

Favorite Fishes

What we see isn't always what we get when we're looking for fishes.

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Scarlet badis (Dario dario) by Gary Lange.

I've been giving a lot of thought to picking fishes for my 80-gallon planted tank recently. My two favorite fishes for freshwater aquaria are galaxy rasboras (Danio margaritatus) and scarlet badis (Dario dario).

However, neither may be appropriate for my 80 gallon. The galaxy rasboras would probably do OK, especially if I purchase captive-bred specimens, but the scarlet badis would likely have a hard time with all the other fishes I'm going to keep.

Both species do best in species setups, and I plan to breed both species in the future. In fact, I'm going to set up two 10-gallon aquariums, at the same time I start my 80 gallon, to act as supplemental locations for species I want to keep in conjunction with my 80 gallon.

What's Your Favorite?

This got me thinking about what other people look for in a "favorite fish." Is it purely an aesthetic issue for you? Or do you prefer oddball fishes? Maybe you have a thing for predatory fishes.

Whatever fish excites you, I have some suggestions for you in picking out a favorite fish and making sure you always stay your fish's favorite when it comes to keeping it happy and healthy in aquaria.

First off, know your fish before you buy. You wouldn't propose marriage to an attractive person you just met on the street, would you? The same logic applies to buying fishes.

Learn everything you can about your favorite fish. Figure out what you'll need to keep it happy in aquaria. All too often, aquarists see something striking and decide to add it to an existing setup, only to find it isn't compatible with their current tank inhabitants.

Aggression, water quality, space and compatibility, among many other parameters, all influence how well a species will do in captivity under certain conditions.

Consider the tradeoffs of keeping the species in an existing setup versus establishing a setup just for it. In the case of both my favorites, I'm going to establish a setup just for them so that I can propagate them carefully under controlled conditions.

You can build an entire aquascape around a specific species, too. Discus are a great example of this. Many people try to re-create a South American biotope setup just for these beautiful fishes. These setups don't have to be species specific, but the system will likely be designed to accommodate your favorite fish.

Aquarists get into trouble when they expect their pets to fit into their preconceived ideas of what their systems should be. Consider those who purchase aggressive cichlids and put them into community aquaria only to find that they've created an unsustainable situation for their other species. In these cases, what was a favorite fish can quickly become a least-favorite fish.

Don't just fall in love with a beautiful fish in the local fish store window and expect it to adapt to your existing setup. You've got to know what is best for your new fish. Make sure you provide the right setup, and not only will your fish be your favorite: You'll be your fish's favorite too.

So, what are your favorite fishes, fresh or salt? What do you do to keep them happy and healthy? Leave a comment below and let me know.

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