

Aquarium Necessities

Depending on your aquarium system, you can get by with less.

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I keep several different setups. I have a few low-tech planted tanks and a few fish-only setups. As readers of this blog know, I'm looking to expand my hobby and start a few high-tech planted tanks, too. In fact, I'm in the process of breaking down and restructuring my tanks.

All of this has me thinking about the process I've gone through since I decided to keep more elaborate setups. Initially, I only felt comfortable keeping less sophisticated setups. In hindsight, I'm very glad I took this route.

There's a lot of pressure to jump right into the more glamorous – and technical – areas of the hobby. We see beautiful planted tanks or reef setups online, in aquarium books and in magazines like FAMA. However, if I had started with a more elaborate setup, I would likely have experienced more than a few failures before I got it right.

Of course, I wouldn't let that stop me, but I know I would have been discouraged. And I can understand why others might experience something similar if they try to "shoot the moon" and establish a reef setup or a high-tech planted tank without first establishing a background in the hobby.

My Recommendations

So, I'm going on record to suggest that new aquarists reevaluate their expectations and plan to keep a basic setup with easy-to-keep fishes for their first go-around with aquariums. I've seen too many people try to start at the top, only to experience failure and decide to get out of the hobby.

It seems like this happens a lot with fledgling reef-keepers. I've heard of aquarium clubs preparing to buy used equipment from hobbyists who are getting out of the hobby for good because of a single mishap. This is likely far more common than it should be.

Causes of Discontent

What leads to this untimely exodus from the hobby? I suspect that new aquarists get caught up in the excitement of the hobby and purchase more than they are ready to handle.

It's true that aquariumkeeping doesn't have to be expensive. But when new aquarists attempt to move right to the more technical aspects of the hobby, they are doing themselves a disservice.

First, they pay for the privilege. In times past this wasn't necessarily as big a deal, but now, with everyone watching their pocketbooks, I think we'll see fewer people enter the hobby this way.

Second, they destroy their enthusiasm for something because they bite off more than they can chew. Some have success by diving in, but others need the time and experience of keeping a low-tech, undemanding system to gain experience and understanding of the aquarium hobby.

No Quick Fixes

So, I think it's time the aquarium hobby takes a step back and encourages new hobbyists to spend time learning the ropes. This is good for everyone. It may not be as interesting or profitable for the hobby right out of the gate, but instead of causing those with an interest to burn out early, we can build a sustainable interest that will lead to even greater accomplishments down the road.

We have to encourage success in new hobbyists. One way to do this is to set the record straight on what new hobbyists actually need to get into this hobby.

I'm going to be honest here. For the most part, aquarists don't need very much in the way of fancy gadgets or additives to succeed in the hobby. We've all seen the special additives, filtration inserts and water treatment products that, while certainly useful for certain situations, are not a requirement for those seeking success in the hobby.

You can get by on a shoestring budget and with minimal equipment or additives, if your setup is simple and undemanding.

All you really need is fish food, something to hold water and a source of fresh water, as long as the conditions you are trying to re-create are not too demanding.

Easy-to-keep fishes like guppies or other hobby staples thrive in the most basic of setups. Why not start at the bottom and develop a deeper understanding of the hobby?

Take it From Me

I know this works because of my own experiences. I've maintained a 3-gallon aquarium with nothing but guppies, a few rocks, pieces of wood and regular water changes for several years. This aquarium has no filtration or lighting. All I've had to do to be successful with this setup is perform regular water changes and keep to a sensible maintenance schedule.

My guppies don't mind though. They show me how happy they are by constantly breeding. I can't keep up with them. I don't use a heater, water conditioner or anything else. Maybe I'm just lucky in that I have good water quality. But as long as your water supply contains no chloramines, you can let chlorine dissipate from your tap water, negating the need for most water conditioning. You can speed this process up with an airstone. If you make sure your tap water doesn't have anything bad in it, such as excess nitrates or any toxins, you're home free.

The hobby is often guilty of implying that certain items are necessities when they really aren't. Hobbyists are often told to change out filter inserts on a regular basis, when in reality they can get by for a long time without doing this. The same is true of treatments and additives that do make the task of keeping aquariums easier, but ultimately aren't required.

Everyone in the hobby has to do a better job to keep new aquarists interested. If we build a real foundation for new aquarists to start in the hobby, they will eventually move onto more sophisticated setups. Then, they really will need all of the gadgets and equipment that make keeping reef setups and high-tech planted tanks possible.

When you're ready, you can move onto the high-tech stuff. Before then, save your money and your enthusiasm for the time when you can tackle the big hurdles in the hobby without stressing yourself to the point of failure.

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