

# First Time Fish Owners' Guide



Written and distributed by  
Aquatic Veterinary Services  
<https://CAfishvet.com>

# New Tank Checklist

Do you have everything you need to get your tank ready for fish?

- Fish tank of \_\_\_\_\_ gallons
- Table that can hold \_\_\_\_\_ gallons fish tank (1 gallon of water = 3.78 kg or 8.34 lbs)
- Lid for tank with light
- Filter capable of volume 1.5x \_\_\_\_\_ gallons (canister or hang-on)
- If tank is >30 gallons, consider adding aerator or powerhead to improve water flow
- Substrate (gravel, rocks, sand, etc.)
- Gravel vacuum
- Decor items (must be FISH SAFE) - for bettas, stick with items that will not snag fins
- Dechlorinator to treat tap water for chlorine AND chloramine
- Bucket that can hold at least ~40% of your total water volume (or multiple buckets if necessary)
- Scrub brush for décor
- Algae scraper for acrylic or glass tank (they are DIFFERENT)
- Heater - if your fish need it; did you do your research?  
Hint: goldfish do NOT, bettas absolutely DO
- Thermometer - to make sure your heater is working properly
- Water quality test kit - this is NOT optional
- Fish food (enough for 6 months), you may want to try a variety to start to see what they like
- Fish, obviously ;-)

# New Tank Checklist—Word Search

T T T T T K G C O R O D D Y F E X D F Y  
P A V R E R M E U E G E H O L E E A O A  
T A N F S K J O L I C D D I L P H E O V  
H T I K T A C B P H A E R A T O R H D R  
I S B P K O A U L C T U N Y G E S R M R  
H F U G I T H O B X M M Q E F D E E E O  
G B H R T F R T J E O X M H U M E W K J  
L K E Q B I R E T E M O M R E H T O A Y  
K X M Q N B C R M U U C A V Y M D P F W  
Q R Y A U D U D E C O R T N Y E I I U G  
H A T Y O J F R K S G L E S R G L C D T  
G O M T N E I S C O C T U P C T F R R U  
R T P U D X S R A S A R V L E J H U J O  
H Q L P Q J K P I R R O A R Y C F R Q Z  
R F S D J S R Z T Z Q O J P S F R D I H  
O B T R K R R S V N X J P V E K E C D M  
V U H M Q H B L G U O N Q D H R T F C P  
U M D W Y U M C I P J A G G R V A Z Q T  
X W B T S R W N G P W L Y K A K E W M L  
G G S Z M O F K Q T R Y K U X Q H L J H

**Find the words!**

**AERATOR**

**BUCKET**

**DECHLORINATOR**

**DECOR**

**FILTER**

**FISH**

**FOOD**

**HEATER**

**LID**

**POWERHEAD**

**SCRAPER**

**SCRUBBRUSH**

**SUBSTRATE**

**TABLE**

**TANK**

**TESTKIT**

**THERMOMETER**

**VACUUM**

# Setting Up Your Tank

1. Be sure to place your tank on a sturdy table, away from direct sunlight. A waterproof tablecloth can be used to protect any porous surfaces.
2. Setup your filter and add water to your tank. Try to pre-heat your water if you are adding tropical fish! Turn on your heater and use a thermometer to make sure it is working properly.
3. Add dechlorinator that treats chlorine AND chloramine to make tap water safe for fish. You DO NOT need to add any other water conditioners or bacterial starter.
4. Rinse ALL substrate decor thoroughly before adding it to your tank. If your water is cloudy after adding the substrate and decor, perform a >75% water change to remove the particulates.
5. Allow your fish to float in their bag for 10-15 minutes, until the temperature in the bag and the surrounding water has equalized. If your fish has been in the bag for more than 2 hours, you will need to add a little tank water to the bag to help slowly adjust the pH. Add 1/4 cup of water every 5 minutes until the water volume in the bag has doubled.
6. Catch your fish out of their bag with a soft net. Transfer them to the tank and pull out the bag of water and throw it away. Do NOT dump it into the tank.
7. Watch your fish carefully for 10-15 minutes. Hiding is a normal behavior. Your fish may not be interested in eating their first day in a new tank. Offer a small amount and watch to see if they are interested. If your fish stops moving, test your water chemistry ASAP.

