

*If in doubt contact your
local OATA
retail member
for further information*

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

ALWAYS PURCHASE test kits and regularly check the water for ammonia, nitrite, nitrate and pH. This will allow you to ensure that 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 undertake 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 them 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. Purchase a specially designed aquarium gravel cleaner which can be started without the need to place the siphon in your mouth.

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 as they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment.

Checklist...

Equipment:

- Large aquarium
- Gravel cleaner
- Water testing kit
- Tap water conditioner or RO water if available
- Gravel
- Filter
- Heater and thermometer
- Food

Before purchase ensure that:

- The tank is large enough to house your specimens when fully grown.**
- Water parameters are as advised by your retailer and any changes if necessary are undertaken gradually.**



ORNAMENTAL AQUATIC TRADE ASSOCIATION LTD

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**How to
care for...**



Discus

Introduction...

Discus belong to the genus *Symphysodon* and are held in the highest regard amongst 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: 26-30°C

pH: 6.0-7.5

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 - moderately hard (0-12°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 discernable 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 amongst 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 that discus are kept in groups of four or five. This coupled with the size they reach and the good water quality requirements mean that 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 hardier 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 25-30%, is strongly recommended (a siphon device is useful to remove also waste from the gravel). The water should be tested regularly to ensure that pollutants such as ammonia and nitrites don't build up. Ensure that 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 2-3 times a day. Remove any uneaten food to reduce waste build up.

Common 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 doubt ask your 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 Corydoras 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 a 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.