

## Not All Tap Water is Created Equal - Part 3

### What's in your aquarium water?

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When you have a problem with your freshwater fish, the first place to turn (after FishChannel.com forums, of course) is to your local fish store. They are eager to help you, and they will usually ask you a few questions about the water in your tank. It's really important that you either bring in a water sample for them to test at the store, or that you actually test the water yourself and tell them the results. The parameters the local fish store will need to know are:

pH – how acidic/alkaline the water is.

Ammonia – the result of fish waste, uneaten food, etc.

Nitrite – the second stage of the nitrogen cycle; bacteria have changed ammonia into nitrite

Nitrate – the final stage of the nitrogen cycle; other bacteria have changed nitrite into nitrate

When the folks at your local fish store ask you for these four parameters it is not because they are quizzing you – there is no right answer – they need to know these readings to begin to help you out. The answers to the four questions are numbers. I can't tell you how many times I've been in a fish store and had the worker ask the customer for these readings, and have the customer say "It's all right" or "The water is crystal clear." If you have problems with your freshwater fish your local fish store can help you out – but they need for you to help them help you.