

*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:**

- Aquarium
- Gravel cleaner
- Water testing kit
- Tap water conditioner
- Gravel, bogwood and rocks
- Filter
- Heater and thermometer
- Food

**Before purchase ensure that:**

- Water parameters are as advised in this leaflet.**
- The aquarium into which the catfish is to be housed is large enough for the adult size of species you have chosen.**



**ORNAMENTAL AQUATIC TRADE ASSOCIATION LTD**

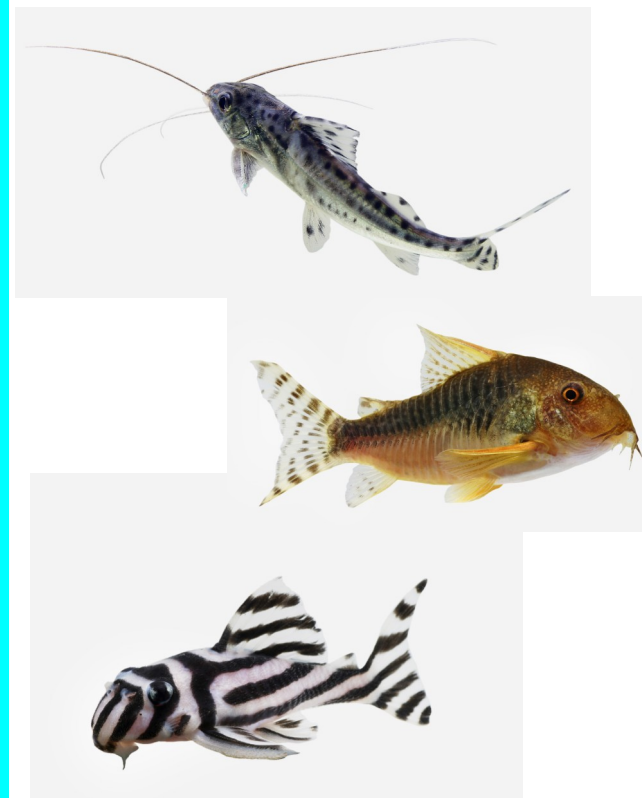
*"The voice of the ornamental fish industry"*

[www.ornamentalfish.org](http://www.ornamentalfish.org)

Photographs courtesy of INTERPET



**How to  
care for...**



**Catfish**

## Introduction...

Catfish are a popular addition to a tropical set-up. They are found throughout the world's freshwater systems and are often sourced from Asia, South America and the African lakes. The most common types of catfish found in the aquauium trade are *Corydoras* and suckermouth catfish, although there are many others available.

## Water requirements...

Catfish are fairly hardy fish and like all fish they will thrive in water closest to their natural environment but may acclimatise to different water over time.

Temperature: 21-28°C

pH: 6.5-8.5 (species dependent)

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 - very hard (2-29dH° species dependent)

## Biology...

Due to the geographical range of aquarium catfish, there are many genera which are available. This wide range leads to big differences in body size and longevity.

Body size: 2cm - 150cm (species dependent)

Longevity: 5 - 20+ years (species dependent in good water quality and without ailments.)

Sexing catfish is not easy. Many have no discernible differences between males and females including the Glass catfish, suckermouth catfish and Banjo catfish. *Corydoras* catfish can be distinguished by differences in fins and width of body.

Catfish often have barbels situated near their mouth. These are used for location of food, as they act as olfactory organs (smell) and to aid movement through dark or murky waters. The species *Pimelodus pictus* (Pictus catfish) has barbels which are often the length of its body. These barbels and fins can easily become entangled in nets so care should be taken when handling.

Most catfish do not have scales; instead they can be armoured with bony plates, such the corys, or fleshy like the *Pictus* and *Synodontis* varieties.

## Aquarium requirements...

The size of the aquarium required to house catfish depends upon the species kept. Some species including the corys, Banjo, Glass and some suckermouth catfish remain small, therefore might be best provided with a tank of 90 litres. If more specialised species are to be kept such as the *Synodontis* and *Pictus* catfish a larger tank of 120+ litres is recommended. There are other catfish available which get very large, such as the Red-Tailed, *Pangasuis* and Shark catfish. These can reach over a metre in length when mature and the average hobbyist can not meet their requirements in the home environment.

Some catfish are reclusive animals, therefore caves and shelter should be provided. Often species are nocturnal therefore will not be seen until the lights are turned off. For these species a blue moon light can be added to the tank if you would like to observe activity at night. The exact water requirements are entirely species dependent. Seek further advice from your retailer regarding your species.

Live or artificial plants are beneficial as they can help to mimic the natural streams, lakes and rivers in which these fish can be found. Sand or gravel substrate is recommended so that the fish can scavenge and dig through it to locate food and detritus. The tank needs to be heated.

## 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 as 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 as 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...

Predominantly, catfish eat insects and crustaceans, and some of the larger species are carnivores. In the home aquarium they should be provided with tropical catfish food and supplemented with frozen and live meaty foods, such as bloodworm, insect larvae and brine shrimps.

Catfish will often feed until their stomach is distended, and some feeding behaviours can be fascinating to watch, such as the Upside-Down catfish. These fish should be fed what they can eat within a few minutes 1-2 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 retailer for advice.

## Compatibility...

Some catfish are quite reclusive but can be added to most community aquariums depending upon the other fish being kept. The smaller corys and Glass catfish will happily cohabit with other small fish such as tetras, livebearers and Rasboras. They also need to be kept in shoals, and it is recommended that these be a minimum size of at least five individuals. These species will not usually thrive by themselves or in pairs.

The larger *Synodontis* and *Pictus* cannot be kept with small species as they will eat them, however they can be added to community tanks containing larger species and also kept alongside some active cichlids.

## Breeding...

Most catfish will not breed in the home aquarium (with the exception of the corys).

In order to induce spawning the temperature of the tank should be raised by two or three degrees for two weeks. After the two weeks a large water change should be carried out. This can induce spawning. Wait for the egg casing to harden then gently remove the eggs and place into a small tank filled with water from the aquarium. The fry should hatch within three or four days.