

## Finding a Good Local Fish Store

**Not all local fish stores are created equal.**

*By David A. Lass*

Just as with anything else in life, there are good fish stores/departments and there are bad ones. Whether a retail pet/fish store is worthy of your business primarily depends on the folks who are working in the fish department – their knowledge, attitude and whether they really want to help you, or are just putting in their hours.

I always encourage hobbyists to patronize their local fish store, but I do not encourage that they should do this to the exclusion of the big box stores. There are good and bad examples of both categories of stores – the only difference is that at your local fish stores, you have a pretty good chance of dealing with, or at least meeting, the owner of the store.

In a post on the FishChannel Forums, I suggested that we come up with a series of questions that we could ask the first time we go into a store so we could ascertain whether the folks selling the fish know what they are doing.

The suggested questions below have been condensed from some suggestions by the loyal posters on the FishChannel Forums. It is very important when you use this strategy that you maintain a straight face – as the idea is for you to “play dumb,” and I know most of you who read this are not at all that way.

These questions are for freshwater only.

What's the best size aquarium for me to start off with?

Right – The largest you can afford and think you can maintain well.

Wrong – Why don't you start off with this 5-gallon kit?

How many fish can I keep in that 8-gallon cube aquarium – I really like the red color.

Right – A betta and a few white clouds, or four or five guppies.

Wrong – As many as you want. Or, more than six.

Can I keep some of those little goldfish in this glass bowl?

Right – NO WAY.

Wrong – Any answer other than NO WAY.

You have all those goldfish there called “feeders” – can I just buy four of them and put them in this 2-gallon aquarium?

Right – Those goldfish are only for feeding to other fish – you won't be happy trying to keep them for any length of time.

Wrong – Yes, and how about a pleco and a betta?

What do I do if the fish I buy get to be too big for their aquarium?

Right – You need to be prepared for keeping this fish in a very large aquarium when it is mature; you really may have trouble with our store, or any other, taking back a mature “biggus monsterus”.

Wrong – Don't worry, any local fish store will be happy to take the fish back when it gets too large for you to keep.

My aquarium has all this green stuff over everything – I'm pretty sure it's algae, and someone told me to get a pleco fish?

Right – Common plecos get too big for your aquarium, and why don't we try and figure out what is causing the algae and correct it?

Wrong – Sure, they stay small and cute, or maybe you would like a Chinese algae eater.

I keep hearing about cycling my fish aquarium – what does riding a bicycle have to do with keeping my fish?

Right – They should have a handout sheet explaining the nitrogen cycle and how to cycle your aquarium.

Wrong – Don't worry; cycling a new aquarium isn't a big deal.

How many of those cute little Oscars can I keep in my 10-gallon aquarium?

Right - NONE.

Wrong – Any answer other than NONE.

I need to be adding chemicals to my aquarium – but what do I need and how often do I add them?

Right – If you run your aquarium the right way, you shouldn't need anything.

Wrong – Yes, you need one bottle of this stuff, and another bottle of this, and, of course, you need to be using methylethylawful.

Hopefully, you get the idea from the questions suggested above. Finding a good fish store – be it a local fish store or the fish department of a big box store – is really important to your success in this wonderful hobby of ours. One final suggestion is that you go and hang out in the fish store(s) at a time when they are not very busy. On a busy weekend, you will probably not get the attention you want, but on a lazy Tuesday afternoon, you and your questions will probably be a welcome to the folks in the fish department.