# Setting Up Your Tank—Picture Match

Match each picture with the setup step

A



B



C



D



E



F



G



# How To Clean Your Tank

It is **very important** to clean your fish tank regularly. Make sure to follow this checklist to make sure your fish stay healthy!

## Daily

- Remove excess food
- Monitor water level and top off if necessary
- Evaluate fish swimming behavior and appetite (make note if anything seems different)
- Check water temperature

## Weekly

- 10% water change using gravel siphon (OR 25% every other week)  
\*\*Please note: this is only a general guideline. Cleaning frequency and volume will be determined by bioload, size of tank and filtration capability.\*\*
- Perform water quality testing if new fish or equipment have been added within last 2 months
- Scrub algae from sides of aquarium
- Rinse biological filtration gently in reserve tank water
- Remove and dead leaves from live plants

## Monthly

- Rinse biological filtration gently in old tank water
- Perform water quality testing if NO new fish or equipment have been added within last 2 months
- Remove décor and scrub separately
- Vacuum gravel under décor

## Yearly

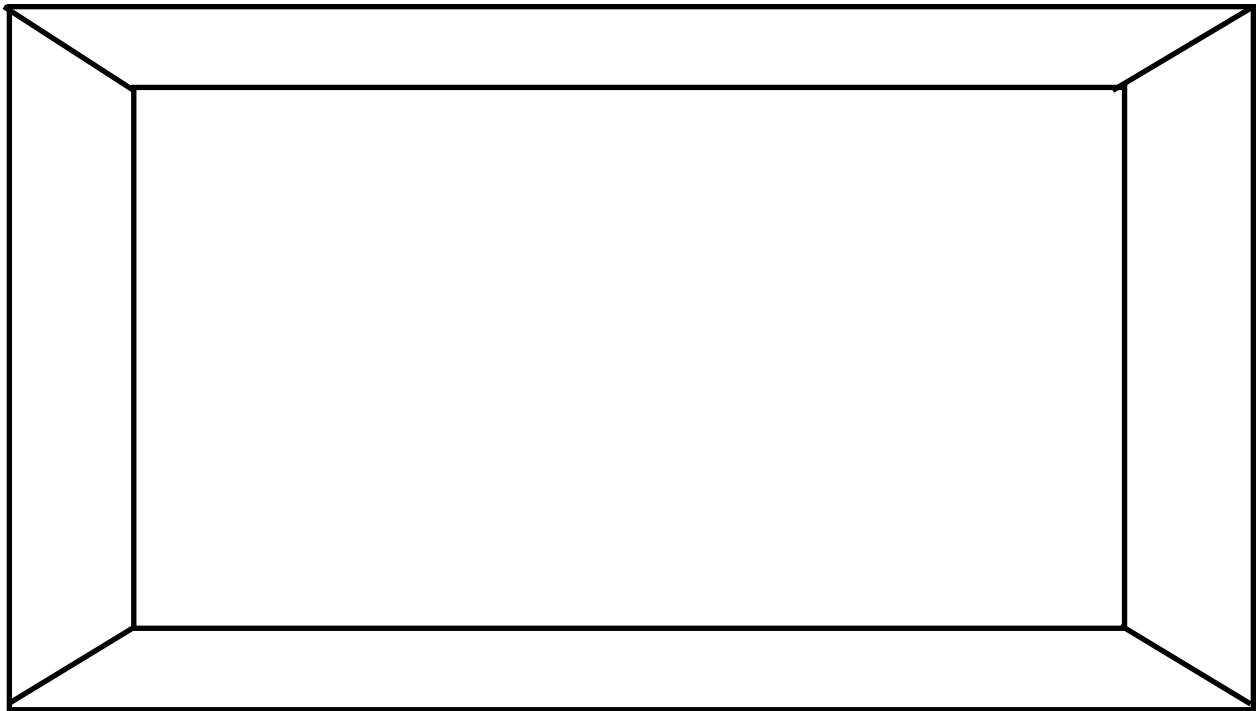
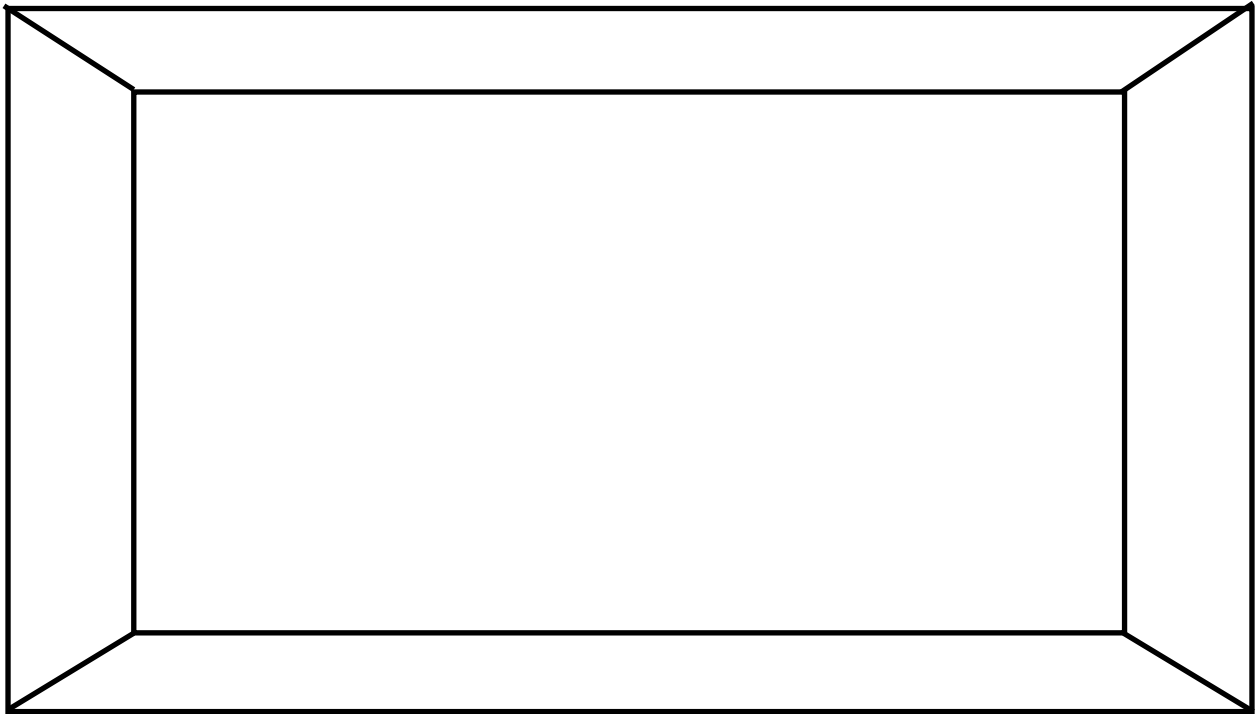
- Buy new water test kit



