Summer Aquarium Care

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Sporting events, family gatherings, vacations, and much more. During the summer, demands on your personal time increase. A world of activities can keep you out of the house…and away from your aquarium…often for extra hours, and sometimes for extra days. While time out is good for you, it may lead to disruptions in your schedule that stress your fish.

Regardless of how busy your personal schedule, the health of your aquarium depends upon routine feeding and aquarium maintenance. Here are five easy tips to keep both on track.

1. Pick a Convenient Time for Daily Fish Observation
Find a couple of minutes each day, at about the same time, when you can stop and enjoy your fish, and check their general condition. Maybe it's over your morning coffee. Maybe it's during their feeding. Or maybe it's the last thing you do before it's time for lights-out in your aquarium. The important thing is that the time is the most convenient possible for you. Choosing the right time will definitely help prevent "skips."

Daily inspections are important because some problems appear suddenly, spread quickly, and require immediate treatment. Any time you observe your fish to act abnormally, you need to test your water and make sure that the filtration is operating properly. Overlooked, even minor problems can become serious, even fatal. Should you fail to spot the signs of parasites or bacterial infection before an extended absence, you may return to a problem that is very difficult to resolve.

You can become a trained and capable observer in a very short time. We recommend you read about symptoms, examine comparison photos of healthy and diseased fish, and learn about recommended treatments.

2. Automate Functions
To reduce the amount of mandatory daily maintenance and save time, take advantage of the advancements in automated equipment. Instead of replacing your care, these tools will help you fine-tune your efforts. They will also free you to take time off. Here are some good options:

- Use an automatic timer to regulate light in your aquarium so your aquatic life enjoys normal days and nights.
- Install a battery-operated air pump which switches on automatically when there is a power outage.
- Add a back-up heater that will operate if the primary fails.
- Use a battery-driven automatic feeder. These work right through power failures, and deliver pre-calibrated amounts at your pre-determined interval.

3. Train a Helper
When friends and neighbors stop by, show off the beauty of your aquarium. This is the perfect time to suggest you need help from time to time looking in on your fish, and to begin to familiarize your guests with the basics of aquarium keeping. Inquire, "Have you ever kept fish?" "Would you like to learn?" You'll find that most people will find helping with your hobby to be a welcome opportunity, not a chore.

The primary role of the helper should be to check that your automated equipment is functioning properly, and to inspect the aquarium for signs of sick or dead fish, removing them immediately so problems do not spread. This person will also utilize the back-up equipment you should have at-the-ready. Ask your helper to check on your aquarium daily while you are away, even if you have everything on auto-pilot. If problems are caught early, they can notify you and, under your direction, take action to correct things.

4. Control Temperature
Temperature control can be the single most important component in the life of your fish. A sudden shift in water temperature can send their immune systems out of whack. During warm summer months, with windows open, room temperature can vary greatly. And as water warms, it loses its ability to hold oxygen. Levels that are below recommended amounts can cause fish to breathe faster than optimum, and this can result in chronic stress. To maintain constant temperature it may be necessary to heat or chill your aquarium water, or both.

- **Heater** - If the daytime temperature were to rise to 90 degrees, for example, and fall into the 70s at night, the corresponding change in water temperature could compromise your fishes' immune system. Under these conditions, you may actually need to turn up your heater to match room temperature.

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- **Chiller -** If you do not have air conditioning, or have an aquarium with pumps, lights, and other various electrical equipment, these devices may combine to add enough heat that you need a chiller.
- **Placement -** Light is essential for aquatic life, but sunlight can easily be too much of a good thing in your aquarium. Always position your aquarium out of its direct rays. Also, keep in mind that the sun travels higher in the sky during summer, changing the angle of its rays. To keep your aquarium out of the sunlight, you may need to reposition it, or use screens or drapes to moderate the light.

5. Monitor Water Quality

During the summer, you cannot let the attention you pay water quality slide. In fact, with warmer temperatures, algae may grow quicker, and your aquarium may require more frequent cleaning. A good, time-saving tool is the magnetic algae cleaner, a device that wipes the inside glass…from the outside. Family members and helpers can use it easily on the first try. Here are more tips to make summer water maintenance easier:

- **Control fish populations -** Adding additional fish to water with already low oxygen can spell disaster. Always test your aquarium before starting to shop.
- **Change water -** Remind yourself to do a monthly water change. We recommend that you do it on the same day each month so you won't forget it. Mark your calendar, literally. Or get an electronic schedule reminder. These can even be set to sound an alarm should you desire. Changing 25% of the water each month helps replaces the trace minerals used up by the fish, plants, and bacteria. It also reduces the amount of nitrate and ammonia that builds up in the water. Many of our customers highly recommend the Aqueon Aquarium Water Changer because it simplifies water changes, making them fast and mess-free. Remember to clean your filter and pump at the same time.
- **Anticipate changes in your water supply -** Municipal water departments often change the additives in the water, sometimes due to seasonal conditions. During the summer it may contain, for example, higher chlorine levels, making the use of a dechlorinator even more important.
- **Special aquariums have special needs -** Aquariums with live plants, reefs, or that are overstocked may require more frequent water changes and the addition of minerals and trace elements. If you feel it is likely you need help keeping up with scheduled maintenance, automated controllers and dosers can provide invaluable help in maintaining a healthy eco-system.

Aquarium care need not cut into your summer fun. Simply invest a couple of minutes each day to make sure all systems are go, and plan ahead for the help you'll need to maintain them.

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