

Keeping Sharks in the Home Fish Aquarium

What sharks can you keep in a home fish aquarium?

By Scott Michael

Epaulette shark.

Q. I've been looking around a fish dealer and found two fish I would like to keep. The fish I like are called the nurse shark and the banded shark. I have a 20-gallon high marine aquarium with a box filter and undergravel filter. Would I be able to keep these types of fish? Exactly how big do these fish grow? Are these fish true sharks? Would I need a bigger aquarium? If so, how big? Any advice would be very much appreciated.

A. Don't do it! That's my advice. First of all, a 20-gallon aquarium is too small for any shark (the two species of sharks you mention are "true" sharks — that is, they are members of the subclass Elasmobranchii)! Even those sharks that attain smaller sizes and are well-suited for captive life should be housed in aquariums of 180 gallons or more as adults.

The banded bamboo shark (*Chiloscyllium punctatum*), which is sometimes referred to as the banded shark, is one of the better aquarium species. However, even a newly hatched individual (they hatch at about 5 inches long) should be kept in an aquarium of 30 gallons or more, and this would be a very temporary home.

Other suitable aquarium species are the whitespotted bamboo shark (*Chiloscyllium plagiosum*), epaulette shark (*Hemiscyllium ocellatum*) and the coral catshark (*Atelomycterus marmoratus*). The nurse shark (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*) is a terrible choice for the home aquarium, not because smaller individuals will not readily acclimate to captivity, but because they can reach a maximum length of 14 feet!

And don't be fooled into thinking that public aquariums are dying to take a pet shark from you when it outgrows its home — they are not. So get a bigger aquarium and select one of the shark species that are better suited for the home aquarium. Good luck.