- **The filter If you are using an undergravel filter:** Rinse and place the bottom plates into the tank, attaching all necessary tubes, airline, gang valves, check valves and air pump. The check valve should be placed approx. 3-4 inches from your air pump, with the arrow on the valve pointing away from the pump. Do not plug in your pump at this time. Check for leaks.

You can use a commercial bacteria additive or you can use 1–2 cupfuls of gravel from an existing aquarium—the existing gravel contains beneficial bacteria.

Add gravel: Rinse the new gravel (a kitchen colander works well) and decorations. Place the gravel, and all decorations, into the tank.

If you are not using an undergravel filter: Install the filter according to the manufacturer's directions. *Do not plug your filter in at this time*.



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Install the airstone: If you want bubbles, now is the time to hook up the airstone or action ornament, airline tubing, gang valve, check valve, and air pump.

Fill the tank If no leaks have been noted, fill your tank the rest of the way with water. In order to protect your decorations and aqua-scaping, place a small saucer or bowl into the tank and pour the water directly onto that. Check the tank for leaks.

Add the appropriate amount of water conditioner and/or additive to your tank.

The heater Place your heater into your tank. DO NOT PLUG IT IN AT THIS TIME. The best place for your heater depends on the type of heater. Clip-on non-submersible heaters that must hang vertically in the tank should be placed as close to the outflow of your filter as possible. Submersible heaters should be placed as close as possible to the inflow of your filter. These placements allow the heated water to be better dispersed throughout the tank. Check the tank for leaks.

Be sure the heater is installed appropriately to avoid over-heating.

Wait at least 20 minutes to plug in your heater. This allows the internal thermometer to adjust to the water temperature and assures the heater doesn't over heat. Follow the instructions included with your heater and adjust your tank to the appropriate temperature (usually around 72-78 degrees.)

- **Thermometer** Install your thermometer according to the manufacturer's instructions. Your thermometer should be on the opposite end of the tank from your heater, in a position that is easy to check. Place the hood and light (if applicable) onto the tank. Plug in your filter, light, air pump and heater. Make sure the cords running from your tank touch the ground before looping back up to the plug. This is called a "drip loop" and prevents water from running down the cord into your electrical socket. You may find that your water level drops slightly when the filter starts. Add as much de-chlorinated water as necessary to bring the water level to the correct level.
 - **Stabilizing Period** Phase one of your tank set up is now complete. Wait until the tank has remained stable for at least 24-48 hours before adding any fish. This allows the atmospheric gases in the water to dissipate, and allows time to adjust the heater. The water may be cloudy. Wait until this cloudiness dissipates before adding fish.

If the water temperature has remained stable for at least 24-48 hours, and the white cloudiness either has cleared up, you are now ready to begin *the cycling process* of your new tank. There are additives that will speed up the nitrogen cycle. Please refer to the Nitrogen Cycle Care Sheets for your next steps.

Resources Books and web sites that include information on common fish diseases and how to treat them. PETCO care sheet for Nitrogen Cycling the tank PETCO care sheet on Water Quality