

FishKidz

Keeping pairs of African Cichlids is full of surprises.

By David A. Lass

Q. I'm 15 and have kept freshwater fish for the last few years. I've been thinking about keeping a bigger aquarium (30 to 55 gallons is what I have in mind). I now have a pair of red zebra cichlid fish (*Pseudotropheus zebra*) in a 10 gallon; the male is about 1 ½ inches, and the female is an inch. I was told that eventually they would need a bigger aquarium. So, I plan to set up a mbuna cichlid aquarium. I am hoping to keep *Pseudotropheus demasoni* and some *Labeotropheus fülleborni* cichlid fish with my *Pseudotropheus zebra*. I've read that *Labeotropheus fülleborni* is a good algae-eater. Other than that, I haven't found much info on this fish or *Pseudotropheus demasoni*. Could you give me some details on these fish? Also, could you tell me if my plan for at least a pair of each would work for either 30 or 55 gallons?

Harold Bosstick

A. Whether you can keep pairs of African cichlid fish together in an aquarium is a hit-or-miss thing - and mostly "hit," in that they will really scrap with each other, especially when they begin to breed. Your existing 10-gallon aquarium will be too small for the pair of zebras, and the male may beat up the female. If they do breed, and you notice the female holding eggs, remove the male as soon as possible.

A 30 gallon should be all right for two pairs, but you would be better off going with a 55. To keep three pairs would require a 100-gallon aquarium or larger. In either case, provide plenty of rock piles in different parts of the aquarium, so each species should be able to establish and hold a territory.

The other way that some people keep mbunas is to crowd so many of them into an aquarium that none can establish a territory. This is a dangerous, and I do not recommend it. The aquarium must be heavily filtered if you have that many fish in it, and you cannot miss doing weekly water changes.

If you have a big enough aquarium with enough rockwork, you may find some surviving babies that just show up sometimes. If you want to get a good amount of babies, however, you should remove any female that is holding eggs (it will be very obvious: the buccal cavity, the fancy name for her throat, will be visibly distended). You can either put the egg-holding female into an aquarium of her own (your 10 gallon would be fine), or you could strip the eggs from her and hatch them in a hatching tumbler.

Labeotropheus fülleborni require vegetable matter in their diet, but they are not a fish we would normally refer to as an "algae-eater." They will, in fact, munch on algae in the aquarium if it is to their liking, but they do not necessarily clear algae from surfaces the way that *Plecostomus*, *Ancistrus* or *Otocinclus* do.

Include plenty of vegetable matter in the diet of all African cichlid fish. You can do this by feeding any of the fish foods prepared specifically for Africans. You can also provide them with *Spirulina* flakes or disks three times a week, which are pure *Spirulina* algae and which they will love. If you want to give them regular vegetables, the best are spinach, romaine lettuce or squash. Put them in the microwave for a minute or two to break down the fibers before feeding them to your fish.