

FEDERATION OF BRITISH AQUATIC SOCIETIES

AQUARIUM MANAGEMENT CARE SHEET No: 4 Setting up the Aquarium 01/01/98

SITING THE

AQUARIUM : Modern aquariums (all-glass or acrylic) are fragile so it is important that they are sited correctly. Their base must be both firm and level; any unevenness will cause stresses in the construction resulting in a flood! A filled aquarium is heavy so make sure that adequate floor support exists.

Do not site an aquarium in direct sunlight (it'll overheat in summer and grow too much algae!), opposite doorways or near radiators. A quiet recess, where you can control its lighting, is preferable and, of course, there should be a power socket nearby!

SUBSTRATE &

DECORATION : Wash all substrates thoroughly. Rinse about half a bucketful at a time. Spread over the tank base to about a depth of an inch or two: you can bank up the substrate towards the rear of the tank for a better visual effect – hold this banking in position by putting rocks in to act as terracing.

Pieces of bogwood look fine but make sure it is completely dead. You should soak it in several changes of water before use to get rid of most of the tannins in the wood, otherwise it will stain the water. Screw a flat plate on the bottom and bury this in the substrate to prevent the wood from floating.

Only use 'safe' decorations. Rocks should be non-soluble and contain no metallic ores. Sunken ruins, treasure chests and galleons must not be made of porous materials such as plaster; replica logs made from inert resins are fine.

HARDWARE : Visible hardware is not exactly ideal, so hide heaters, filters and pipework behind rocks or plants but without hindering water flow around the tank.

Heaters must be mounted clear of the substrate and have unrestricted water flow around them if they are not to overheat.

Fit isolating hose-taps to external filters (one in the flow and one in the return) for ease of maintenance. Airpumps should be situated above the tank if possible or an 'anti-siphon' loop formed in the airline to the aquarium. Alternatively, fit a non-return 'anti-siphon' valve in the airline to prevent water entering the pump if a power failure occurs.

Airlines are best connected to any diffusers in the tank via a controlling air valve.

Similarly, power to the heaters, lights and filters is best connected via a 'Cable Tidy' switching facility mounted in the side of the aquarium.

DO NOT SWITCH ON ANY HARDWARE UNTIL THE TANK IS FILLED WITH WATER

The cover glass and the hood are obviously placed in position after the tank has been furnished and filled with water. Add a thermometer once the tank is filled.

WATER PREPARATION

& FILLING : As this is the first time you will fill the aquarium you can treat the water with a dechlorinator when it is filled. Remember to calculate how much water you have used so that you can add the correct dosage to the tank when full. For subsequent water changes, adding dechlorinators and salt mixing will take place using separate containers as required.

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Similarly, if this is to be a marine aquarium, you can fill it with water (after placing rocks and hardware in position) and then add the correct amount of salt mix to the water to arrive at the correct Specific Gravity, although this 'salting up' should ideally be done once the water temperature is at the correct value.

Place a small saucer or a jug on the substrate and pour the water into this first. As it gently overflows, the rising water level will not then disturb any of your careful aquascaping nor **dislodge any plants which have yet to establish their roots.**

PLANTING : Bushy type plants are used to fill out spaces, especially corners to disguise the fact that the aquarium is a glass box! Tall grassy plants can also hide the sides and back.

Plants should be rooted in the substrate in species groups rather than singly.

Single, larger specimen plants can make focal points in the tank but never position such a plant smack bang in the middle of the tank. Low, slow-growing plants will form a 'lawn' over the substrate.

Plastic plants do have a place in the aquarium, especially where herbivorous fish make the keeping of live plants an impossibility. Remember that such plants will do nothing to keep water quality high – you will have to rely on filtration and your own good aquarium management for that.

Before planting, inspect each plant carefully for snail eggs (they're usually on the underside of leaves). Taking this precaution now will save a lot of trouble later on should you then have a snail-infested tank.

Some people plant the aquarium 'dry' whilst others fill up the aquarium with water about three-quarters full first. This allows the plants to take up their natural positions immediately and you can easily check on how your aquascaping and planting skills are progressing as you continue to furnish the tank. There's a good reason for only partially filling the tank at this stage – it won't overflow when you put your arms and hands in to plant it!

RUNNING IN : After planting, the tank completely filled and hood and cover glass installed, the power can be switched on.

Filters may need to be 'primed' before they flow continuously. Keep an eye on the thermometer so that you can verify that the heater is working correctly.

Operate the lights as normal, even though there are no fish in the aquarium.

You may wish to check the ammonia, nitrite and nitrate levels during this running in period (it may take a few weeks). Test kits are easy to use and you should see initial peak readings of ammonia and nitrite before these fall to zero.

At this time, the tank is said to be mature and now ready for fish. The nitrate level will be low to start with but gradually increase over the coming months.

STOCKING : Never add the complete tank holding capacity of fish at once.

This will overload the filter system and cause a massive wipe-out of stock. Add fish in few numbers at a time and remember that they will grow!

Once the original batch of fish have settled in, it might be prudent to set up a smaller tank as a quarantine area for any further fish that you wish to add to your collection. This will lessen the risk of introducing disease into the tank.