

RIP, Firefish Friend

A firefish's flame burns out.

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This is our personable firefish about a month ago. Sad days. Our beloved firefish disappeared from the tank recently. I have no idea what happened to him. He didn't appear sick. He was eating and swimming normally. One night he was fine, gobbling up his dinner and the next morning he was just gone. The little guy had been a part of our fishy family for about two years.

If anyone would have told me that I would cry over a fish before I got involved in reefkeeping I would have rolled my eyes. But here I am, absolutely heartbroken again. I often wonder why I take it so hard when a fish dies. I think part of it is tropical fish are just so darn beautiful. It's a shame to watch a pretty creature die.

Perhaps another aspect of it is the fact that I feel 100 percent responsible when anything in my tank dies. After all, I took it from the ocean for my own enjoyment, and I am the one trying to ensure that its living conditions are appropriate. I think that most of the time, it is my fault when something dies in the tank, even if I'm not aware of the cause. So I feel tremendous guilt every time a fish dies in my care.

Also, as anyone involved in reefkeeping knows, saltwater fish have wonderful personalities. I can tell you a lot about each one of my fish, and every one is different. Our firefish was adorable. He was the smallest fish in the tank, yet the boldest of all. He wouldn't even back down to our bully tomato clown. If Nemo charged, the firefish would hold his ground and open his mouth wide, spike straight up in the air. Nemo must be a wimp at heart because he always swam off.

The tiny but mighty firefish was also extremely curious. If I had my face close to the glass, he'd swim over and appear to be checking me out, wondering what to make of me (or possibly wondering if I was going to feed him!). He liked to hang out in the flow created by a powerhead, which placed him at the front of the tank for much of the day. Often, when somebody walked past the tank, all the other fish would startle and dart behind the rockwork. Not the firefish, though. He'd stay put, every time.

Years ago, it took a little work to sell my fiancé Jeff on the addition of a firefish. He thought they were too small and "girly" looking. But now there's no question that we are going to replace our little guy. Maybe we'll try a purple one this time (as long as Jeff doesn't think it's too girly!).

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