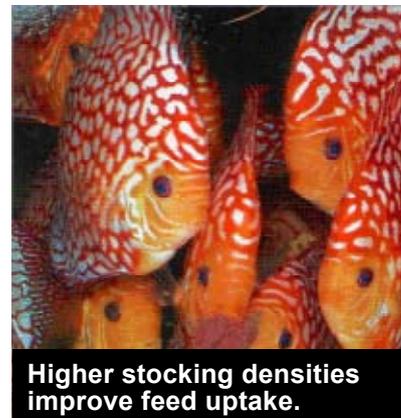


# Are discus fish suitable for first-time aquarium owners?

by Jörg Stendker

The appearance of large discus fish is very majestic, whether they have been bred in captivity or caught in the wild. However, it is only newly introduced fish, which have not yet acclimatised to an aquarium environment, that react as delicately as you might expect a “royal majesty” to do. The captive breeds of *Symphysodon discus*, bred over many fish generations, have become domesticated pets, thanks to a process of selective breeding and domestication. While domesticated animals cannot easily be re-introduced into the wild, they have many advantages, which make them perfectly adapted to living in aquariums, with human care.



In the past, a rule of thumb was established stating that for discus fish caught in the wild each fish required approx. 50 litres of aquarium water. For domesticated fish, which are generally available in specialist pet shops, and which have been bred in captivity over many generations, these water requirements no longer apply. Moreover, especially for juvenile fish that are still growing, it is advisable to stock them more densely. Normally, in a group of 10 fish, no territorial behaviour will arise. And if two of your fish become a pair, you can easily partition off part of your aquarium for them, providing them with their own territory, so that no aggressive behaviour will arise. Once discus fish are fully-grown, you should provide them with approx. 15 to 20 litres of aquarium water per fish. In discus fish aquariums with too low a stocking density, one discus fish will generally become dominant and will prevent weaker discus fish from feeding. Unfortunately, the weakest fish in the group may then be excluded from the group and may become ill and dark in colour, and remain motionless in a corner of the aquarium.



Instead of addressing such behavioural problems with medication (which generally either do not help at all, or only help short-term) a much more promising approach is to increase the number of discus fish in your group to at least 10 fish. Feeding behaviour and social behaviour is also improved in large discus groups (as small groups display less competitive feeding). When adding new stock to your aquarium, it is important that the new fish are from the same hatchery or pet shop as your other fish.

Captive bred discus fish also have the advantage that they are no longer quite so demanding regarding the aquarium water quality. These days it is possible to keep them in almost all types of tap water – with no complicated water treatment or chemical additives needed. Standard aquarium equipment and general maintenance and care, including a weekly water change, are fully sufficient for keeping and even breeding discus fish successfully. The most important factors are high, tropical water temperatures and good filtration.

Even feeding discus fish has become very straightforward nowadays, thanks to specially developed feeds, whereas in the past, discus fish were considered difficult to feed and to be specialised feeders. We have developed our own special discus feed-mix, which we exclusively feed to the discus fish in our hatchery. We also make this feed available for end customers, who can purchase it as frozen feed in specialist pet shops. Our feed is easy to split into portions, is eaten readily by the fish and contains everything discus fish require in a healthy diet.



**Captive bred discus fish also look most spectacular in aquariums with ample plant life.**

The discus fish, which we have selectively bred over the past 47 years and have gradually and continuously acclimatised to the standard aquarium environment, are kept in normal tap water. This means they do not require a complicated acclimatisation phase, when they are introduced to a home aquarium or supplied to specialist pet shops. So, our discus fish are quite “tough”, in the best sense of the word. This also applies to diseases and illnesses. In our hatchery, we are often able to treat first signs of a fish’s poor overall condition or actual illness, by simply raising the water temperature and using activated carbon for effective water filtration – wholly without the use of any medication. This is also very advantageous when the fish are introduced to a home aquarium, as it means the fishes’ health is stable and the fish have not developed resistance to medications and are not susceptible to particular germs. So if an illness should then chance to develop, it is possible to treat it with low dosages of medication and with low-risk treatment methods.



**This is how we feed our discus feed in the hatchery.**



**Juvenile discus fish feeding our specially-developed feed.**

Hence, discus fish have developed into fish which are now suitable for first-time aquarium owners. So why not opt for captive bred discus fish? Other species like dogs, cats, pigeons and budgerigars – and naturally guppies, kois and goldfish – are examples of a wide range of animal types which have been domesticated and bred solely for the pleasure and enjoyment of human beings, as pets and/ or companions. These species have been living in human care for many generations and have adapted to the human environment. Nowadays we can also add discus fish to this list. It is important to me, to be able to allay fears about keeping discus fish. Salespeople in specialist pet shops and all aquarium owners should be aware of the fact that discus fish are not difficult to keep, and they should let others know this too.

## **Diskuszucht Stendker GmbH & Co. KG**



**Top quality, great colours, easy to keep!**

Our discus fish are accustomed to normal tap water! We offer a wide range of over 20 colour varieties as well as sizes ranging from 5 cm to jumbo-sized – and all fish originate exclusively from our own hatchery!

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**Our fish are only available for purchase from specialist (retail) pet shops!**