A Beginners Guide To Setting Up A Large Marine Tank - By a Beginner

Category : Marine Articles

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A BEGINNER’S GUIDE TO SETTING UP A LARGE MARINE TANK::BY A BEGINNER!!

By K Smart My husband and I have had a 6 foot fish tank (110 gallons approx) in our living room for many years now. We have always kept tropical fish and can safely say we have mastered the art of keeping tropical fish (mainly community fish). For the last year or so, my husband has been saying "I wish we could change it to a marine tank"•. For months I used every excuse in the book to put him off the subject, knowing that the cost would be more than we could afford, to do it properly.

This is how the tropical tank looked at one point (before reintroducing fish) Ok:so I gave in! Just seeing the wide variety of marine fish at our local garden centre became so tempting. We purchased a few basic books and read many websites to get the feel for the ease/difficulty of setting up a marine tank. In the mean time the tropical fish were re-homed and the tank was stripped out and cleaned.

NOVEMBER 2005

We took a trip to a reputable Marine supplier, who were extremely helpful and their expertise in the area stood out far beyond others we had spoken to so far.

We explained that we wanted to have everything we needed in one go and we knew we were looking at about £1000 in total. We are very good friends with â€œEggâ€œ , I must add. (*nb - for our international readers 'Egg' is a Credit Card*) **List of items purchased:**

Wave machine with 4 power heads

Ozonizer

UV sterilizer

Sand filter

Pump to run the sand filter

Prizm ProDeluxe Protein Skimmer

Tetratec air pump

Already had 2 Fluval 403 external filters

4 (x 2 bulbs each) T5 light units

2 heaters (already had these, one runs constantly the other is back up on lower temp)

S pare piping to link filters

Spray bar

1 hydrometer
Ro Man (50gal per day) 5 sediment Reverse Osmosis filter & large plastic water butt!! (to store RO water as it is made)
4 x 25kg bags of sea rock
4 bags of coral sand
1 bag of coral gravel (decorative topping)
10 large pieces of Fuji uncured living rock (approx 40kg)
4 lumps of black lava rock (to add colour variation)
1 large tub of red Sea marine salt
1 Hagen full marine testing kit

28TH NOVEMBER 2005 DAY 1 OF SET UP 1. Sand and coral gravel added to bottom of tank,
2. Stone and power heads put in to place
3. Set up external fluval 403 to run uv and spray bar
4. Set up other fluval 403 to run as a filter on it’s own
5. Heaters put in place
6. Put protein skimmer in place on edge of tank (hangs on!)
7. Sand filter pump and piping set up opposite end of tank
8. Started the RO filter running to make RO water.
9. As water was ready, we mixed the marine salt to correct SG 1.020-1.025
and added it to the tank. Adding the water was the slowest process.
10. Tank allowed to run to check everything was working and temp rising

30TH NOVEMBER 2005 DAY 3 LIVING ROCK ADDED

Five days after the living rock was added we carried out our first tests knowing that the nitrogen cycle would be kicking in, starting with high levels of Ammonia, Nitrite and nitrate (we had already read up on this bit:)

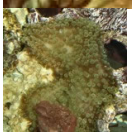
Please refer to the test results accompanying this article. You will see we continued to test everything SG, pH, Ammonia, Nitrite, Nitrate, Calcium, Phosphate and Non-Chelated Iron, every 3-4 days. By the third week (counting from day 3 when the living rock was added) test results had stabilised to 'safe'• levels. Ammonia was no longer present. Nitrite and Nitrate levels had also dropped to safe levels. Admittedly, just before the end of the second week even though Nitrite was still a little high along with Nitrate (Ammonia was zero) we decided to risk a few things as a tester. (Turbo snails, red polyp/finger anemone and 2 cleaner shrimp) By the fourth week we had added quite a variety of things, from fish to soft corals, anemones and invertebrates. We had already decided we wanted a mixed tank rather than a reef only or fish only tank.

Please note, we know it isn’t recommended to add too many things to your tank in one go. We took a few risks and by the 3rd week our results were stable (after a part water change to bring the nitrate down once and for all) the inhabitants seemed to be happy. The test results, also state when and what was added to the tank. I have referred to them as 'intakes'•. It also lists any treatments we have had to use. Unfortunately we did have a bout of whitespot between 6 and 8 weeks in to the set up. (We used Exodin a marine safe treatment, which solved all the problems).

Tank Inhabitants (as of the end of Feb 2006) These are photos of the stock we have now, to summarise what we have in our tank 3 months on

I can honestly say that everything we have in the tank appears to be compatible and for each fish listed below, we only have one of each variety except for 2 yellow tail damsels, 2 electric blue damsels and 2 Common Clown fish.

There is a subtle mix of anemones, 1 sponge and a few soft corals, accompanied by various invertebrates.



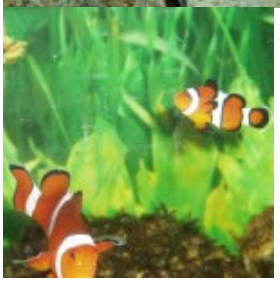
Unknown Anemone Atlantic Anenome Bubble Tip Anemone

Mushroom soft coral Mushroom soft corals
(with Bi-Colour Angel) Seaweed/Algae

Starfishl Feather Duster Worm Hermit Crab

Blue Cheeked Goby
(or Blue Streak Goby) Orange Sponge Sun Coral

White Anemone Seahorse Orange Soft CoralSeahorses aren't actually recommended for a busy fish tank with strong currents, as they find it difficult to compete for food. Our seahorse is ok, but he does keep himself out of the way a lot of the time and is being watched closely.



