

Australian Aquarium Plants and Fish

Australian biotope fish tank with fish and plants.

By Karen Randall

Q. I am thinking of changing my 90-gallon aquarium to a planted aquarium. Articles about Australian fish in previous issues have gotten me interested in rainbows again. I would like to keep an aquarium with rainbowfish and aquatic plants from Australia. Finding the fish is easy, but the plants are a different story. Are there plants in the hobby that come from Oz and do they require any extra care? I live in Ohio and the water is hard and generally neutral.

A. I applaud your interest in learning about the flora native to Australia. Remember, though, Australia is a huge place. Just as in the United States, there is a large range of biotopes and climatic zones. So, while it is fun to learn about a particular area and its aquatic plants and fish, I wouldn't get overly hung up on the idea of matching nature. If you are seriously interested in a biotope aquarium, aesthetics must take a back seat. Many of the habitats where our aquarium fish are found are not the most beautiful. For most of us, our aquariums are only (I hope) a beautiful surrealistic representation of a general area.

There are, of course, many aquatic plants native to Australia. There are also many plants that grow worldwide. It would be challenging for a non-Aussie native to obtain many Australian plants, but there are some commercially available species that can be used. In addition, you may want to consider using a non-native species of a genus that is native to Australia to increase the variety of aquatic plants.

Some commercially available plants that are Aussie natives are *Azolla*, *Bacopa monnieri*, *Ceratophyllum demersum* (hornwort), *Ceratopteris thalictroides* (water sprite), *Vallisneria gigantea*, *Vallisneria spiralis*, *Riccia fluitans*, *Lemna* sp. (duckweed), *Hygrophila salicifolia*, *Eleocharis* sp. (hair grass), *Fontinalis* sp. (willow moss), *Myriophyllum* sp. and *Glossostigma elatinoides*.

Because red plants are missing from this list, and red plants are the "flowers" in the aquatic garden, I would be tempted to add commercially available species from the genera *Ammannia* and *Ludwigia*. Both of these genera are present in Australia, although the native species, *A. bacifera* and *L. peploides*, are not commercially available at this time. For more information on Australian fish and aquatic plants, you might want to visit the Australia New Guinea Fishes Association Web site.