

CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Saltwater aquariums start out as a simple tank of water in which aquatic life are placed with the goal of creating the ultimate marine 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, you must first determine the best location for your aquarium. It should be placed away from windows, outside doors, heat vents, and air conditioners. Rapid changes in water temps are extremely stressful for all fish, and especially so for saltwater fish. Also remember that, once it's set up, your tank will weigh approx. 10 lbs per gallon that it holds. That means that a 55-gallon tank will weigh approx. 550 lbs! Be sure your floor will support this amount of weight. Place your aquarium out of direct sunlight, in a room where you will be likely to spend a good amount of time. If you rent your home, be sure to check your lease. Some apartments and condos limit the size of aquariums allowed. Also, check for electrical outlets. Most salt tanks will need access to at least four plug-ins.

Make sure you have enough distance between the wall and the back of the tank to adequately fit your filters and to allow easy access for maintenance.

Set up the tank First, rinse out your tank to get rid of any dust or debris inside.

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.

Affix your background.

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 leaky tanks is difficult, with no guarantee of success.

The filter and skimmer **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.

Attach the lift tubes to the filter plate, cutting to length if necessary. Attach the powerheads to the lift tubes, making sure the powerheads will be completely submerged when the tank is filled. (Do not plug in at this time.)

Add substrate: Rinse the new substrate (a kitchen colander works well) and decorations. Place them into the tank.

If you are not using an undergravel filter: Set up your filter now according to manufacturer directions that come with the filter. Do not plug your filter in at this time.

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.

Attach your powerfilter and protein skimmer now, following the manufacturer's directions.

Setting up a Saltwater Aquarium



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Fill the tank and add salt 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. Start adding commercial marine salt, a little at time, until you get a specific gravity reading of around 1.020 with your hydrometer. Your goal is a specific gravity of around 1.021-1.026. It may take up to 24 hours for the salinity level to stabilize, so wait before making your final salinity adjustments.

The heater and thermometer 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 it is. Clip-on non-submersible heaters that 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.

Install the heater appropriately to avoid overheating.

Install your thermometer according to the manufacturer's directions. 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, and air pump. 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 water as necessary to bring the water level to the appropriate level.

Wait 20 minutes, then plug in your heater, filter, powerheads and protein skimmer. If your powerheads have a feature that allows mixing air into the water output, turn them off.

Top off your water level, if needed. Following the instructions included with the heater, adjust your heater to keep your tank between 75 and 82 degrees.

Stabilizing period Your saltwater system is now set up and running, but don't rush off to buy fish just yet. You need to wait until the temp of your tank has remained stable at the appropriate temp for at least 24-48 hours. This allows the atmospheric gases in the water to dissipate, and makes certain that your heater is working correctly. Don't be surprised if your water becomes cloudy. Wait until the cloudiness dissipates before adding fish.

If the water temperature and salinity levels have remained stable for at least 24-48 hours, and the cloudiness has disappeared, 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 on Water Quality
PETCO Care Sheet for Nitrogen Cycling the tank