Bi-Colour Angel Cleaner Wrasse Common Clown Fish

Electric Blue Damsel Cleaner Shrimp Boxer ShrimpWe have a number of cleaner shrimp and one boxer shrimp. The boxer shrimp has posed no threat to the cleaner shrimp, but be careful, this may not always be the case. He can hold his own against any nosey fish with his aggressive stance when threatened. Cleaner shrimp are graceful and the ants of the invert world - always up to something and fun to watch!

Strawberry Fish Yellow Tail Damsel Flame Angel

Blue Spot Goby Sixline Wrasse Copperband Butterfly FishThe Blue Spot Goby is quite a character and has his own little cave in the corner of the tank. We made the mistake of purchasing a Copperband Butterfly fish quite early on. We did not realise that they forage in the reef and corals for food, with their long snouts, and they can be fussy eaters. We failed to notice that he wasn’t eating regularly and think that may have been the cause of death. We are now on our second attempt at keeping a Copperband. So far so good and he eats very well! (We use marine flake food, frozen marine mix, marine quintet and plankton which keeps everyone happy!)

Pinnate Batfish Powder Blue Surgeon Yellow TangThe Pinnate Batfish - absolutely stunning and perfectly designed with a deep orange/red line all the way round him. Very slow moving and graceful and not phased by his other tank mates! I believe they can grow quite big and when they are larger, may attempt to eat some soft corals. Currently he is approx 5-6â€• tall. (see appendix for a warning on these fish). The Powder Blue Surgeon is also our second attempt:the first one became trapped in a rocky corner and was unable to get back out. The reef has now been rearranged so no one gets 'stuck'. • The Yellow Tang - who although related to the Powder Blue Surgeon, gets on fine with him in a tank our size.

LEARNING BY OUR MISTAKES:

Look at this beautiful beast!!!
The Crimson Knobbed Starfish - every tank should have one:or so you would think:

This little beast decided to eat all of our little polyps - hence I cannot show you photos of them. He then started to munch his way through the smallest soft coral, namely the one he is with in the above photo. We drew the line at that and promptly removed him and sold him back to the shop!

Another lesson - make sure whoever serves you in the marine department knows their fish?? Certainly not 'reef safe'...
Here is another lovely pair.- The Birdmouth Wrasse

Very active and the male (on the left) is a beautiful aquamarine colour. After finding that we no longer had any cleaner shrimp or hermit crabs (and actually witnessing the shrimp being torn apart violently), we realised that these were not invert safe!! (This was also an error by a sales person who has grovelled and over compensated for it since), in fact we now have a full stock of cleaner shrimp again, and hermit crabs.The following photographs will show you how we had to strip our tank completely of the rock to catch the pair of Birdmouth Wrasse. Be warned - putting things in to a large tank is far easier than getting them back out again. Our tank stripped and reassembled..

the devastating experience:..after all that hard work and finally:.the tank reconstructed

CONCLUSION I will draw this article to a close now. For those of you considering the marine aquarium as a hobby, take the time to research information you need, and decide what sort of tank you would like to have, fish only, reef or both? We have chosen to have a mixed tank which means we have to be even more careful selecting the inhabitants. We also need to have good lighting for the 'reef'• side of it.

Whatever you buy needs to be able to live happily with the other things. Will the fish eat the invertebrates? Will the starfish eat the corals? Will the big fish eat the crabs or anenomes? It may seem like a mine field, but with careful reading before hand and a good marine supplier you should be able to purchase compatible marine life for your aquarium. Read up on the fish you want before you go shopping and use more than one reference book/website as some are more accurate than others.

We are very pleased with our marine tank and it appears to be running smoothly with constant good test results. We have made a few mistakes but it has taught us more, and has made us appreciate that good things come to those who wait, and it doesn’t pay to be spontaneous when 'fish shopping'• . Please note: The views and opinions in this article are purely from our own experience and not set rules for marine keepers.

APPENDIX The Batfish Sadly the batfish only lived for one week in our tank. He seemed very happy for the first few days, and after swimming around gracefully he would retreat to one corner of the tank. We got up one morning to find him swimming in a very 'drunken'• fashion, and displayed symptoms of swim bladder disorder, apparently common in very unusually shaped/very ornate fish. Within 24 hours he was dead. Other opinions have led us to believe he suffered a great amount of stress relocating to our tank (which was still too small for him) and this did not help either. If you come across this beautiful specimen at your local marine supplier, please refrain from buying him however tempted you are, unless you have a marine aquarium larger than 200 gallons. That is the recommended 'minimum'• size of tank for one of these fish, even when the fish is still small in size. They can grow to 20''• .We thought we were doing it a favour by giving him a home in our tank as it was considerably bigger than the tank he was displayed in:sadly that was not the case. The batfish is best left to the experienced keeper, and one who has the space.