

Fish Rooms

Setting up a fish room.

By Miller Morgan

When it comes to communities of fish, we concern ourselves with compatibility. We want all the fish in our aquariums to get along. When it comes to the aquarium hobby in our homes, compatibility is also an issue. In this case, it's about what happens when you have aquariums in the living room, family room, hallways, and even a bedroom or two. Family members, significant others or roommates may not be as excited as you are about the proliferation of tanks.

Yes, I know: What's not to love about aquariums? But the fact is, if you have more than one or two display tanks - particularly large ones - it may be time to consider taking control of your aquariums.

If your involvement in the hobby is growing, you are almost certain to add more tanks, often many smaller ones to accommodate additional species or growing fry as your fish breeding efforts become more successful. When you find yourself trying to figure out where a new tank should go, it's time to reconsider where all of them should go.

The answer to all this is a fish room. Now, I can assure you that many - including those who actually love you - will find the idea of a room dedicated to aquariums to be perilously close to confirmed insanity of some sort. So, you also want to know about the practical reasons for a fish room, both to justify the concept to others and because you may not realize the advantages a fish room brings to your hobby.

Benefits of Consolidation

A fish room is like a home office. You could put the desk, computer, file cabinet and other items in existing rooms, but in terms of convenience, usability and efficiency, a dedicated office makes more sense. In a fish room, all the aquariums (and thus all the fish), equipment, accessories and food are together and easily accessible. You can also have a library of aquarium books, maps of the exotic origins of your fish on the wall and places to set everything from fish show awards to your collection of ceramic fish (or whatever).

A fish room provides a place where you can relax and enjoy your hobby without imposing upon others. It's not that you can't still have a really nice display tank in the family or living room, and not that you won't have visitors to your fish room. But it is your sanctuary from the nonhobby world.

Fish rooms can contain a few tanks or dozens of aquariums. Given that the number of tanks and their sizes will depend on your involvement in the hobby, you can make the room small or large, depending on the amount of available space and access to utilities such as water and electricity. A fish room can be within an existing structure, or you can even construct a separate building for this (typically quite modest in size) with a built-in water supply, floor drain and numerous electrical outlets.

You may not necessarily know how much space you will need in the future, but there is something to be said for limiting room for future growth - doing so keeps things from getting out of hand. Honestly, there's more to life than aquariums, and you don't want to find yourself so obligated to a large fish room that you don't have time for family, friends and other activities. You also don't want to suffer burnout if the time and effort needed for tank maintenance and fish feeding becomes overwhelming.

Plan the Ideal Fish Room

Planning your fish room starts with determining if there's available space somewhere in your house, the garage or an adjacent building. This space should possess certain characteristics that are important, even essential, for a fish room.

First, consider the actual amount of space: the floor area and wall dimensions. Obviously, this will determine how many aquariums of various sizes will fit along the walls and what will be left over to work with (including space for other items, such as a desk, bookcase and shelving).

There are two ways to figure out the number of aquariums to set up. If the available space is fixed, work through various combinations of tank sizes to see how many will reasonably fit (make sure you know the outside dimensions of the sizes you're interested in). Then decide how you might stack the tanks on racks: one above the other, staggered in rows one behind the other or some combination. To save space with small tanks, such as standard 10s and 20s, some hobbyists

place the aquariums so that you view the fish from the side rather than the front glass - you can almost double the number of tanks for a given length of rack or wall space.

Alternatively, you could determine the specific number of each tank size you want and then work out how much space is needed.

Sufficient working space is vital. Not having enough space around the tanks to do regular maintenance makes the task at least difficult, if not completely distasteful. Without enough space, you will have problems getting to the lowest rows of tanks and find yourself bumping other tanks or even the walls while trying to maneuver hoses, buckets and nets.

Filling aquariums and emptying them, along with partial water changes, requires convenient access to water and either a sink or drain. Using a bucket for these tasks might work for a tank or three, but is simply inadequate for a fish room. Given the inevitable water spills that will occur, a floor that's impervious to water damage, and a drain to catch and remove water are also important.

Electricity is obviously necessary to operate pumps (water and air), filters, heaters and other equipment, as well as room lights and tank lights (although you may want to dispense with individual tank lights to save money on fixtures and lamps, as well as the electricity to operate them). You will need sufficient plugs along the wall (even if you are also using power strips) and enough electrical capacity to handle the amperage requirements for tank or room heaters. Heating the tanks in winter will become a significant cost. If the tanks are densely stocked and aeration cannot provide sufficient dissolved oxygen in the water, you will need to provide cooling in the summer - another cost to factor in.

One way to get around having many aquarium heaters in operation is to heat the room instead, which will be more efficient and cost effective in the long run than multiple heaters in the tanks. Having effective insulation in walls and the ceiling can make a big difference, regardless of what combination of tank and room heaters you end up with, so make sure you can insulate your fish room in some way. If you cannot add insulation to an existing finished wall, you might consider placing sheets of styrofoam over the walls, with a vapor barrier between the styrofoam and wall. If you section off space in a garage or basement that isn't already heated, the value of insulation becomes even more important.

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