

Betta Fish

This text can be found at: www.aquariumsource.com/betta-fish-care

I have added/changed a few things that I have learned from caring for them myself.

Musts:

- **Ensuring they have at least a 3-gallon tank**
- **Using silk or real plants in the tank**
- **Using an adequate submersible heater and thermometer**
- **Giving your Betta enough space between the lid and the water surface to breathe**
- **Performing frequent water changes**
- **Checking ammonia levels of your tank with a water testing kit**

Species Summary

Betta fish (sometimes called the Siamese fighting fish) are an extremely common choice in the aquarium community. They're beautiful and have a unique temperament that can be fun to observe.

Behavior & Temperament

Betta fish are very active fish, which can make them fun to observe. They go up to the surface frequently and are hungry often. This protective nature can even apply to people viewing the aquarium as well. They'll often swim up to the glass to investigate an onlooker and even flash their colors as a warning! When threatened, betta fish will also puff out their fins and gill covers to convince you that they are not to be messed with.

A common misconception, however, is that betta fish are a low-maintenance species. They have a specific set of needs that must be met, and if cared for correctly, can be a beautiful choice for your tank.

Betta fish are a small yet fierce freshwater tropical fish native to countries in Asia and can live to be anywhere around three years old. They are found in places like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, and Thailand (they've even been named Thailand's national fish). They're quite adaptive and can regularly be found in rivers, streams, and even rice paddies.

Aside from their intelligence, they have one fascinating trait they are known for – their labyrinth organ which is very similar to a lung. This means they fall into the category of “labyrinth fish” because this organ allows them to gulp air from the surface of the water. Because of this never use any commercially prepared fish remedies ending in fix. They contain oils that are harmful to the labyrinth organ. This trait can make them more tolerant of poor water conditions out in the wild, although you should still aim for perfect water quality in your tank at home (more on that later).

Size

Bettas are small fish, **growing only up to about three inches in length**. Once they're about 7 months old they'll typically be done with their growth for the most part. However, they can sometimes get a little bigger after this time period.

The size of your fish is influenced by all of the usual factors:

- The quality of betta fish care you provide in your tank
- The quality of care from the pet store that sold you your fish
- Genetics

When you compare female betta fish to males, the biggest difference in size can be noticed in the fins. Male betta fish have larger and longer fins than females and may have a larger body (although the difference can be small). Females will have an ovipositor (egg spot). Some males will have a false ovipositor; however they will show a “beard” under the chin area when flaring where the female won't have this bearded area while flaring.

Appearance

Bettas are extremely colorful and come in multiple variations, but blue and red variations are the most commonly seen. Other less common colors betta fish are seen in are black, metallic variations, and multi-color. Purple is the rarest color. They have fins that are large and flowing in comparison to their small bodies and are bright in color. Their colors can deepen if they are threatened or mating. If the color is pale the betta fish may be stressed or ill provided it's not the usual color for that fish.

How To Care For A Betta Fish

Water Parameters

Betta fish care is something that can be a little trickier than many aquarists realize. The key to caring for any fish, especially bettas, is maintaining **consistent** water quality, parameters, and conditions. Failing to do this can cause a sudden change in temperature or chemical levels, which can compromise their health and immune system or even be fatal.

Temperature

Bettas are tropical fish. The ideal water temperature for your betta fish should be **between 78 and 82 degrees Fahrenheit**. Be careful not to place the tank by a window that gets lots of sun, or a heat/air-conditioning vent, as this could alter the water temperature.

pH levels

The pH of the water should be between 7 and 9—close to neutral, with a **hardness between 5 and 35 dGH**. Do not chase pH. By that I mean do not try to bring the pH of your tank to a perfect level. Gradually acclimate your fish to the current water parameters in your home, and go with that for all subsequent water changes. Your fish will become used to it, and it will be fine.

Water should be dechlorinated to safe limits, and ammonia levels should be zero parts per million. Nitrate levels should stay below 40 ppm, and nitrite levels should be zero ppm.

As always, testing the water levels every few weeks with a test kit will help you keep your aquarium in these ranges. Tanks must be filled with filtered water, or tap water that has gone through a dechlorination process (conditioning).

