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**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
- Marine salt
- Marine substrate and live rock
- Reverse osmosis, deionised water or tap water conditioner
- Heater, thermometer and hydrometer
- Filter and protein skimmer

**Before purchase ensure that:**

- The aquarium is well established and large enough.
- Water parameters are as advised.



**ORNAMENTAL AQUATIC TRADE ASSOCIATION LTD**

*“The voice of the ornamental fish industry”*

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**How to  
care for...**



**Seahorses &  
Pipefish**

## Introduction...

Both seahorses and pipefish are associated with coral reefs, sea grass beds and lagoons throughout the world's oceans. They both belong to the family *Syngnathidae*.

They can be found in temperate, sub-tropical and tropical regions, however the most common species found in the aquarium trade are the tropical species.

## Water requirements...

Seahorses and pipefish are delicate species which should not be added to a new tank. The water parameters are recommended to be as follows although these fish may acclimatise to different water over time:

Temperature: 23-28°C

pH: 8.1-8.4

Ammonia: 0 mg/l (0.01mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

Nitrite: 0mg/l (0.125mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

S.G.: 1.021-1.024 at 22-24°C

## Biology...

There are over 50 species of seahorse and approximately 200 species of pipefish throughout the world's oceans.

These fish are coated with armoured plates and skin rather than scales. The dorsal fin is used to propel the fish through the water and the other fins are often underdeveloped resulting in reduced swimming power.

Pipefish rarely exceed 20cm in length and the common Seahorse species available have a maximum length of 30cm.

The pipefish get their name due to their long, pipe-like snouts. Seahorses also share this characteristic, but their larger heads and stouter body gives them a horse-like appearance, and hence their name.

Seahorses also have finless tails that are prehensile. This allows them to cling on to vegetation which compensates for their weaker swimming ability. They are also capable of moving their eyes independently, much like a chameleon.

Many species of seahorses and pipefish form monogamous pairs. Famously, males of the species look after the eggs in brood pouches or canals that actively nourish the developing offspring.

## Aquarium requirements...

On the whole, seahorses and pipefish do not grow large. They can be successfully kept in small aquaria, but a larger aquarium of approximately 150 litres or more would be more suitable. Larger aquaria are likely to remain more stable, making it easier to maintain an optimal environment.

As these fish are not strong swimmers, a reduced flow rate is recommended. If the water movement is too great, these fish can become stressed and may damage themselves.

Seahorses swim up and down as well as utilising the length of the aquarium. Therefore, the tanks should ideally be twice as deep as the length of the adult seahorse.

The use of live rock and sand will not only aid filtration and water quality, but will also provide crevices for pipefish and also anchor points for the seahorses. In addition, you should also purchase a protein skimmer, filter, lighting and heater.

These shy fish can be easily outcompeted for food by other fish. Consider housing them in a species only system.

## Maintenance...

At least every two weeks, a partial water change of 25-30% is strongly recommended (a siphon device is also useful to remove waste from the gravel). This help to reduce the build-up of potentially harmful nitrates and other pollutants. Replacement water should be dechlorinated using strong aeration or a tap water conditioner (if not using reverse osmosis water). Ideally, replacement water should be heated and enough salt should be added to achieve the correct salinity.

Filters should be checked for clogging and blockages. If the filter needs cleaning, then do not wash it using tap water; any chlorine present may kill the beneficial bacteria that has established within the media. Instead, it can be rinsed in tank water which is removed during a partial water change. This should reduce the number of bacteria lost.

Good husbandry is essential as these fish can be stressed by even the smallest amounts of ammonia and nitrite. Test the water weekly to monitor ammonia, nitrite and nitrate, especially after initial set-up and after adding new fish. Don't forget to check the salinity as this may increase due to evaporation of water.

If live rock and invertebrates are present in the aquarium, never use copper based medications. Copper is highly toxic to invertebrate species, including those found within live rock.

## Feeding...

These fish are all carnivorous and in the wild can be found feeding upon shrimp, plankton and tiny fish in the water column. Wild caught specimens may be harder to feed than ones which have been captive-bred.

In the aquarium these animals should feed happily upon live food although it is advisable for to feed them on frozen aquarium food. Keep the diet varied and feed 3-4 times a day. Add vitamin enrichment to the food and 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. Poor water quality is the main cause of disease outbreak in aquarium fish.

It should be noted that some of these species are sensitive to copper based treatments, ask your retailer for advice before adding a medication.

## Compatibility...

Seahorse and pipefish go well together, seahorses are often seen hitching a ride on the tail of pipefish. They are also reef safe provided the reef contains no stinging corals or anemones which could inflict a potentially fatal sting to these delicate species. Inverts are also safe and can be good additions to the tank to help to reduce algal build ups. Avoid all active and aggressive fish as Seahorses and Pipefish are not able to swim quickly enough and will be outcompeted for food.

## Breeding...

Most retailers should be able to provide you with captive-bred seahorses and pipefish.

These fish may also successfully breed in a home aquarium if a pair is formed. The female deposits her eggs into a pouch or onto the body of the male and he will carry them for the length of the pregnancy. If your fish successful breed then the fry need to be removed from the tank as they can be easily drawn into filters.