Quarantine Tanks: Manage Fish & Coral Health

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

are you prepared? why you need a QUARANTINE TANK

Effective aquarium health management involves proper care and sound husbandry practices. While many hobbyists devote their time and energy on their main display aquariums, very few invest in a quarantine tank. Regrettably, resources spent on creating and maintaining a beautiful and healthy aquarium can be undermined with the introduction of disease-causing organisms. Prevent costly losses by having a quarantine tank ready for any unexpected event.

WHAT IS A QUARANTINE TANK?

A quarantine tank is an independent, supplementary aquarium used to temporarily house any aquarium inhabitant. Similar to conventional aquarium setups, a quarantine tank incorporates lighting, heaters, and filtration to maintain proper conditions for its temporary inhabitants. Its principle purpose is to isolate livestock before they are introduced into the main aquarium. As a fundamental husbandry practice, quarantine tanks offer hobbyists a means to ensure quality care for individuals as well as the entire aquarium community.

> **Q:** Is a quarantine tank really necessary to have?
>
> A: Similar to insurance, the immediate need for a quarantine tank may not seem evident. Quarantine tanks offer peace of mind and a means to prevent and treat illnesses without compromising the main aquarium system. Quarantine tanks are particularly important in reef aquariums where the removal or treatment of sick fish is difficult.

WHY QUARANTINE FISH?

Fish kept in quarantine are usually newly acquired fish. However, quarantine tanks can also be used to house any particular fish of interest and keep them under careful observation. Quarantine tanks allow hobbyists to perform thorough physical and behavioral examinations.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

Detailed visual examination of coloration, fin development, and eye clarity offers great insight into the general health of the fish. Careful examination over an extended period also allows hobbyists to detect any potential parasites or disease symptoms.

During quarantine, hobbyists can also monitor feeding behavior to make sure new arrivals are eating and are accepting prepared foods. More importantly, this observation period allows new arrivals to acclimate and recover from the stress of transport. These cautionary steps ensure optimum health of new fish and the prevention of potential illness in the main aquarium. A minimum quarantine period of at least two to three weeks is recommended for new arrivals.

SETTING UP A QUARANTINE TANK

An aquarium kit like the 14 gallon Coralife BioCube Aquarium System makes a great quarantine tank. Since it already includes a filtration system, set up is fast and easy. Generally, a quarantine tank should be about 10 to 20 gallons but a 29-gallon aquarium, or larger, is preferable for larger fish. In addition to the aquarium, you will also need the following items for your quarantine tank:

- Heater
- Thermometer
- Test kit
- Artificial décor for shelter
- Water conditioners
- A journal to document observations, water parameters, date/length of quarantine period, etc.
- Dedicated fish supplies (i.e. net, siphon/water changer, etc.) for quarantine tank use only.

WHY QUARANTINE CORALS?

All new aquarium inhabitants including corals should be quarantined. As more hobbyists enjoy the engaging hobby of reef keeping, numerous pests and parasites have also made their presence in home aquariums. Pests affecting the reef aquarium hobby include certain Red Bugs, Nudibranchs, Flatworms, Snails, and Limpets. The best remedy for these pests is to prevent introduction into your aquarium. Follow proper quarantine procedures to keep your reef aquarium free of pests and pathogens. Quarantining also helps reduce transport stress and allows corals to acclimate to water chemistry and lighting conditions found in your main system. Be sure to quarantine all new corals until they are free of any unwanted organisms and demonstrate good expansion and vigor.

HOSPITAL TANKS FOR FISH (TREATMENT TANKS)

When quarantine tanks are used to medicate sick fish, it is sometimes called a "hospital" or treatment tank. Removing sick fish from the main population and treating them in a hospital tank has many benefits. The most significant benefit is the prevention of unnecessary medication. Many medications have strong antibiotic properties and may have the undesired effect of harming or compromising the health of non-target species. For example, ornamental invertebrates are sensitive to copper-based medications. These medications should never be used in any aquariums housing desirable invertebrates, especially reef aquariums. Biological filtration can also be affected by medication. To minimize stress and potential harm to the entire aquarium system, it is prudent to treat only the affected individual in a hospital tank.

Limiting medication use to hospital tanks also means the need for less medication. Since hospital tanks are generally smaller than the main aquarium, you use

THE IMPORTANCE OF A QUARANTINE TANK

Quarantining is a vital practice that should be employed by all aquarists. However, less than 5% of all aquarium owners use quarantine tanks. Most hobbyists don't have a quarantine tank because of perceived expense and maintenance. However, a quarantine tank doesn't need to be large or expensive. Its benefits will pay for itself many times over. Get into the practice of using a quarantine tank and you will find it difficult to imagine continuing your hobby without one. For optimum health, the quarantine tank and equipment should be disinfected between uses. A mild (2-5%) chlorine bleach solution works great as a disinfectant. Make sure all traces of

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

chlorine are removed before re-use. Drying also kills many but not all aquatic pathogens.

less medication. Furthermore, using less medication allows better control and monitoring of dosage. By using hospital tanks for treatment, you not only spend less money on medication but also reduce the potential of overdosing. It is prudent to have two quarantine tanks if you keep corals and fish. Use one quarantine tank for corals and the other for fish. Exclusive use of the two quarantine tanks prevent unintentional harm to your corals especially if you use medications to treat sick fish.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*