Important note: NEVER use distilled water because it lacks important nutrients.

Water cleanliness

Having a reliable filtration system is crucial. About 25 percent of the water in the tank should be changed out weekly – **NEVER do a 100 percent water change**. The reason for this is there are beneficial bacteria that reside inside your tank that reduce ammonia levels. During water changes always use the drained tank water to swish out the filter media in your tank filter. **NEVER** use soap or any cleaning agents.

Every two weeks or so, it's a good idea to vacuum the gravel/substrate, as well.

Tank Size

Sticking with the recommended tank size for your betta is essential if you want them to thrive.

According to the IBC (International Betta Congress) **Betta fish should have a minimum tank size of 2.5 gallons**. It is common to use bowls to house betta fish or vases with plant toppers, but this is not something that is recommended. Bowls do not provide the necessary amount of space for these fish, which can lead to a lot of unnecessary stress which can cause disease and death. Long finned males do best in 5 gallons or more. Longer tanks are better than taller tanks.

Always make sure that whatever goes into your aquarium is labeled as "aquarium safe". Any new furniture or plants should also be rinsed with fresh tap water or conditioned fresh water before they are placed in the betta tank.

Important elements of a healthy betta fish tank include:

- **A filtration system:** A filter with internal adjustable power is best – this will allow you to ensure the water isn't moving too swiftly for the betta's liking.
- **A heater:** The most common type are fully submersible water heaters.
- **Substrate:** A gentle substrate of pebbles, sand, etc. is ideal. One to two inches of a finely-milled substrate is best. This will prevent your fish from scratching themselves on the bottom and provides a place for beneficial bacteria to live. Be sure to rinse the substrate and get rid of any sharp pieces before placing it in the tank.
- **Plants:** Plants provide a good place to retreat, as well as a pleasant visual effect. Artificial plants should be silk, so as not to scratch the fish. Harsh plastic should be avoided. Live plants serve this purpose, and can improve the cleanliness of the tank as well. Just make sure that access to the surface isn't obstructed, as bettas like to breathe from the surface of the water.
- **Lighting:** Betta fish enjoy a tank without harsh inside lights. Many betta enthusiasts add tannins to the water to produce a "dark water" effect to simulate their natural environment. Too much direct sunlight can promote algal growth as well. Most tank owners prefer a luminescent tank light or an LED left on for several hours each day. Betta fish need a day and night schedule, as do live plants.
- **A close fitting lid on the tank:** Betta fish are excellent jumpers.

It's best to find a quiet place to put their tank, as loud noises can cause stress (which will impact their overall health).

Betta fish are not exceptionally strong swimmers, especially the long finned breeds, so anything more than a gentle current will cause them stress as well. Because of their interesting ability to receive air from the surface, betta fish do not need an aerator in the tank.

What Do Betta Fish Eat?

It's very important that your betta fish eat the proper food. Do not rely solely on plants to feed your betta fish. They are carnivores, plus they cannot live on infusoria (microscopic animals in the water) alone. A well-rounded diet allows them to be happier, more active, and brighter in color. Their diet should consist of high quality betta fish flakes or pellets with a protein source of fish/fish meal as the first ingredient or two. They may also be given live or frozen foods like brine shrimp or bloodworms, occasionally, as a snack to enjoy. Cultured fruit flies can be fed to them either live or frozen and are available in the reptile section of major pet store chains.

How Often Should You Feed Betta Fish

Most adult fish eat twice each day. Each fish only needs a "pinch" of flakes per feeding. Pellets are more dense than flakes, and should be fed sparingly – 1 or 2 pellets. These pressed and compacted pellets can easily cause constipation when over fed. Betta fish tend to eat more than they need. They are excellent hunters, and will scour the bottom of the tank looking for sunken food or living things to eat. Because of their hunting skills it is very easy to overfeed them (especially if you're using food to help train them to do tricks).

Your betta may have been overfed if it is bloated (swelling of the abdomen, acting lethargic or swimming abnormally). If this becomes the case, skip one day of feeding.

