

Getting Kids in the Aquarium Hobby

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

If you are a fishkeeper and a parent, sharing your hobby with your child can bring you closer together, open the lines of communication and educate your child. Unfortunately, fishkeeping has a hard time competing for children's attention these days — kids' lives are filled with the Internet, video games, school activities and friends -- and going to a fish show with dad may not seem like the most exciting thing in the world. As hard as it sounds to convince your kids that fish are cool, if you succeed, it will be worth the effort. Getting your kids interested in fishkeeping will give them valuable education, healthy emotional development and intellectual exercise, as well as instill in them understanding and caring for the natural world.

Young children are easy to inspire. At an appropriate age, get them their own tank without expecting that they will do all the work. Kids will love to decorate their tank and pick out their own fish — within reason, of course. At this age, they don't need to know all the details about fishkeeping (pH may be a little too advanced for a 5 year old), but before going to the store, tell them that they can choose between X, Y and Z fish because those are the fish that will do well in their tank. Don't buy them that cool marine fish that will eventually grow to 3 feet. Even if they scream and cry that they want a specific type of fish, ensure them that they can work their way up to harder fish. Always start your kids off with a good chance at success.

Teenagers can be more difficult to convince. Finding out what your teens like can help you show them that fish really can be interesting. Some kids may be easier to bring over to the fishkeeping hobby, especially if they like science or animals, while some kids may be nearly impossible. For kids that resist the hobby, don't force them to go to a fish show with you or make them keep a fish they don't want. Take gradual steps. To begin with, offer to bring them to the fish store with you one Sunday afternoon when you need to pick up a replacement filter. Let them browse the fish, and tell them any interesting tidbits you know. Chances are that if they don't want a fish now, their exposure to fish as a kid may inspire them to keep a tank later on in life.

If your teenager likes science, you're one of the lucky ones. Get a kid's microscope set, and show them all the cool critters that live in your community tank. Look at aquarium plants, water, algae and even detritus under the microscope. If your child has an affinity for art, they can photograph, draw or paint fish. Have a feeling your child is a future business-owner? These children can recruit friends to the hobby by breeding and selling baby fish. Most likely, there is a way to get your child interested in fish. Just stay patient and don't pester them. Even if it seems impossible, if you've exposed them to fish when they are children, they'll come over to the fishkeeping side sooner or later!

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.