

## Raphael Catfish

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*By Ginny Eckstein*

Q. I recently purchased a raphael catfish. He is in a community aquarium and doing well. I plan on moving him into another aquarium with young (2-inch) angelfish. What can you tell me about this fish's temperament and requirements?

A. Raphael is a trade name for several different South American catfish, all members of the family Doradidae. They all have three pairs of barbels (no nasal barbels) and "scutes" that almost look like zippers down their sides.

In the aquarium, they're actually model residents due to their undemanding nature. They don't bother other fishes and are certainly on the bottom rung when it comes to intraspecific aggression (that is, they are peaceful with members of their own species). Their behavior is somewhat reclusive, so be sure to include a cave or similar place in your aquarium for your raphael to call "home." They will adapt to and tolerate a wide variety water conditions and temperatures. Of course, regular partial water changes are necessary for optimal health.

As far as feeding is concerned, they will eagerly devour black worms or Tubifex worms, but also readily accept sinking pellets or tablet food. Be sure to add some fish food for your catfish after you turn your aquarium lights off.

The species generally considered to be raphaels include *Agamyxis pectinifrons* — the spotted raphael, *Platydoras costatus* — the striped raphael, and *Orinocodoras eigenmanni* — the "long-nosed" striped raphael. This last species is more active in the aquarium when kept in a group of three or more. Under this circumstance, they will eagerly compete with other freshwater fish for food at the surface of the aquarium. Look for this species as "contaminants" (accidentally included with shipments) in aquariums of regular striped raphaels. Another species, *Acanthodoras cataphractus*, the chocolate or red raphael, is distinguished by the distinctive patterning on its stomach.

When you move your raphael — regardless of which variety it is — into its new aquarium, avoid "netting" the fish. They have powerful dorsal and pectoral spines that they "lock" into place, which will trap the fish in the net. The usual end result when this happens is that you will have to cut the net in order to free it. This leaves you with a highly stressed catfish swimming around with small sections of green netting stuck on its spines (eventually it falls off) and a destroyed aquarium net. Better to use a plastic fish bag or a container, such as Tupperware, to move your catfish into its new home.

Because raphaels are relatively inexpensive and easy to care for, I'm sure that you'll end up owning more the one. Enjoy your catfish!