



Betta Splendens / Siamese Fighting Fish

Betta Splendens or Siamese Fighting Fish originate in the tropics of SE Asia, Thailand, Bangkok and parts of Vietnam. They were originally used for gambling in Thailand when 2 male fish would be put together to fight, sometimes to the death, with gamblers betting on which fish would dominate. It's not known exactly why they are such vicious fighters. There are various Betta types, this article focuses on Betta Splendens - the most commonly kept Betta.



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The male of the species is more attractive than the female with his long flowing fins and bright colouration, both of which are beautifully displayed when the fish 'flares'. This is when he extends his fins and gills to display himself in an aggressive and impressive "I am bigger than you" manner. Males can be found in many colours including blue, red, green, orange or even pure white. They can also be bi-colour or patterned.

Betta tails come in many shapes:

Plakat this is the form in which Betta tails are found naturally, all other tail types are specially developed through breeding.

Veiltails are the most commonly found tails and are long and flowing.

Crowntails have a fringed look.

Combtails are similar to Crowntails but smaller.

The Double tail is as it sounds, both tails should be symmetrical.

The Halfmoon is aptly named, the tail should resemble a 180 degree half moon when flared. The Delta and Super Delta are similar to the Halfmoon but will not

Bettas are Anabatoids meaning they have a special Labyrinth organ allowing them to breathe air from the surface of the water. This means they can live in conditions, such as in rice paddies, stagnant ponds, ditches and slow flowing streams, which would most likely be fatal to other fish. Bettas must have access to the surface of the water to breathe. They can actually drown without this access. Studies have shown that a Betta with its Labyrinth organ removed, even in oxygen saturated water, will die.

Bettas are one of few fish, possibly the only type, which can be kept in very small tanks, bowls or even the infamous Betta Vase. This is due to their capacity to live in poorly oxygenated water and lack of activity. It is said that Bettas can be kept in bowls or cups of 4 litres or even 2 litres but many argue that that is too small - the Betta may survive but it will not thrive. Until recently it was common place for Bettas to be sold in a vase with a Peace Lilly on top. Owners were told the fish would eat the flower's root and that water changes were not necessary. Conversely, Bettas do not like very large tanks either, possibly due to the fish 'patrolling' their territory and becoming tired and stressed. Many owners, kindly liberating their fish to a larger tank, have found themselves moving their fish back into a smaller tank again as their fish was so unhappy in its new home! Ten to 12 gallons is big enough for a fish on its own although people have successfully kept Bettas in larger

Tanks need to be heated to a constant 24-29 C (75-84 F). Water temperature is a key factor in keeping your fish happy and healthy. Any current caused by filtration should be minimal so as not to stress the fish, this will mimic their natural habitat. Also, Betta fish are not usually strong swimmers due to their heavy finnage. Bigger tanks need to be filtered but many keepers who have smaller tanks do not have filtration and keep the water clean by doing regular (usually daily or bi-daily) water changes of up to 50%. Bettas can tolerate soft to hard water with a pH range of 6-8.

Tanks should have tight fitting lids as Bettas have a tendency to jump out of water. Many owners have come home to find their fish dried out on their desk or floor after leaping from their tank. A lid is also important to keep the air in the area above the surface warm and humid - a Betta breathing in cold surface air could lead to pneumonia.



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Tank decor should include plants, preferably real or silk as plastic may tear delicate fins, for the fish to hide in and rest on. Floating plants are good and may house any bubble nests created by your male fish. Betta tanks should not contain anything reflective or be near anything reflective as the fish will see the reflection leading him to believe he has competition, causing excessive flaring leading to tiredness, stress and possibly physical damage. The fish will also appreciate a hidey hole such as a terracotta pot but it must be ensured the pot does not have a hole in the bottom which the fish may get stuck in!

A good example of a Betta tank. Not too small or big. Soft plants to rest on and lots of hiding places

There is much debate over suitable tank mates for Bettas, some are kept successfully with fish that are thought as completely incompatible companions. However general consensus is that male Bettas are best kept on their own, and definitely NEVER with another male. Females should be either kept on their own or in a group of at least six to even out aggression, One male with a large group of females is acceptable. A single male and a single female should only be kept together for breeding, after which the female should be removed.

If they are to be kept with other fish, as a general rule their tank mates should not be brightly coloured or be long finned, for example, Guppies, so the Betta won't regard them as competition which will lead, most likely, to fierce aggression by the Betta. Tank mates should not be too quick or active either as this will stress the slower Betta. Some suitable tank mates are Corydora catfish, African Dwarf Frogs or snails, although Bettas have been know to nip at snails. Some Betta fish are very docile and will co-exist happily in a tank with other fish but others can be very aggressive and will not tolerate anyone in their 'kingdom'. They are generally quite lazy fish, drifting around their tank or resting on leaves However, every Betta is different and what may be true for one fish, may not be true for another. The recommendations above are commonly advised and are generally true.

Corydora catfish make good tank mates for Bettas



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Many keepers are attracted to Bettas, not only because of their appearance, but because they are great characters. A Betta will come to recognise his owner and have been known to only accept food from their owner, refusing food from anyone else! They may become upset if their routine is changed or interrupted and sulk. They are curious and friendly fish, sometimes rubbing their owner's hand during water changes.

When Bettas breed, the male will build a bubble nest. This is often seen by Betta owners as a sign that their fish is happy as they will build these nests even if breeding is not imminent. The male will entice the female under the nest and squeeze the eggs from her. The female should be removed from the tank after spawning, as the male may be aggressive towards her. The male will guard the eggs, returning then to the nest if they sink. The eggs will hatch after 24 hours.

This is a basic over-view of the beautiful and interesting fish which is Betta Splendens. Each of these fish are individuals and should be regarded and treated as such. Vicious and ruthless with it's own kind, curious and friendly to its owner. Betta Splendens makes a fascinating addition to any aquarist's collection.

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