

Aquarium Styling Overview

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Many people generally refer to aquarium styles in broad terms of either fresh or saltwater setups. However, there are many variations within these two categories, requiring different experience levels. For example, freshwater aquariums can be divided into Community, Planted, or Biotope aquariums while marine aquariums can be divided into Fish-Only, Fish-Only-With-Live-Rock, or Reef aquariums. There's even Brackish/Estuary systems for borders of fresh and saltwater environments. This diversity makes the aquarium hobby interesting as well as challenging.



While hobbyists of all experience levels will find a style that appeals to them, which is right for you? While there is no single "best" type of aquarium, there are important considerations that determine the type of aquarium that is appropriate for you. Factors such as space, the amount of time you'll be able to commit, and budget all influence your decision regarding the size and type of aquarium you'll be able to purchase and successfully maintain. After careful assessment of your resources, consider the following aquarium styles that best suit your personality and skill level to ensure continued success and enjoyment.

Freshwater Aquariums

Freshwater aquariums are extremely popular and immediately conjure images of an active and colorful environment. Due to the availability of many hardy and adaptable species, freshwater aquariums are well suited for the beginner. There are many variations within this general category, each with their unique set of challenges. As a result, it is not uncommon for freshwater enthusiasts to have several aquariums of varying size and styles.

[Freshwater Community Aquariums](#)

This is the quintessential freshwater aquarium setup stocked with a variety of [compatible fish species](#) from different habitats throughout the world. The [décor](#) can vary from whimsical setups with sunken ships to more realistic ones like [driftwood and rock formations](#). A freshwater community aquarium is a perfect outlet for your creative side and a great way to express your personality. After all, a hobby is meant to be fun.



[Freshwater Planted Aquariums](#)

These beautiful underwater gardens are extremely popular in Europe and are steadily gaining interest in the United States. It is not uncommon for the fish to be upstaged by the lush emerald growth. [Planted aquariums](#) are often considered difficult to maintain but by using hardy, easy-to-grow plants that don't require high lighting conditions, like [Java Fern](#) and [Anubias](#), even a beginner can develop a green thumb without investing in special lighting fixtures or equipment.

Freshwater Biotopes

Designed to recreate a particular habitat, biotope aquariums incorporate plants and fish from a specific region of the world. The effect is an aquarium that mirrors the natural conditions found in the area from which the aquarium inhabitants originated, encouraging natural behaviors. One of the most popular example is the [African Cichlid Aquarium](#), where hard water conditions and the rocky underwater terrain of the African Rift Lakes are simulated.

[Brackish/Estuary Systems](#)

Not all species of fish can adjust to ever-changing brackish conditions. Those [fish](#) that do are hardy, active, and easy to feed, making them a good choice for most enthusiasts. Setting up and maintaining a brackish aquarium for these fish is not difficult. In fact, a brackish setup is basically a freshwater aquarium that requires the addition of [sea salt](#) and ongoing [testing](#) to maintain [specific gravity](#) in a suitable range.

Marine Aquariums

At one time, saltwater or marine aquariums were considered too difficult to maintain by the average hobbyist. However, due to technical advances in [filtration](#) and [lighting equipment](#), marine aquariums have become much easier to maintain. As a result, their popularity has sky-rocketed. The greatest challenge for the marine aquarist is to provide and maintain [stable aquarium conditions](#) as well as properly addressing the special requirements of the aquarium inhabitants. Since the cost of maintaining a marine aquarium is higher and the care of some inhabitants is more involved, marine aquariums are better suited for experienced hobbyists or dedicated beginners. However, the fruits of your labor are well worth it. There are an enormous variety of



living creatures that can be put in a saltwater aquarium to create a colorful and dramatic underwater realm.

[Marine Fish-Only](#)

Generally regarded as a "starter" aquarium for the marine hobbyist, fish-only setups are a great way to develop the experience necessary to maintain reef aquariums. Similar to the freshwater community aquariums, marine fish-only aquariums can be stocked with a variety of [compatible species](#) and [artificial corals](#). Due to the greater availability of hardy [Tank-Bred marine species](#), beginning marine hobbyists are able to enjoy their hobby with greater success.



[Marine Fish-Only-With-Live-Rock \(FOWLR\)](#)

A variation of the marine fish-only aquarium, FOWLR setups provide additional biological filtration, biodiversity, as well as a more natural environment for its inhabitants. Therefore, FOWLR aquariums provide a more stable environment than fish-only aquariums. [Live rock](#) also provides a natural food source for fish as different types of algae and crustaceans grow in and around it. FOWLR setups are ideal for aggressive fish, those that will nip at live coral, that are not suitable for a reef aquarium. FOWLR has the feel of a reef aquarium but are less expensive, less demanding, and easier to maintain than reef aquariums.



[Reef Aquariums](#)

The most challenging and expensive of the marine aquariums, reef aquariums are stocked primarily with [corals](#) and other [invertebrates](#), with little or no fish. The corals and invertebrates are the stars of a reef aquarium. Since marine invertebrates are very sensitive to water conditions, [water parameters](#) must be [monitored](#) on a regular basis to maintain pristine [conditions](#). Also, many corals are photosynthetic and require proper [lighting](#) to survive. The inhabitants of reef aquariums require special attention, so it is crucial to research and learn about these fascinating creatures.