

## Aquarium Setups for Kids

**Bonus content from the October 2009 AFI magazine article "Are Kids No Longer in the Aquarium Hobby?"**

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The best way to keep interested kids in the hobby is to ensure success with their first tanks. Here are some examples of simple aquarium setups that are easy to keep but still interesting and educational.

### A Betta in a Gallon

The Siamese fighting fish (*Betta splendens*) enjoys unparalleled popularity among hobbyists and nonhobbyists alike. Though these fish are often displayed in tiny jars in shops, this is not how they were meant to be kept long-term. For a very simple betta habitat, you can use at least 1 gallon of water. Add a little gravel and a sprig of greenery, and you will have a curious, alert pet that will survey your world with the same aplomb that you survey his. Caution: Male bettas are territorial and will fight to the death, so keep only one per aquarium. Also, if you do keep your betta in a 1-gallon container without a filter, make sure to do sufficient water changes to keep it healthy.

### 10 Gallons of Softwater Fishes

Tiny fish are the key to success here. The dwarf pencilfish (*Nannostomus marginatus*) grows to less than 1.5 inches, so keep a modest school. Ideal tankmates would be rasboras (especially the dwarf rasbora, *Rasbora maculata*), Corydoras, Apistogramma or various small tetras (especially the small ones, such as the lemon, *Hyphessobrycon pulchripinnis* or neon tetras, *Paracheirodon innesi*). The water should be warm (between 76 and 82 degrees Fahrenheit), soft and acidic, with a pH of 6.0 to 6.5 being ideal. The aquarium should be well-furnished with live or artificial plants and driftwood. In a small aquarium, restrict the number of species in the community to three, perhaps four, and if you find the aquarium can accommodate more fish, it's better to increase the number of specimens in the schools than to add new species.

### 20-Gallon Tanks for Hardwater Fishes

The krib (*Pelvicachromis pulcher*) is a west African cichlid well-suited to hard (as well as brackish) water. Dwarf neon rainbows (*Melanotaenia praecox*) are also appealing and not too large. There is no reason not to keep livebearers if you have hard water. The many varieties of guppy, molly, platy and swordtail are all quite adaptable and do well in diverse water chemistry, except perhaps the softest water with low pH.

The African rift lake cichlids are naturals for the hardwater community. Use only one fish of each species, preferably male, with only four to five individuals for a 20-gallon tank. Use decorations, such as rocks, that help to form discrete territories to avoid confrontations.

### 30-Gallon Neutral Community Tank

One Angelfish (*Pterophyllum scalare*) surrounded by a court of small, peaceful tetras and some Corydoras makes for a good community tank. Using a single angelfish allows the tank to stay socially stable in the long-term. Having several angelfish in a community setting will lead to trouble as the fish mature and start to pair off. To keep the peace, make the angel the center of attention, and add peaceful tankmates.

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