

Equipment

- 1 Glass or plastic aquarium
- 2 Gravel cleaner
- 3 Water testing kit
- 4 Tap water conditioner or RO water if available
- 5 Gravel
- 6 Filter
- 7 Food
- 8 Heater & thermometer

Before purchase make sure:

- 1 The aquarium is of a suitable size
- 2 Water parameters are as advised in this leaflet
- 3 If adding to an existing set-up ensure these fish are suitable before addition.

Checklist

Before purchase make sure that:

- 1 You have the appropriate equipment and position for the aquarium.
- 2 You have researched all the species you are interested in and your final choices are all compatible.
- 3 You are familiar with how to transport and release your fish.
- 4 You are aware of the daily, weekly and monthly maintenance your aquarium will require.
- 5 You are prepared to look after your fish properly for the duration of their life.



Never release your aquarium animals or plants into the wild

Never release an animal or plant bought for a home aquarium into the wild. It is illegal and for most fish species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death because they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment.

Important things to remember

Always buy...

test kits and regularly check the water for ammonia, nitrite, nitrate and pH. This will allow you to make sure the water in your aquarium is not causing welfare problems for your fish.

Establish a routine...

for testing the water in your aquarium. Record your results to enable you to highlight fluctuations quickly. Also check the temperature of the water.

Maintain...

the water in the aquarium within the accepted parameters highlighted in this leaflet. You may need to do regular water changes to achieve this.

Always wash your hands...

making sure to rinse off all soap residues, before putting them into your aquarium. Wash your hands again afterwards and certainly before eating, drinking or smoking.

Never siphon by mouth...

A fish tank can harbour bacteria which can be harmful if swallowed. Buy a specially designed aquarium gravel cleaner which can be started without the need to place the siphon in your mouth.



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If in doubt contact your OATA retail member for further information



Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association Ltd
The voice of the ornamental fish industry

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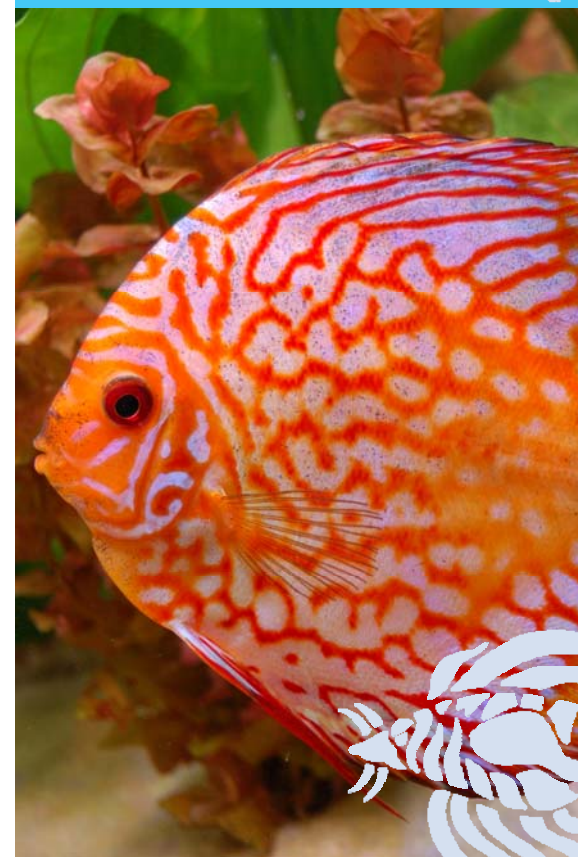


How to care for...



Discus

28 Tropical freshwater fish



Introduction

Discus belong to the genus *Symphysodon* and are held in the highest regard among fish keepers and by some as the ultimate freshwater tropical species.

These cichlids are found in the wild in South America. They do not have the same aggressive temperament as many other cichlids but have much more specialised care requirements.

