

STEP-BY STEP CHECKLIST FOR SETTING UP A SALTWATER FISH-ONLY TANK

PLAN THE SYSTEM

Visit your local fish store

- Survey fishes, aquarium, and aquarium stands
- Learn about the compatibility of the fishes you want to keep
- Ask about saltwater aquarium starter-kit packages and options

Consider the options and design your aquarium

- Decide on size and location of your tank
- List the equipments that you need/want
- Sketch the layout of your tank (draw a couple and choose which one is the best and doable)
- Budget for equipment and livestock
- Create a simple written system plan
- Decide and settle on the types of fish that you want to keep

PURCHASE ALL YOUR EQUIPMENTS AND SUPPLIES

- Buy your equipments
- Buy, order, or reserve live rock

SET UP AND TEST YOUR EQUIPMENT

Prepare the aquarium

- Clean the aquarium
- Set your aquarium background (if you decided to get one)
- Find and level the stand, making sure that there's space for all your electrical connections
- Set your aquarium in place (if you're setting it up on a carpeted location, set it on an underpad so that carpet won't get damaged)
- Level the aquarium
- Install all the equipments (make sure they are all unplugged)
- Fill the tank and filtration equipment with tap water

Perform wet test

- Start all equipment
- Allow the tank to run for 24 to 48 hours
- Check for leaks
- Check the temperature with and without lights on
- Adjust the heater(s) accordingly
- Check protein skimmer for bubble production
(no waste will be produced by skimmer until salt and live matter are added to the aquarium)

MIX SALTWATER

- Mix saltwater in a separate container
- Allow salt to dissolve for 24 hours with a heater and small air or water pump for circulation
(adjust specific gravity as necessary)

START UP SYSTEM

Empty the aquarium

- Mark a "fill-to" line on the outside back corner of the aquarium
- Shut down all equipments
- Siphon freshwater out of the aquarium

Refill with saltwater

- Fill your aquarium with premixed saltwater
- Restart all your equipments and adjust the water level if necessary
- Allow the tank to run with equipment on for a few days (the protein skimmer will be pulling nothing)

or little, but it will be useful in oxygenation and gas exchange)

Check water parameters

- Temperature target: 74 to 78 ° F (23 to 26 ° C)
- Specific gravity target: 1.022 to 1.026
- pH target: 8.1 to 8.3
- Add freshwater as needed to fill line to make up for evaporation and maintain a constant specific gravity

SET UP QUARANTINE TANK

- This is optional but is highly recommended to have.

PREPARE LIVE ROCK

If starting with uncured live rock:

- See my suggested methods on curing live rock

If starting with fully cured live rock:

- Keep rock wet or damp and at room temperature 70 to 80 ° F until placed in the aquarium
- Aquascape: Check out Aquarium Aquascape or see steps below:

AQUASCAPE THE AQUARIUM

- Turn off all pumps
- Remove heaters to prevent breakage
- Lower water level
- Place live rock in the aquarium, creating the aquascape you want from your sketches
- Check for loose rock or unstable construction
- Stabilize rockscape

ALLOW THE TNK TO CYCLE

- With only saltwater and live rock, allow your aquarium to run for 3 to 8 weeks, while testing for ammonia, nitrite, nitrate

Test for ammonia

- Test 1 to 3 days after adding live rock
- Test every 4 days until ammonia level begin to fall
- Continue ammonia test until level read zero (approx. day 20)

Test for nitrite

- Begin testing when ammonia level drops (approx. day 8)
- Continue testing at least every 4 days
- If ammonia never appears, nitrite may also not become detectable
- Continue testing nitrite until level reads zero (approx. day 21)

Test for nitrate

- Begin testing nitrate after ammonia and nitrite levels become undetectable
- Testing should show a leveling off of nitrate at approx. day 45
- Begin testing nitrate once a month
- Try to keep nitrate level below 10ppm so that algae growth can be kept to a minimum (if nitrate exceeds 20 ppm, take action - see below)

PERFORM WATER CHANGES

- Repeat water changes, if needed until nitrate measures less than 10 ppm

ADD SUBSTRATE

- Add 1/4 to 1/2 pound of coral sand substrate per gallon of tank volume is enough
- Layer should be 1/2 to 1 inch deep

PURCHASE FIRST FISHES

- Purchase two or three fishes that fit into your plan and their foods
- Place them in your quarantine tank for 3 weeks
- After the quarantine period is over and fishes are eating well, transfer them in the main tank

Test display tank for ammonia daily; level should be zero

If levels of ammonia rise above 0.2 to 0.4, do a partial water change and reduce feeding until level is zero

ADD MORE FISHES

If ammonia level does not rise, you can add more fishes after being properly quarantined

KEEP THE SYSTEM HEALTHY

Begin regular maintenance

Keep a log of water test, livestock additions, losses

Do not overstock or overfeed