

Fish Aquarium Setup Decorations

Three creative fish aquarium setup decoration ideas.

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Few things are as captivating as a beautifully decorated aquarium replete with colorful tropical fish. An aquarium is a miniature world, its design only limited by our imagination and the effort we are willing to exert. But as conscientious aquarists, we sometimes become so involved in the acquisition of the aquarium and focusing on the biological cycle that the fun part — aquascaping — is often relegated as an afterthought.

We will look at three easy and unique aquascapes I have created in my aquariums, which will hopefully stimulate your imagination and creativity. Although I'm describing my aquariums and mentioning their sizes, you can adjust the amount of aquascaping you do to fit larger or smaller setups. [Click image to enlarge](#)

This aquarium, the setup called "The Abyss" here, is a natural-looking aquarium using artificial plants.

The Abyss

Our first aquarium, which we'll call "The Abyss," takes the approach of a natural-looking 20-gallon aquarium with artificial plants and resin logs. It is ideal for herbivorous or destructive species, and is also perfect for those aquarists who don't have the time or desire to maintain live plants. Artificial plants today are remarkably realistic and durable. Some made of seaweed are even edible and provide a nutritious snack.

The Abyss has between 1 to 1.5 inches of quartz gravel, which is deep enough to hide the plant anchors. The gravel is deeper toward the front glass and gently slopes rearward, leading the viewer's eye toward the back of the aquarium. Two fluorescent lighting strips can be used to create an eerie appearance of looking deep into the abyss. Actinic lighting borrowed from a reef aquarium is positioned over the back of the aquarium, which projects a violet hue, and a full-spectrum light is placed as close to the front of the aquarium as possible to fill the aquarium's frontal area with illumination that replicates daylight. The unusual lighting, coupled with a mirror that is positioned outside along the back of the aquarium, gives the aquascape an illusion of tremendous depth. It is similar to what a scuba diver would see prior to entering a spectacular freshwater cave.

The Abyss is the most difficult to clean of the three aquariums presented in this creative decor feature because it has multiple artificial logs and numerous faux plants, each capable of trapping debris.

Southeast Asia Biotope

Our second aquarium is a biotope theme: a southeast Asia biotope for bettas. Aquatic, bog and terrestrial plants used together here create a stillwater wetland theme. The sustained popularity of the betta has created a sizable niche market for designer bowls and miniature life-support equipment. The male betta is very beautiful, but unfortunately, we all know that keeping more than one in an aquarium is impractical due to the behavior of these pernicious fish. Our 2.5-gallon themed aquarium overcomes this challenge by using transparent plastic partitions to keep them separated. In my tank, the partitions are constructed from a clear plastic sheet that formerly covered a framed movie poster (you can also use Plexiglas). The thin plastic is very pliable, so I cut the two sheets just slightly wider than the aquarium's width and wedged them firmly into place. [Click image to enlarge](#)

Aquariums sectioned off to house multiple bettas do not have to be drab — each betta "room" can be decorated.

The aquarium is divided into thirds with one fish on each end and the mid-section of the aquarium containing emergent and water-tolerant terrestrial vegetation. Each fish's "room" is decorated with live and artificial vegetation with color schemes chosen to complement the fish coloration. My right betta room is decorated with silvery artificial plants that accent the fish's vivid red hue, while the blue betta on the left is contrasted with bright artificial vegetation. Both betta rooms have several live sprigs of Java fern (*Microsorium pteropus*). The aquarium's mid-section is planted with lucky water bamboo (*Dracaena*), umbrella palm (*Cyperus alternifolius*) and heart-leaf philodendron (*Philodendron scandens*).

For ease of maintenance, the aquarium can remain bare-bottomed or perhaps have a thin one-eighth-inch layer of sand. Lighting is provided by a simple desk lamp. Cleaning this aquarium with a siphon is relatively easy.

Mississippi River

Our final aquarium is something fun for our younger hobbyists: a Mississippi River aquarium. This 20-gallon aquarium projects the viewer deep into the mystique of the turbulent Mississippi River. The old-time paddle-wheeler, taken years ago by this tumultuous river, rests along shoals prowled by ominous alligators and snapping turtles. The aquarium has varying depths (1 to 2 inches) of mixed blue and brown gravel, giving the aquarium a muddy river bottom effect, yet also providing subtle color contrast. The riverbank is one large resin log, and the scuba diver, alligator, turtle, frog and sternwheeler are all nontoxic, aquarium-safe items. [Click image to enlarge](#)

A fun setup for younger hobbyists could include all sorts of unrealistic decor. This theme depicts a Mississippi River look.

Combining incandescent and fluorescent lighting gives this aquascape its unique appearance. In my aquarium, a piece of frosted glass was inserted between the fluorescent light and the aquarium's glass top to help diffuse and soften the bright illumination. The frosted glass is 2-inches wide and runs the entire length of the aquarium. A 20-watt incandescent spotlight mounted on a gooseneck lamp shines directly over the diver to give the appearance of sun rays striking the water at high noon. Black foil is wrapped around the outside back and sides of the aquarium to complete the dark river effect.

This is the easiest of the three aquariums to maintain. Because it is a rather dimly lit aquascape, algae growth should not be a problem. Additionally, cleaning simply requires removing the single resin background log and a few decorations. It doesn't get any easier than that.

Three very different designs are presented here, yet all of them are very easy to replicate. It is most interesting to note that creative lighting can completely change the effect or mood of your underwater world. Have fun!