

Aquascaping Nano Reef Aquariums

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Even for seasoned hobbyists, the nano reef aquarium presents unique challenges. In addition to maintaining ideal water parameters, nano reef aquariums require another type of attention to detail. Without proper aesthetic consideration, the "reef-in-miniature" quality that exemplifies nano reef aquariums is lost. Get the most out of your nano reef aquarium - learn how to maximize visual impact in small aquarium spaces.

Arrange Rock Work in Advance

Corals are the stars of nano reef aquariums, but live rock sets the stage for dramatic displays. Live rock should therefore be arranged in visually interesting layouts. Don't limit yourself to conventional layouts where all the live rock is piled towards the back of the aquarium. Consider a central mound, a U-shape or Horseshoe-shape, a chasm, or cove for your live rock layout. No matter what live rock arrangement you decide on, begin by determining the amount of usable space you have in your aquarium. In many situations, the shape of the live rock arrangement is determined by the amount of usable space.

Usable Space



Design your nano reef aquascape as if you are framing a photograph. A well-thought-out nano reef aquarium is a snapshot that captures the complex beauty of natural reefs. While it may seem effortless, achieving a balanced and aesthetically pleasing nano reef display requires forethought



and planning. Without a plan, it is easy to overestimate usable space, and the small environment of the nano aquarium becomes filled and cluttered.

Begin by establishing a perimeter of open space around your proposed live rock display. When taking this border space into consideration, you quickly realize the difference between available space and usable space. This open space not only provides visual “breathing space” but also functional space for maintenance purposes. At least 1 to 2 inches of space between live rock and the aquarium wall is required for convenient algae scraping. This open area also provides room for coral growth and prevents coral from touching the aquarium glass. Once you know how much space you have to work with, sketch out a pleasing live rock arrangement that fits within this space.

Room to Grow

In general, 1.25 to 1.75 pounds of live rock are recommended for each aquarium gallon. For example, a 10-gallon aquarium will require between 12.5 and 17.5 pounds of live rock. However, for the nano reef aquarium, it may be a good idea to lean towards the low end of this range or even slightly lower. This conservative approach takes into account future stocking levels, since new coral additions will often include aragonite plugs or live rock. Even though live rock is essential, a nano reef aquarium should not look like a live rock quarry.

When in Doubt, Choose a Theme

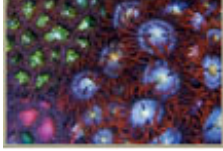
Choose and maintain a theme to provide focus and clarity of intent. The theme can be as basic as color or the coral type you prefer, whether they're mushroom corals, soft corals, or hard corals. The themed nano reef aquarium imparts immediate impact due to its uniform and cohesive nature. A biotope, or the faithful recreation of a natural reef, is another rewarding theme for a nano reef aquarium. For example, an Indonesian reef biotope will replicate water parameters found around Indonesia and house corals only from that specific region. This unique blend of aesthetic and regional integrity elevates and maximizes interest for both hobbyist and admirer.

Design with Corals



Due to limited space and other constraints, the typical nano reef aquarium contains a few select species of hardy and relatively slow-growing corals. [Polyp corals](#), [mushroom corals](#), and [soft corals](#) are excellent examples of corals that are well-suited for the nano reef. Fortunately, these easy-to-care-for corals are available in a variety of growing habits and color morphs to allow the creative hobbyist to design with corals.

One of the easiest ways to maximize visual impact in a small space is through the use of color. Select corals that create striking color combinations. Imagine a stunning display of electric blue, turquoise, or amethyst colored mushroom corals paired with tangerine or scarlet Ricordea mushrooms.



You can also provide visual interest by varying layers and mixing different textures. Create visual depth by juxtaposing Tree corals, with distinct vertical growing habits, with a tight carpet of *Zoanthus* polyps growing near the bottom of your aquarium. The graceful and feathery tentacles of Glove or Starburst polyps come alive when paired with the geometric colonies of Moon polyps. There are countless, visually-interesting coral combinations, but always remember to properly consider the temperament and growing requirements of each species.

Question:

Where can I find nice live rock pieces that will fit my nano?

Answer:

Break large pieces of [live rock](#) into smaller pieces with careful use of hammer and chisel. For a convenient alternative, consider our [Nano Live Rock](#) available through [LiveAquaria.com](#).