

Chapter 1

Tanks for the Memories

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the basics of aquariums
 - ▶ Looking at what goes in an aquarium
 - ▶ Understanding fish and plant choices
 - ▶ Expanding your hobby
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We think some of the most pleasurable moments in our lives have involved aquarium keeping. There is a special excitement that comes with owning a beautiful tank full of wonderful fish and plants. Most people have either owned an aquarium, lived in a house with a fish tank, or dreamed of putting one together.

Maddy remembers the first time her fish had babies. Her little heart was ready to burst with excitement and pride! She stayed up all night watching the new fry adjusting to their new world. She also remembers getting a \$20 gift certificate for her 10th birthday that she could redeem at the local fish store. She walked to that store feeling like she had just won the lottery. (Okay, she admits that she is older than dirt, and \$20 bought a lot in those days.)

She can still remember entering the store the day after her birthday and just feeling like she was in a whirlwind of new and exciting discoveries as she saw isle after isle of equipment and tank after tank of fish. Sound like fun? Well it is more than fun; aquarium keeping is hobby that can bring joy throughout your entire lifetime.

Many people think aquarium fish are harder to keep than other pets. This is simply not true. Everyone pretty much knows how to feed, water, and walk a dog, but many tend to shy away from setting up an aquarium because they worry about the minor details too much. Never fear, this book will show you how simple fishkeeping can really be so that you can start building your own memories.



You can be successful at any hobby you choose by simply understanding the basics:

- ✓ In this book you will learn the basic building blocks of an aquarium system such as tanks, gravel, equipment, plants, and fish.
- ✓ In this book you will learn how to make choices that will suit your needs and ideas so that you can make the perfect aquatic world that will bring you years of enjoyment and pleasure!
- ✓ In this book you will find many ways to expand your aquarium-keeping hobby.

Well, now that you are ready to get started on your new adventure into the wonderful world of fishkeeping, let's get going and see what else you are going to learn as you read this book.



If you have other immediate family members living with you, such as children, don't forget to get them involved in the aquarium decisions as well. By involving others, you will be able to share your new hobby from day one with those you love.

Seeing the Big Aquarium Picture

If you look at an aquarium from all sides and from the top, you will quickly see that it is just a glass, plastic, or acrylic box with a bunch of things added to it. It is as simple as that.

You may be asking yourself a few questions: What is the function of all this equipment, and how does the tank use them to run? Does it matter which fish and plants I choose? Is there a special type of water in the tank? How do I feed and care for my fish and plants?

These are all very good questions, and you have come to the right place for answers. Let's take a brief look and preview some of the main aquatic questions that people have when they are figuring out how to set up an aquarium.

Where do I put my tank?

People wonder where they should place an aquarium in their home. There are good places and bad places. Tanks should be placed away from direct sunlight and drafts. There are also household traffic issues and electrical considerations to take into account as well.

In Chapter 3 you learn how certain places in a room can affect the water temperature of your tank. You will also learn about how high-traffic areas have an impact on your fish, how close your water source needs to be to your tank, what electrical supply is required, and how much space will be ample to set up the tank that you want.

Every home has numerous spots to put an aquarium, and after reading Chapter 3, you will know exactly where to put your tank so that your fish will be safe and happy.

What type of tank and stand should I buy?

There are many sizes and shapes of aquariums and stands on the marketplace, and you may be wondering if you should start out with a small tank or a large tank. In Chapter 4, you learn that starting out with a larger tank will provide a more stable environment for your fish.

In that chapter you also learn the difference between glass, acrylic, and plastic aquariums. You will be given the information needed to purchase an aquarium stand that works best for your needs. Chapter 4 also shows you how to correctly move an aquarium if you ever decide to set your tank up in a different location or in a new home.

What do I put inside my aquarium?

When you look at different aquariums, you will see that they contain many different combinations of rocks, decorations and interesting objects such as driftwood. No big mystery here. Some items are necessary for your tank to run properly, and others are not.

In Chapter 5, you learn that gravel and/or other substrates are necessary for your aquarium. You also learn that the type and number of decorations in an aquarium come down to matter of individual taste (though some species do well with certain additions such as rock caves), and that this is an area that you can really let your creativity, decorating skills, and good taste shine.

Chapter 5 shows you what types of substrates there are and gives you good information on the types of decorations available. The chapter also gives you a good excuse to spend your “mad money” on cool-looking stuff.

What does all this aquarium equipment do?

Most new hobbyists get very confused when it comes down to deciding what equipment to purchase. As you find out in Chapter 6, there are many different options to choose from.

Chapter 6 explains filters, heaters, lighting, pumps, airstones, thermometers, tubes, valves, and hoods. In that chapter you will also learn the most important rule when it comes to purchasing equipment: Always buy the best that your budget will allow.



When it comes to setting up an aquarium, there are no shortcuts. You can't rush your down to your aquarium store, buy a bunch of stuff, and expect to have fish swimming around in your new tank within an hour. If you take the time to set up an aquarium properly, you will have fewer problems later on down the road.

