

Discus-Keeping

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The graceful, stately [Discus](#) is a joy to behold. Bred in captivity since the early 1960s, the many varieties of these beautiful fish are prized for their bright and intricate color schemes by freshwater aquarists around the world. The Discus earns our highest rating as one of the most beautiful and rewarding of all fish to keep, but success with Discus does not come without its challenges. The following overview should help determine whether you and Discus will be a good match. Ratings indicated are based on a scale of 1-10.



Degree of Difficulty: 7

Years ago, keeping Discus was considered arduous, but advances in equipment, greater availability of hardy, captive-raised specimens, and better understanding of the species make keeping Discus easier and more enjoyable than ever before. The hobby still requires a thorough understanding of the mechanics of freshwater aquarium management, and a solid commitment to maintenance, especially water quality. Here is a snapshot of two key Discus-management issues:

Aquarium - Discus can be kept in either a planted or bare-bottom aquarium. Whichever set-up you choose, it needs to be large, at least 11 gallons per adult fish. Because Discus are schooling fish, best kept in groups of at least 4-6, your aquarium will likely need to be at least 50 gallons. For breeding, an adult pair can be kept in a 29-gallon aquarium.

Water & Filtration - In the wild, Discus thrive in some of the rivers of South America where white, black, or clear tributaries combine to form naturally soft, acidic waters. In captivity, Discus require similar conditions - very clean water with pH between 5.0 and 7.0. To maintain these conditions, frequent water changes - at least 25%, twice per week - may be necessary. You must also test your water regularly, especially the pH level, and become confident making adjustments necessary for fish health.

Investment: 8

Because of the relative rarity of excellent specimens and difficulties associated with breeding, Discus are among the most expensive of aquarium fishes. High-quality [Discus](#), spawned and raised by a handful of select breeders, are harder to find and therefore even more expensive. The cost of a large aquarium equipped with proper [filtration](#) and [heat controls](#), plus supplementary water quality equipment, makes keeping Discus most appropriate for intermediate and advanced aquarists.



Enjoyment: 10

Because Discus are demanding fish, your first step should be to learn all you can. Read the best books available, and talk to fellow enthusiasts. Two books we recommend are the [Encyclopedia of Exotic Tropical Fishes](#) and [Baensch Aquarium Atlas #2](#). Both will help you learn all you need to know about water quality, nutrition, breeding, and more.

Not all aquarists are destined to be Discus keepers. You must have patience, the desire to learn, the diligence to perform daily maintenance, and the willingness and ability to make a long-term commitment. Yes, keeping Discus is a demanding hobby, but if you are willing to study and meet the needs of these amazing fish, you will be greatly rewarded.