

Why Keep Aquatic Plants?

Bonus content from the March 2009 AFI magazine article "Three Tough Planted Tanks."

By David Lass

As with just about everything in this wonderful hobby of ours, planted aquariums are equally as much art as they are science, and there is always something new to learn about them. While doing as much research as possible on the topic, it is of primary importance that you find out which plants will do well in your water conditions and with the way you run your tanks. In my experience, what works best is the simple "low-tech" method of keeping a planted aquarium. Also, the reason I keep fish tanks is because I really like fish. Plants are interesting, and I have them in all of my tanks, but it is the fish that I am primarily interested in. Plants are there because I think that fish look better in planted tanks, and I know that tanks with a lot of live plants are healthier than tanks without plants. If you want to get into the "high-tech" planted tanks of the Amano style, in addition to taking a lot of your time, you need to be prepared to shell out a fair amount of money for the extra lighting and the CO2 system that is required. In addition, there are a number of recommended additives, so much so that you will be adding things to your tank on pretty much a daily basis. If this is the route you want to take, I strongly urge you to join the Aquatic Gardeners Society (aquatic-gardeners.org). Personally, I want to keep more animals than a few tetras, some *Otocinclus*, maybe a few Siamese-algae eaters and an expensive group of shrimp; these, you will notice, are about the only things swimming around in those gorgeous Amano-style planted tanks.

Back in the Dark Ages when I had my local fish stores, we were one of the few stores that kept plants in tanks on the floor (along with the feeder comets), below the fish-selling tanks. Today, many of the good stores have large, well-stocked planted tank departments, including all of the lighting, substrates and additives needed to make any hobbyist successful in keeping live plants. In addition to the local fish stores, there are a number of plant providers on the Internet. As opposed to your local fish store where you can see exactly what you are getting, when you order things out there in cyberspace, you need to be extremely careful about the folks you are dealing with.

FishChannel.com, the website for this magazine and our sister magazine, Freshwater and Marine Aquarium, are excellent sources for information about everything having to do with the aquarium hobby. To learn more about plants, you can go to "Plant Particulars" on the forums and see the many topics and posts about planted aquariums. As with just about everything in this wonderful hobby of ours, there is a lot to learn about keeping live plants – but learning is half the fun of the hobby.

Want to read the full story? Pick up the March 2009 issue of Aquarium Fish International, or subscribe to get 12 months of articles just like this.