Water requirements

These fish are highly sensitive to the water in which they live, how well you manage the water quality in the aquarium will determine how successful you will be as a discus keeper. It is recommended you maintain the following conditions in your aquariums:

Temperature: 26 to 30°C

pH: 6.0 to 7.5

Ammonia: 0mg/l (0.02mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

Nitrite: 0mg/l (0.2mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

Hardness: soft to moderately hard (0 to 12°dH)

Biology

These fish are fairly large although they do not grow quickly, a maximum body diameter of 20cm may be achieved in the ideal water conditions. All discus have a flattened body with short fins – it is this body shape which gives rise to the common name ‘discus’.

There is no easily discernible difference between the males and females, both species are brightly coloured and of similar size when fully grown. They can be sexed during breeding by looking at the genital papilla, which is pointed in males and rounded in females.

The *Symphysodon* genus contains three species from which the aquarium fish are derived. However, these three species are yet to be agreed among scientists, with recent studies contradicting each other.

There are many vibrant colour varieties available to purchase. Many have been especially bred for the aquarium market and can make striking displays in tanks.

Discus have a small stomach so eat regularly and can be found actively searching for food throughout the day.

Aquarium requirements

It is recommended discus are kept in groups of four or five. This coupled with the size they reach and the good water quality requirements mean large aquariums are recommended. As a guide they might be best provided with a minimum tank size of 200 litres. The addition of rocks and bogwood décor helps to mimic the natural environment. If you have a planted aquarium, be sure to provide the fish with open swimming spaces large enough to allow your group to move freely.

Good filtration is necessary to ensure the water chemistry remains stable. Other equipment required includes a heater, thermometer, lighting and water testing kit.

These fish live in moderately soft water. In order to achieve this the use of a RO water with added salts and minerals, dechlorinated tap water or de-ionised water is recommended. The fish may benefit most from the use of RO water. This will make the water extremely soft and allow for easy pH adjustments. Try, where possible, to match the water of your retailer when first purchased, and if you want to change the water from these levels do it slowly over a period of weeks. Captive bred discus are somewhat harder than previously available wild caught fish and can tolerate slightly alkaline harder water.

Maintenance

At least once every two weeks a partial water change of 25 to 30%, is strongly recommended although, more frequent smaller water changes would be preferable as this species is quite sensitive to rapid change. (a siphon device is useful to remove waste from the gravel). The water should be tested regularly to ensure that pollutants such as ammonia and nitrites do not build up. Ensure you either allow the replacement water to stand or aerate it to remove any chlorine present. Ideally treat all replacement water with tap water conditioner before adding to the aquarium.

Filters should be checked for clogging and blockages. If the filter needs cleaning then do not run it under the tap, any chlorine present may kill the beneficial bacterial population that has established in the media. Instead it can be rinsed in the tank water which is removed during a partial water change, this reduces the amount of bacteria which are lost.

Good husbandry is essential as these fish can be stressed by even the smallest amounts of ammonia and nitrite. Test the water to monitor the ammonia, nitrite and nitrate levels every week, especially during initial set-up and after adding extra fish.

Feeding

Discus are carnivores, therefore they require a meat-based diet. The use of specially formulated cichlid/discus foods occasionally supplemented with frozen beef heart and other frozen and live foods should provide a suitable diet.

These fish should be fed what they can eat within a few minutes 2 to 3 times a day. Remove any uneaten food to reduce waste build-up.

Potential problems

A water quality problem will affect fish behaviour and can be shown by clamped fins, reduced feeding, erratic swimming and gasping at the surface. Immediately test the water if any of these symptoms are shown. If in doubt ask your OATA retailer for advice.

Compatibility

Most discus enthusiasts keep their fish in species only tanks, due to the strict water quality they require. Often they can be kept with other hardy catfish such as members of the Corydorax family and medium sized tetras. There are reports of single specimens kept in community tanks failing to thrive.

Breeding

A group of juvenile discus bought together (and with a bit of luck) will form pairings. Alternatively some shops may also sell a proven breeding pair, however they are often more expensive.

A pair which is ready to breed will need to be placed into a breeding tank. This should be large enough for two adults and contain an unobstructed vertical surface onto which they can lay their eggs. Carry out regular partial water changes to induce spawning.

Eggs are deposited onto a vertical surface. These will hatch after three days and the free swimming fry will feed from mucus supplied through the skin of their parents. Fry food should be supplied from five days and remove young from the parents' tank to a separate tank at around two weeks of age.