How to Start Your Own Planted Aquarium

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aquarium MAKEOVER

Part II: Barren Aquarium to Planted Oasis

For many aquarium hobbyists, setting up a planted aquarium may seem like a difficult challenge. Imagine having to transform a neglected 75-gallon aquarium into a lush planted aquarium. Live plants are commonly considered too fragile or too demanding, but through proper plant planning and preparation you too can create a planted paradise. The following is the second installment in our aquarium makeover series.

PLANTING INSTRUCTIONS

for freshwater aquarium plants

Adding new plants to your aquarium is a simple process. But, before you begin, it is highly recommended that all aquatic plants be quarantined in a separate aquarium for a period of two weeks. This reduces the possibility of introducing diseases and parasites into your aquarium. To prevent an overpopulation of snails, visually inspect leaves for snail eggs and remove them using your fingernail. Rinse each plant in water and remove all dead leaves before planting.

ROOTED PLANTS - Potted or bare-root plants

1) If potted, carefully remove the plant from the pot.

2) Cut off 1/4 of the roots using a sharp pair of scissors to stimulate new root growth.

3) Place the plant into the substrate, making sure to keep the crown of the root barely visible at the surface of the substrate.

STEM PLANTS - Each stem plant should be planted in its own individual hole.

Fish-Ready Aquarium

We planned to set up a new planted aquarium, but unexpected events forced us to make the aquarium "fish-ready" before our shipment of plants arrived. We added a small school of Lemon Tetras, Rasboras, and Black Phantom Tetras to the newly cycled aquarium. To prevent any unexpected ammonia spikes in this young system, we fortified the biological filtration with a bacterial additive, supplemented aeration with a powerhead, and used the ammonia detoxifier AmQuel+ Plus for safe measure. We are proud to say, we did not lose a single fish during this period.

Preparing a Plant-Ready Aquarium

After regular testing confirmed the stability of the nitrogen cycle, we removed the powerhead. Supplementary aeration was no longer necessary since the plants will naturally produce oxygen for

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1) Remove the lead weight from the bundle of plants.

2) Trim any decaying part of the stem. Then strip off two to four leaves, leaving the nodes exposed on the stem.

3) Plant the stem 2-4 nodes deep. New roots will grow from the buried stem nodes.

ROOTLESS PLANTS - Because these plants do not have a root structure, they need to be tied down to decorative driftwood or stones. Best done out of the water. Use suitable thread, such as monofilament line, to carefully wrap and tie the plant to the decoration.

BULBS, TUBERS, and RHIZOMES - Trim the roots of these plants if they are damaged or black. Be careful not to damage the plant body.

Bulbs and tubers: Insert the plant into the substrate so that about half of the bulb is visible above the substrate. All the leaves should be clearly visible.

Rhizomes: The top half of the rhizome, where the leaves sprout from, should not be buried. Place the rhizome into the substrate at an angle so the majority is under the substrate. These plants can also be secured to driftwood in the same manner as rootless plants.

both fish and beneficial bacteria. Testing and maintaining ideal water parameters did not end there. In addition to the R/O Right, initially used to condition the reverse osmosis water, we used Acid & Alkaline Buffer to create the ideal carbonate hardness (KH) conditions for the plants.

Planned Planting

Once our plants arrived, we were eager to start planting. But before adding the plants to the aquarium, we discussed what kind of "look" we wanted to achieve. Since we had several large, impressive pieces of driftwood, we wanted to use these pieces to their best advantage. Settling on a "natural-looking" arrangement with good architectural movement, we added plants around this central feature.

The driftwood was arranged asymmetrically to heighten visual interest and we left lots of space between the two prominent pieces. This clearing was used to create a diagonal path that stretched from the front to the back of the aquarium, simulating the movement of a gentle stream. We incorporated the notion of foreground, midground, and background planting to give depth and dimension. This is simply the positioning of shorter, low-growing plants in the front, mid-height plants in the middle, and tall plants in the background. However, we staggered the planting and blurred the layers for a natural and organic appearance.

Planting is pretty straightforward, but because the water distorts and skews your perception, the actual placement of the plants is often harder than it looks. Have a friend help you or step away from the aquarium, from time to time, and look directly into the aquarium from the front. This allows for a realistic notion of the plants' location.

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Q **What do snail eggs look like?**

A Snails usually lay their eggs in a single cluster, slightly larger than a grain of rice. Individual snail eggs are scattered within this clear, protective gelatinous mass.

PLANTING TIP: Place tall, background plants first. Then fill in the gaps with shorter plants.

ESSENTIALS

- **Acid & Alkaline Buffers**. Use together to safely adjust pH and alkalinity (KH). Buffers aquarium water to help establish ideal conditions for planted aquariums.
- **Flourish Tabs**, time-release conditioner, provide vital nutrients at the plant base for optimum plant supplementation.
- **Kent Marine Pro-Scraper II**. Professional grade aquarium scraper with extended handle effectively removes algae in deep, hard to reach areas.

RELATED INFORMATION

- **Aquarium Makeover Part I: How to Renew a Neglected Aquarium**
- **Tips for a Successful Freshwater Planted Aquarium**
- **Plants: Substrates and Supplementation**

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