

Water Changes: The Key to Saltwater Aquarium Success

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Many people think it's hard to keep a marine aquarium. At one time, this was true. Only a few decades ago, the average hobbyist was limited in the tools and education available. Those who dared keep marine life often lived near the ocean, as constant water changes seemed necessary for success.

But those days have long gone. With our understanding of the [nitrogen cycle](#) and the massive improvements in [filtration](#), the only big difference in keeping freshwater fish and saltwater fish is the [salt](#).

Often, the biggest concern with keeping saltwater fish is the [maintenance](#). The skills needed are very similar to freshwater. Knowledge of the fish's diet, temperament and preferred water conditions are still important, and most [filters](#) used in freshwater can also be appropriate for saltwater. It's the dreaded monthly [water change](#) that seems so scary. But this fear is unfounded. The water change process is the same as with freshwater; it just takes a little bit of planning.

How to do a Water Change

You'll need a clean [mixing container](#) that does not contain metal for mixing up the saltwater (this should be a container that has not and will not be used for anything else). The synthetic [sea salts](#) available today are complete and consistent enough to be all you need to add to the water. Just fill container with amount of water equal to 1/4 your aquarium volume and add salt slowly, as directed. Mix until all salt is dissolved (about 24 hrs). Measure specific gravity with a [hydrometer or refractometer](#), then add water or salt until level is between 1.020 and 1.025, preferably the same as your aquarium.

Just like freshwater, you'll need to make sure the new water is the same [temperature](#) as the aquarium water, and to use a [dechlorinator](#) if your source water contains chlorine.

An easy way to do this is to add a [submersible pump](#) and [heater](#) to the bucket and let them take care of the mixing and temperature. When correct parameters are reached, and you've finished siphoning out debris, [flexible tubing](#) can be put on the pump and it will put the water in the aquarium for you!