Caring for Your New Aquatic Pets

Once you have read through the chapters that show you how to set up an aquarium system, you need to start thinking about what other things you will need to take care of the fish you will be purchasing. You will also have to get a general idea of what type of fish you will be purchasing so that you know what types of plants you will need and how to set up water conditions that are just right for the species you choose.

Why are so many fish so different?

A fish's physical makeup (fin shape and size, body shape, color, and so on) is important when determining what type of fish and what type of aquarium is needed for that particular species. For example, long, thin, streamlined fish such as danios tend to be speedy horizontal swimmers and love a tank that is long and not tall.

Chapter 7 explains the physical makeup of aquatic species so that you can understand what system your fish will enjoy most. This chapter also allows you to quickly see if there is a problem such as stress or disease by observing any deviation from your fish's normal body shape, fin shape, and swimming patterns.

Knowledge is not only power, it is also the best preventative method on earth for diagnosing aquarium problems before they get out of hand.

What type of fish is best for me?

There are so many choices in aquarium fish; you may wonder, where is the best place to start? Chapter 8 gives you a good selection of popular aquarium fishes so that you have a many good options to choose from right off the bat.

Of course, there are numerous other fish not listed in that chapter. It would take volumes to describe all the species available. Chapter 8 offers excellent choices for beginning hobbyists. These fishes are inexpensive, easy to find, forgiving of beginner mistakes, and will help get any aquarium off to a good start.

What should I look for when buying fish?

The best way to start out as a beginning fishkeeper is to develop a good relationship with a local pet store. A quality vendor can help you make decisions on the best way to set up or improve your system. They can also make good suggestions on fish compatibility and lend a hand if your fish become ill.

Chapter 9 helps you learn how to choose quality dealers and develop good relationships with them. This chapter also shows you how to select healthy fish for your new aquarium by providing information on how to evaluate the physical attributes and behavior of fish in a store.

The World Wide Web is a great place to find fish, plants, and equipment for your new aquarium, but nothing beats the wonderful feeling of walking through a tropical fish store and seeing everything up close with a helpful dealer at your side.

What should I feed my fish?

We all know that you can buy canned fish food. But nutrition goes beyond pre-manufactured dry food. Many species of fish have different nutritional requirements.

Chapter 10 helps you understand basic aquatic nutrition and shows you what and how to feed your fish properly.



A well-balanced diet for you fish can include prepackaged, frozen food, live food, and in some cases fresh vegetables.

What if my fish get sick?

Despite having the best setup possible, fish *will* eventually contract disease from time to time. This is usually not a cause for alarm because most fish illnesses can be cured.

Chapter 11 helps you identify stress, spot common problems ahead of time to prevent disease, treat common illnesses, set up a hospital tank to treat disease, and understand the importance of a quarantine tank to avoid introducing sickness into your main tank with newly purchased fish.



Never buy ill fish with the noble idea of taking them home and nursing them back to health. This practice will endanger your other fish and risk upsetting your current system.

Understanding Water, Chemicals, and Live Plants

In Part III, you learn many important new concepts:

- ✓ Chapter 12 shows you which water is safe to use in your aquarium.
- ✓ Chapter 13 helps you to understand what chemicals you can use to improve your aquarium conditions.
- ✓ Chapter 14 explains the nitrogen cycle and water testing so that your aquarium water will be perfect for your fish and plants.
- ✓ Chapter 15 describes the steps that are necessary to set up examples of a freshwater, coldwater, and indoor mini pond.
- ✓ Chapter 16 helps you understand the nature of live plants and what is required to keep them healthy and happy in a home aquarium.
- ✓ Chapter 17 offers some good examples of plants that are great choices for beginning aquarium keepers.
- ✓ Chapter 18 is a quick guide to fixing the most common aquarium problems.

Cool! A lot of great new stuff to learn!

Expanding Your Aquarium Hobby

Setting up and maintaining an aquarium is only the beginning. If you want to expand your hobby, you can do many fun and interesting projects.

Can I breed my fish?

Many hobbyists love to breed their fish for fun and profit. If you become really good at breeding, you may even come up with a new color or pattern for the world to enjoy. Chapter 19 helps you find the right water conditions, feeding schedule, plants, and equipment for breeding fish. It also tells you how to help coax your fish into mating. When you get to Chapter 20, you will learn how to decide which fish to breed, how to select strong breeding traits, the best way to care for fry and protect them from other fish, and how to succeed in this wonderful and challenging aspect of the hobby.

How do I keep track of all my fish?

Many hobbyists are concerned about remembering every fish and the problems and success they have had with each species. Chapter 21 helps you cut through the clutter by teaching you how to accurately record fish data and photograph your fish for fun, education, and potential profit.

How do fish shows work?

Like dog shows, fish also have their own competitions. Fish shows can be a lot of fun. Chapter 22 explains how to get your fish in top form, the best way to transport your aquatic friends to a show, how to set up once you arrive, and the standards by which your species will be judged.

Is there another type of aquarium system?

Once you have mastered the basics of freshwater fishkeeping, Chapter 23 gives you a brief overview of the marine (saltwater) side of the hobby. This chapter also shows you where to find good information on setting up an aquarium for those oh-so-beautiful marine species of fish and invertebrates.

Now that you know what this book has to offer, let's move on to Chapter 2 so you can get started.