# How To Clean Your Tank

Draw your tank BEFORE and AFTER cleaning.

How does it look different?



# Water Quality

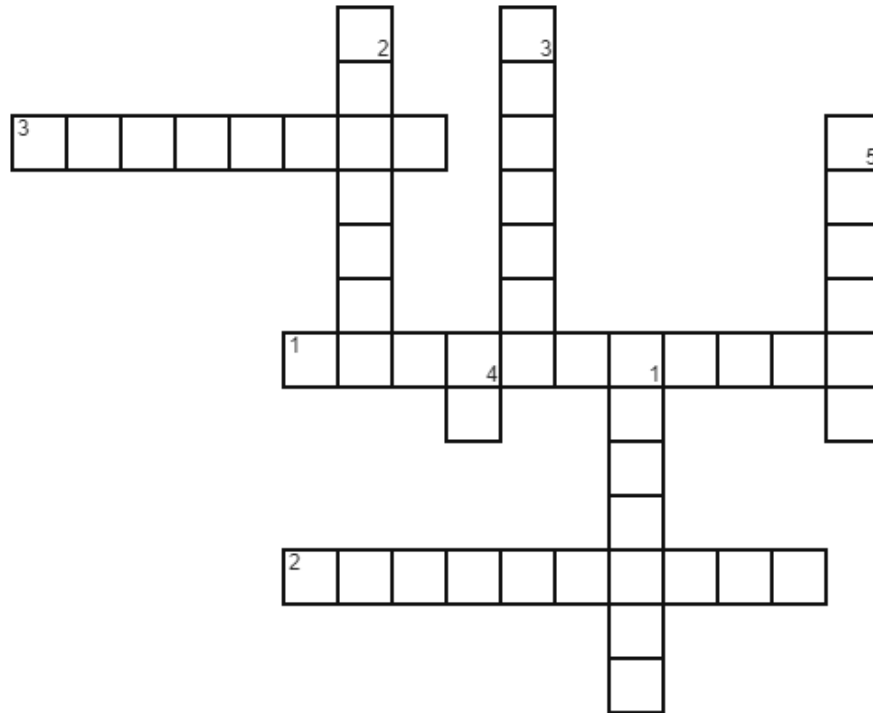
Water quality is the measurement of certain chemicals in the water to make sure it is safe for fish. It is important to test the following parameters on a regular basis with a liquid-based test kit! Copy this page to keep a close eye on all your parameters!

|                    |  |  |  |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Date</b>        |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Ammonia</b>     |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Nitrite</b>     |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Nitrate</b>     |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>pH</b>          |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>kH</b>          |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Temperature</b> |  |  |  |  |  |

For more information on water quality, visit <https://cafishvet.com/stress-free-fish/water-quality/>



# Fish Tank Water Quality



## Across

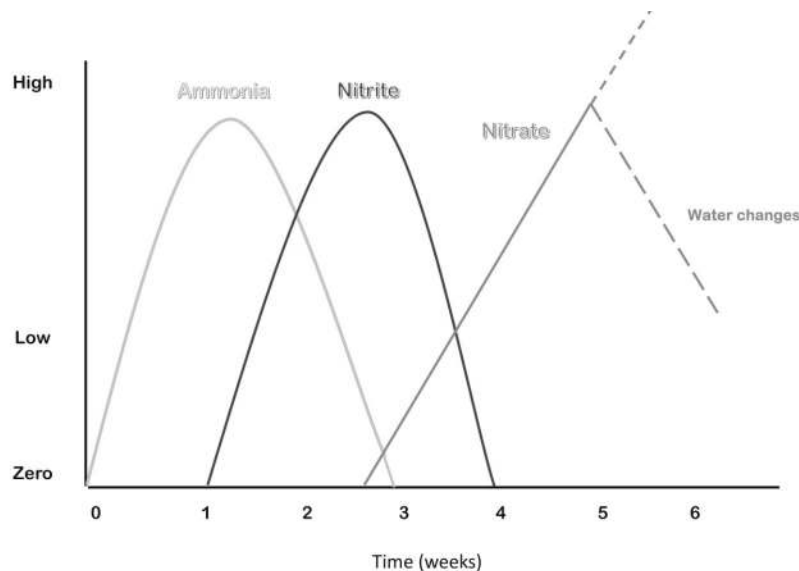
1. Since fish are ectotherms, this measurement determines their metabolic activity.
2. Measures the buffering capability of the water.
3. Marine fish will vary in what range of this they can tolerate.

## Down

1. The first stage of the nitrogen cycle, primarily excreted from the gills of fish.
2. Can competitively bind with hemoglobin and cause methemoglobinemia.
3. End stage of nitrogen cycle and can be used by plants as a food source.
4. The measure of hydrogen ions in the water.
5. Like the air we breathe, fish need this in the water to survive.

# New Tank Syndrome

All new fish tanks will undergo a process called “New Tank Syndrome.” This occurs due to the fact that your biological filtration has not yet become established. During this process, you **WILL** see spikes in ammonia, nitrite and nitrate. If you plot your levels, it will look something like this:



In order to keep your fish safe, start with just a few fish in your new tank to keep the bioload low. Make sure that your filter is at least 1.5-2 times the capacity of your tank volume. Watch your parameters carefully and your fish will make it through just fine!

If your fish start to swim too slowly, lie on the bottom of their tank or stop eating for more than a day, perform a 25-30% water change and check your parameter levels.

