Quarantine Tank FAQs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Quarantine tanks should be used by the aquarium hobbyist when introducing new fish to a tank, but are unfortunately used by less than 5% of all aquarium owners. Every time we bring a new inhabitant into our aquarium we run the risk of introducing pathogens and parasites. At the same time, new fish will be stressed from transport and relocation, thus, susceptible to any diseases or parasites present in the new environment. A quarantine tank protects your existing investment while allowing new fish to regain optimum health before their final transition. A quarantine tank is a vital piece of equipment that should be used by all aquarists.

- What are quarantine tanks?
- What's involved in setting up quarantine tanks?
- Why do new arrivals need to be isolated in quarantine tanks?
- How long do new fish need to be quarantined?
- Are quarantine tanks used just to monitor sick fish?
- Why don't people have quarantine tanks?
- What are the benefits of quarantine tanks?

What are quarantine tanks?

Quarantine tanks are essentially auxiliary aquariums set up along with the main aquarium. They are most often used to isolate sick fish or to observe new arrivals to minimize the stress of introduction or spread of disease/parasites into the main aquarium. Also, the smaller and less competitive area makes feeding easier. A 29-gallon aquarium makes a versatile quarantine tank perfect for both fresh and saltwater application. Depending on its use, a slightly larger or smaller aquarium will work just as well.

[Back to Top]

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What's involved in setting up quarantine tanks?

Setting up quarantine tanks is basically no different than setting up a "regular" aquarium. The main difference is that only the most basic equipment is necessary. This includes a filter, heater, thermometer, lighting, and maybe an air pump. Since quarantine tanks are an extension of the main aquarium, water parameters such as water temperature and pH should closely match those of the main aquarium. Just like any aquarium, quarantine tanks must be properly conditioned and cycled.

[Back to Top]

Why do new arrivals need to be isolated in quarantine tanks?

Quarantine tanks allow new arrivals to recover from the stress associated with transport, allow them to acclimate to new water conditions in a stress-free environment, and allow you to carefully monitor the health of your new fish, making sure they do not show signs of illness. Stress lowers the immune response of fish and allows disease-causing organisms to take advantage of their weakened state. Not only are new arrivals more susceptible to disease/parasites that may exist in the main aquarium, but may potentially harbor them. Even though they appear healthy, the new arrivals may not exhibit symptoms until days after purchase. Quarantine tanks allow new arrivals to regain their strength, making them more resistant to disease when introduced to the main aquarium.

[Back to Top]

How long do new fish need to be quarantined?

New arrivals should be quarantined for at least 3 weeks, though a longer quarantine period is preferable. Many disease-causing organisms, such as Ich, take several weeks to complete their life cycle and visible signs may not occur for several days. An extended quarantine period allows ample time to monitor signs of illness, such as lack of appetite, color loss, sores or wounds, and other physical and behavioral changes.

[Back to Top]

Are quarantine tanks used just to monitor sick fish?

Isolating sick fish is just one of the many practical uses for quarantine tanks. Since quarantine tanks are essentially an "extra" aquarium set up along with the main aquarium, it can be used to temporarily house aquarium inhabitants in the event of unexpected emergencies. During an emergency such as a leaking aquarium, scrambling to find and set up another aquarium can mean wasted time, money, and the potential loss of your aquarium inhabitants. Quarantine tanks are already cycled and share similar water conditions as your main aquarium so moving fish into it can be done with minimal stress and with relative ease.

[Back to Top]

Why don't people have quarantine tanks?

Most people don't have a quarantine tank because of the extra expense and maintenance that the tank will require. However, a quarantine tank doesn't need to be large or expensive, and in the end it will pay for itself many times over. In fact, once the habit of using a quarantine tank is established, you would likely be so impressed with the benefits and uses that you would never be without one.

[Back to Top]

What are the benefits of quarantine tanks?

In addition to preventing the spread of infectious disease, quarantine tanks allow new fish to get adjusted to new water and food. When not being used for quarantine, these tanks can also double as treatment tanks for sick fish. Treating the entire display tank for a pathogen that only infects a few fish is not a good practice. Quarantine tanks allow the infected fish to be safely treated without damaging fragile

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species or compromising water quality in the display tank. Other quarantine tank uses are to provide a breeding area for fish, a recovery area for harassed fish, or a place to allow newly hatched fish to safely grow.
[Back to Top]

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