



SEA DWELLERS AND FRIENDS
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Saltwater TECH Sheet

“Is it hard to keep a saltwater aquarium?”

It is not hard to maintain a saltwater aquarium. We have had clients as young as 12 years old that have successfully maintained saltwater aquariums. This is what is hard:

- It is hard taking time to read about and research saltwater aquariums prior to setting one up.
- It is hard to have the patience to let the aquarium become established.
- It is hard to resist buying animals on the spur of the moment, without first learning about their specific needs.

“What is the average cost and size of a saltwater aquarium?”

There is not a direct answer to this question. At Sea Dwellers we recommend that an aquarium is at least 30 gallons. Smaller tanks can be successfully maintained, but larger tanks are more stable in regards to temperature and water chemistry.

There are many different options to consider when setting up a saltwater aquarium. Some of the options include: aquarium size, type of filter(s), lighting, cabinetry, heaters, and other accessories. All of these options have different costs associated with them. Your choices of these options ultimately determine the cost of your aquarium. You can estimate that it will cost about 20 times the size of the aquarium you are planning on setting up (for example: a 30 gallon, $30 \times 20 = \$600$). Remember this is a method for a rough estimate and not by any means an exact figure.

“How often do you clean a saltwater aquarium?”

A saltwater aquarium requires maintenance. Algae will have to be wiped off as often as twice a week. Water must be change to remove pollutants that the filters cannot remove. The size of the water change depends on the aquarium and the types of filtration that is being used. Sea Dwellers would suggest that you change 20%-25% of the water over the course of a month. This can be accomplished through one large change or several smaller changes. Changing small amounts of the water several times a month is the best choice.

“How do you keep the salt level right?”

We recommend that you maintain a salt level (specific gravity) of 1.020-1.025. The salt level can be measured with a hydrometer. Sea Dwellers has several different types available. The specific gravity will fall within this range if you use 1 cup of salt per 2 gallons of freshwater. Salt and water should be mixed before it is added to the aquarium. Salt does not evaporate. When water evaporates, the salt level increases. When you add freshwater to your saltwater aquarium the salt level decreases. This means only add freshwater to replace evaporated water.

“What kind of water should I use?”

The best choice of water to use for saltwater aquariums is reverse osmosis (R/O) water. Reverse osmosis is a type of water filtration that removes impurities. This water is available at places like Culligans, Du-mor Water Systems, Department stores and grocery stores. R/O water should have a buffer added to it before it is used.

The next best choice is city water. This is what we currently use here. We treat the water with a water conditioner to remove the harmful chemicals that the city puts into the water. We then mix marine salt into the water at the rate of 1 cup per 2 gallons of water.

We do not recommend using well water. Well water usually has high level of iron and phosphates in it. We do not recommend using spring water. We do not recommend using distilled water for anything other than to make up for evaporated water.

“How soon can I introduce fish to my new saltwater tank?”

You can introduce animal to your new saltwater tank after it has been set up for 24 hours and the temperature is between 76 and 78 degrees. Please see our handout titled “What is new tank syndrome?” Choices of animals to “cycle” a new tank are: damsels, clownfish, live rock, banded coral shrimp, pink tip anemones, and hermit crabs. You can use any saltwater animals, but these animals are known to be hardy and inexpensive compared to other choices.

What fish are compatible?”

We are here to help you determine which animals will get along. Here are some guidelines that will help you to answer this question:

- Any animal will usually eat any other animal that will fit into its mouth.
- Many fish that look alike will fight with each other. However, if the aquarium is large and there are 3 or more specimens of said fish, they will probably get along.
- Do not put a fish whose diet is invertebrates in an aquarium with invertebrates.
- Every animal that you introduce to your aquarium will limit your choices of other possible inhabitants.

“Do the fish die easily?”

Yes. The fish can get diseases just like freshwater fish get diseases. Many of these diseases can be treated with antibiotics and copper. Unfortunately, copper and many antibiotics are toxic to invertebrates. If you have fish and invertebrates in the same aquarium you have only a few options for treatment.

1. You can catch the affected fish and medicate it in an already established “hospital tank”.
2. You can leave things alone and hope that the fish recover from the disease themselves.
3. You can use an ultraviolet sterilizer (UV). An ultraviolet sterilizer is a type of filter in which water is circulated through a chamber and it is exposed to UV light. The light kills many of the disease organisms. The fish are then able to recover from the disease via their own immune system. This option is the most used method of disease control. Using this method of filtration does not insure that you will never lose a fish.

“What is live rock?”

Live rock is a term used to describe rock that has been collected from the ocean. This rock may be from dead coral, volcanic activity, or even aquacultured (placed into the ocean for later collection). This rock contains many plants and animals on and in the rock. It is kept wet during shipping and arrives to our store with many of the life forms still alive. This rock is what you use to build up your own reef. This rock can become a biological filter for your aquarium. This rock can provide a food source for the inhabitants of your aquarium. The best live rock to use for your aquarium is rock that is porous. This type of rock makes a better reef because it allows for greater water circulation. Avoid dense live rock. We normally recommend at least 1 pound of live rock for every gallon of water if you plan on having a reef aquarium.

“What eats algae?”

There are no saltwater plecostomus. Algae does grow a little faster in saltwater and you will have to wipe the algae off a little more often. These animals do help with the algae control:

- Snails
- Sally lightfoot crabs
- Emerald crabs
- Small hermit crabs
- Sea Urchins
- Lawnmower blennies
- Some surgeon fishes (tang)
- Rainford Gobies (court jester)

“What are some good books about marine aquariums that I can read?”

These are some really good books to read if you want to learn more about saltwater aquariums. Sea Dwellers has these titles available for purchase.

- “The New Marine Aquarium: Step-By-Step Setup and Stocking Guide”, Michael S. Paletta
- “Marine Fishes(Pocketexpert Guide)”, Scott W. Michael
- “The Saltwater Aquarium Handbook”, George C. Blasiola