Live Rock/Sand Curing & Acclimation Guide

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

During the shipping process of all live rock, either pre-cured or uncured, some die-off will occur. For this reason, all live rock must be cured again, before it is placed in aquariums that contain fish, corals, or other marine animals.

Why cure live rock?

Live rock must be properly cured to create a healthy marine environment. The biodiversity found on all transported live rock undergo some degree of natural die-off, especially delicate or damaged fauna and flora. As these encrusting organisms go through this process, they produce a large amount of waste materials. Without proper curing, pollutants and toxic compounds such as ammonia are released into the water and compromise the health of your entire aquarium system. Whether pre-cured or uncured, it is crucial to never introduce any live rock to an established aquarium containing fish, corals, or other marine animals unless it has been properly cured.

Curing Live Rock

Important: Do not place uncured live rock directly into an aquarium containing fish, corals, or other marine animals.

Note: Be sure to use gloves when handling live rock to prevent accidental cuts and potential infection.

There are many different ways to cure live rock, however, at Drs. Foster & Smith we have found the following methods to be the most effective:

Method A: Curing process of live rock for the established display aquarium that already contains fish, corals, or any other marine animals.

1. Place the live rock in a new 30-gallon plastic garbage can. Consider adding bottom drains to the container to speed draining and water changes.
2. Completely cover the rock with freshly mixed saltwater, with a specific gravity of 1.021 - 1.025.
3. Use a heater and keep the water temperature near 80 degrees to speed die off.
4. Provide constant water movement with a power head or air stone.
5. Keep the area dimly lit to prevent algae blooms.

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6. Perform 100% water changes twice weekly.
7. Gently scrub the rock with a new nylon bristle brush or toothbrush between water changes to remove any white film or dead material.
8. When the water conditions stabilize and ammonia and nitrite tests are zero, the rock is ready to be placed into the display aquarium.

Most live rock will be fully cured in 1 - 3 weeks, at which time it is safe to add to the display aquarium.

Method B: Curing process of live rock for the new aquarium that DOES NOT contain fish, corals, or any other marine animals.

Live rock may be used to cycle a new marine aquarium. Follow the manufacturer's directions on the installation of all filtration devices and accessories. Fill aquarium with freshly mixed saltwater with a specific gravity of 1.023-1.025. Activate all filtration equipment, check for leaks, and set heater and/or chiller to the desired temperature of 72-78°F.
Note: Mechanical filtration will need frequent cleaning during this cycling process.

1. Rinse each piece of live rock in a small bucket of saltwater to remove any loose organic matter, debris, or sand.
2. Place live rock into the aquarium to create a stable foundation for corals or decorations.
3. Keep the lighting system off during the cycling period in order to reduce the likelihood of undesirable algae growth.
4. Gently scrub the rocks periodically with a new nylon bristle brush or toothbrush to remove loose white film or dead material.
5. Perform 50% water changes weekly while siphoning out any organic matter and loose debris that accumulates at the bottom of the aquarium.
6. Measure and monitor the ammonia and nitrite levels in the aquarium weekly.
7. When both ammonia and nitrite levels are zero, perform a 50% water change on the aquarium.
8. After 24 hours, check the pH of the water and adjust as needed to achieve the desired level of 8.1-8.4.

Most aquariums will cycle within 2-4 weeks using this technique, depending on the equipment that is installed.

Helpful Tips for Controlling Unwanted Pests:

Submerse the new rock into a bucket filled with saltwater with a specific gravity of 1.035 to 1.040 for one minute. Any invertebrates including mantis shrimp, bristle worms, and crabs will quickly evacuate from the rock and into the bucket of water.

Remove the live rock from the bucket and sort through the invertebrates in the bucket. Determine those you want to add to your system and discard unwanted pests. Bristle worms still attached to the rock can be removed with a pair of needle-nosed pliers or tweezers. This technique can be used to remove unwanted pests before or after curing your newly arrived live rock.

Curing Live Sand

Live sand should be rinsed in saltwater to remove any organic matter that may foul the water in the aquarium. After rinsing, the sand may be placed directly in any marine aquarium.

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1. Remove the bag(s) of sand from shipping box and dump sand into a new 5-gallon bucket, filling the bucket 1/2 full with live sand.
2. Add saltwater from the aquarium until the bucket is 2/3 full of water and sand.
3. Slowly stir the sand by hand until the water within the bucket becomes cloudy with debris.
4. Discard the dirty water in the bucket and place the sand back into the shipping bag.
5. Lower the shipping bag to the bottom of the aquarium. Disperse the sand slowly and evenly across the bottom of the aquarium.
6. Repeat the above steps until all of the sand has been placed into the aquarium.

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