You **DO NOT** need to add any “bacterial starter” or “ammonia binder” during this process. It will only slow your efforts.

# New Tank Syndrome—Coloring Page

Changes in water chemistry are invisible!

Color this page using your imagination.

What kind of fish would you have?



# Feeding Your Fish

What do fish like to eat? Fish food!

There are LOTS of different types of food you can buy for your fish.

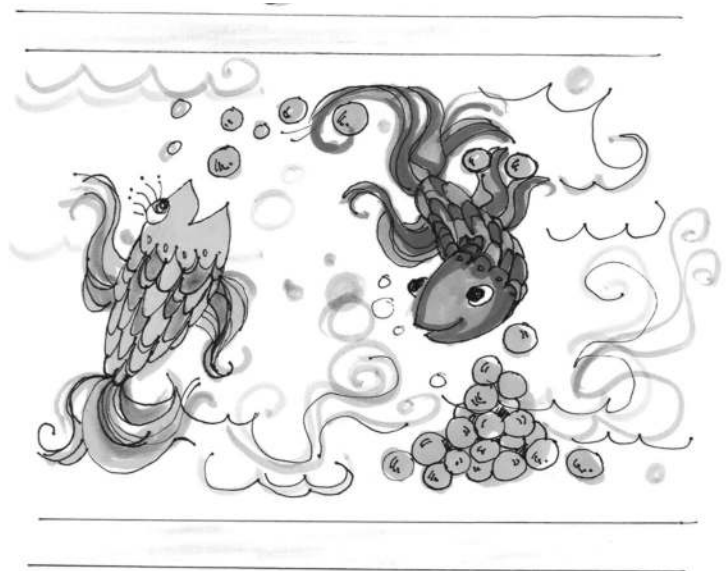
**Flakes:** These flat pieces of food are good for very tiny fish, but they spoil very quickly. Due to a high surface to mass ratio, you should go through your container in only 4 months.

**Pellets:** These round balls of many sizes are the best diet for your fish. Choose a size that fits comfortably in your fishes mouth. Their shape holds their nutrition better than flakes.

**Frozen:** Most fish don't need to have frozen diets. Picky eaters or exotic fish may eat nothing else, but most fish can get a frozen diet as an occasional treat of if they are sick.

Fish can also get treats, but VERY rarely. Shelled green peas are a good low calorie snack. Some fish may like small, freeze-dried shrimp.

If you have a picky eater, try a couple of different brands.



## How much should I feed my fish?

It is best to feed your fish very slowly, and allow them to eat all the food you toss in before adding more. We recommend starting with a very small pinch or 2-3 pellets per fish and letting them eat everything before adding a little more. If they don't finish all their food, they are done eating.

## Fish Feeding—Word Jumble

Ready to get your first fish? What kind do you want to get?  
Figure out the jumbles of some of the most popular pet fish!

1. IHFDSOGL \_\_\_\_\_

2. ATTBE \_\_\_\_\_

3. RSAIEFZBH \_\_\_\_\_

4. RTATE \_\_\_\_\_

5. ACOLH \_\_\_\_\_

6. YPUGP \_\_\_\_\_

7. LLMYO \_\_\_\_\_

8. IHLCDIC \_\_\_\_\_

9. ETUSOOOPSMCL \_\_\_\_\_

10. HTCFIAS \_\_\_\_\_

11. TDSOIRALW \_\_\_\_\_

12. OIK \_\_\_\_\_

# New Fish Owner Pledge

I, \_\_\_\_\_, pledge to take care of my new fish to the best of my ability. I understand that a fish's life has value and by signing below, I am responsible for my fish's well-being.

I promise to feed my fish every day and clean their tank once a week. I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ for help if I need it.

I understand that properly taken care of, my fish will live for several years. I plan on taking care of my fish for \_\_\_\_\_ years. After that, ownership of my fish will transfer to \_\_\_\_\_.