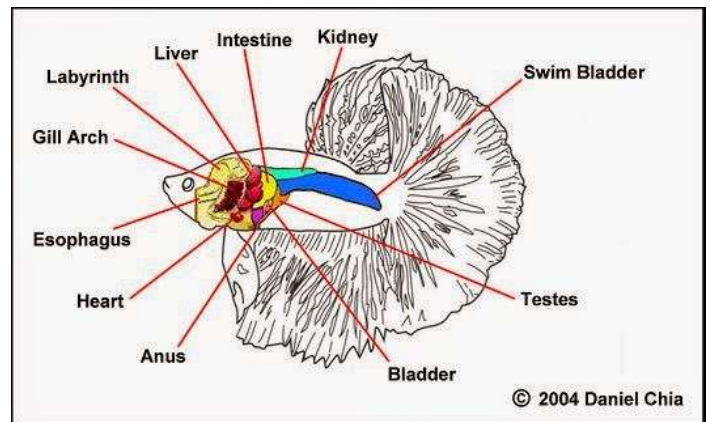
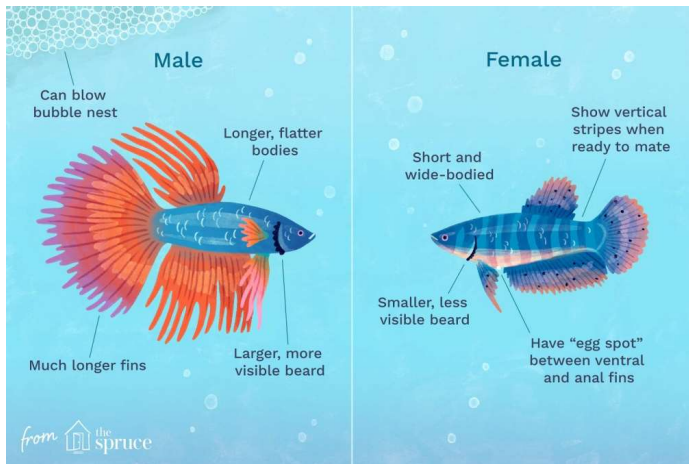
Tank Mates

First off, there must NEVER be two male betta fish in the same tank. They will have the need to assert dominance, and the result will be a severe injury, and most likely the death of one or both of the males.

- Tank mates must be larger, and aggressive enough to defend themselves if needed.
- Fish duller in color are best. If they are too vibrant in color or have flowing tails, the betta fish may flash their colors and feel the need to compete.
- Tank mates must have the same water condition requirements.
- There must be plenty of room in the tank to avoid unnecessary conflict. Water must be added with tank mates. 1 gallon per additional tank mate.

Types of fish that tend to be successful in shared tanks with bettas include rasboras, large ghost shrimp, tetras, catfish, gouramis or mollies.

Expected Costs:



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How to Acclimate Your Fish

Remove a small portion of the water your fish is currently in. (This is where I test it to find the parameters, matching the pH and temperature if possible).

Place the cup your fish is in into the tank where your fish will be living. Make sure the tank is heated to at least 78F. Using a heater which can be set is the best. Also, be sure the water in the tank has been treated with a chlorine remover such as API Quick Start.

While the cup is floating in the tank water be sure it stays upright, we want to add only small quantities of tank water to the cup, so leave the lid on.

Fill the pipette with tank water, and then slowly drip it through the lid opening into the cup. Do this every 10 minutes until there is more tank water than original cup water. Allow your fish to remain in the cup for at least another 15 minutes.

Release it by dipping the cup all the way into the water giving the fish time to swim out. It is common for the fish to go to the bottom of the tank for a period of time, but it should greet you in a shortly. If it doesn't, try adding Seachem Stress Guard or API Stress Coat to the water.

Item	Initial Price	Yearly Cost
Betta	\$2 – \$30	
Tank	\$50 – \$150	
Filter	\$30 – \$150	
Heater	\$10 – \$40	
Lighting	\$10 – \$30	
Thermometer	\$5	
Substrate	\$5 – \$50	
Toys	\$5 – \$30	
Food	\$5 – \$10	\$50
Water Conditioners	\$5 – \$10	\$10 – \$15
Plants	\$5 – \$30	\$10
Medication	\$20	\$20
Total	\$152 – \$555	\$90 – \$95

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