By taking in my new fish, I will cherish them and give them the best quality of life possible.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

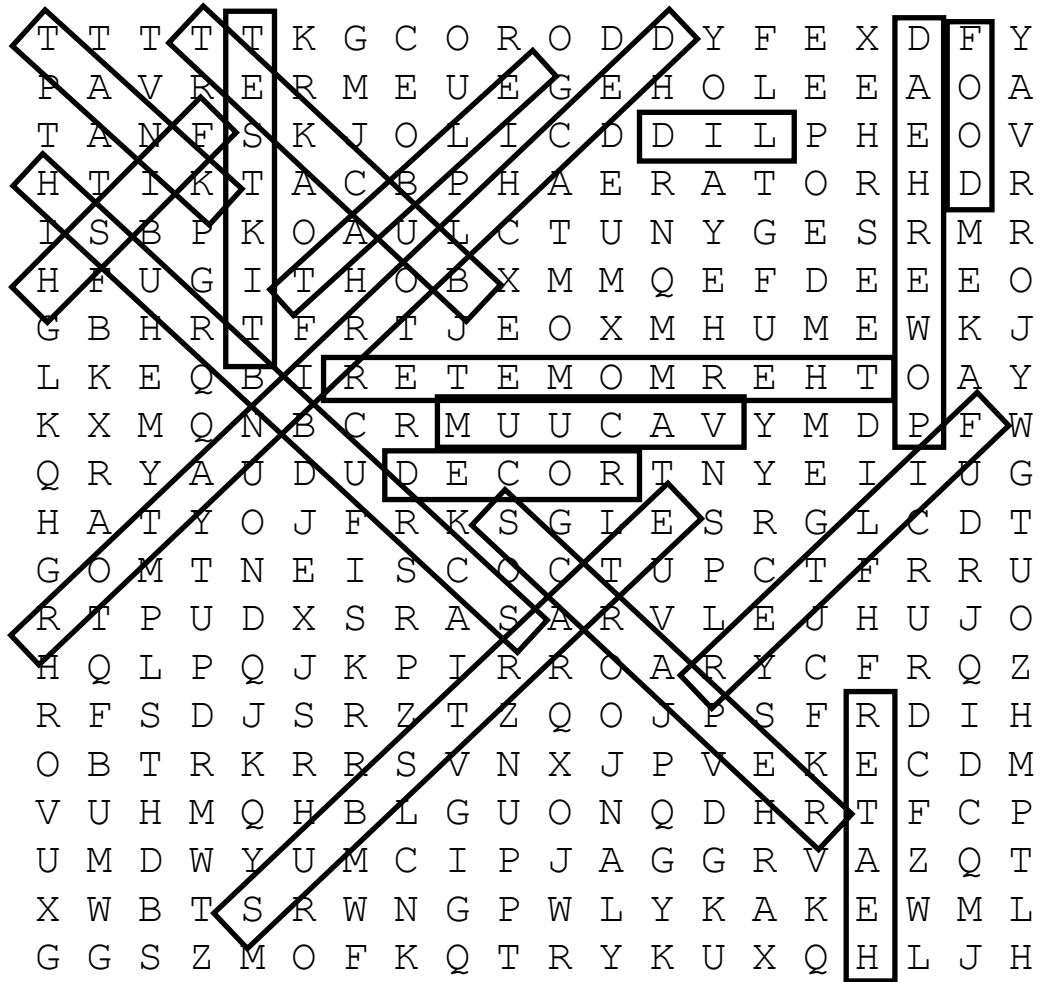
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Answer Keys

## Word Jumble



## Picture Match

A-4, B-3, C-6, D-5, E-7, F-1, G-2

## Crossword

Across 1. temperature  
2. alkalinity  
3. salinity

Down 1. ammonia  
2. nitrite  
3. nitrate  
4. pH  
5. oxygen

## Jumble

1. GOLDFISH 2. BETTA 3. ZEBRAFISH 4. TETRA 5. LOACH 6. GUPPY 7. MOLLY 8. CICHLID 9. PLECOSTOMOUS  
10. CATFISH 11. SWORDTAIL 12. KOI

# Additional Resources

**Aquatic Veterinary Services**

**<https://CAfishvet.com>**

**(831) 728-7000**

**American Association of Fish Veterinarians**

**<http://www.fishvets.org/>**

**World Aquatic Veterinary Medical Association**

**<https://www.wavma.org/>**

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