



Betta Splendens

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Bettas, also called Siamese fighting fish, are among the most popular pet fish. Their engaging personalities, hardy nature and beautiful coloration make them wonderful pets. They are native to rice paddies and floodplains in Southeast Asia. Bettas have some color changing ability and can display dark horizontal bars along their bodies when stressed or vertical bars when encountering a potential mate. Bettas kept in appropriate enclosures with good water quality and an appropriate diet can live 5-10 years.

Health Care:

Bettas can be very good at hiding illness. Signs of illness to watch for include lethargy, loss of appetite, redness of scales or fins, fuzziness on scales or fins, bloating, and loss of balance. Common illnesses include bacterial, fungal and protozoan infections. Always transport fish in water from their habitat to keep water quality variables consistent and avoid shock.

Husbandry concerns:

Appropriate housing conditions for bettas are often badly misunderstood. Due to their hardy nature, and ability to breath air through a labyrinth system, bettas can survive in very poor conditions, but become prone to illness and have much shorter lifespans. Bettas should have a tank that is at least 5 gallons, but the bigger the better. Smaller tanks require much more frequent water changes to maintain appropriate water quality: up to daily 30% water changes for tanks under 2 gallons, weekly 60% water changes for tanks over 5 gallons. Water changes should be partial only, to allow beneficial nitrogen converting bacteria to survive. These bacteria convert ammonia waste to less harmful forms. Water quality is important as a buildup of waste products can be harmful to fish and cause illness. Water quality can be tested with at home test strips, or by an aquarium supply store. There should be no detectable ammonia, or nitrites as both of these are harmful. The presence of either suggests there is not a sufficient population of nitrogen converting bacteria in the tank for the amount of waste being produced. Nitrates, should be detectable, but less than 50ppm. These are the end products of nitrogen converting bacteria and are not harmful until reaching very high levels, but indicate water is not being changed frequently enough at greater than 50ppm. All tank sizes should have a filter to maintain water quality. Low flow filters work best for bettas as their long fins make it difficult for them to swim against current. Canister filters with adjustable flow or under gravel filters with attached valves to restrict flow work well. Water should be dechlorinated either by using a chlorine free water source or removing chlorine before adding it to the tank. Chlorine can be removed by resting water for 24 hours or by using a compound, such as sodium thiosulfate or zeolite clay, to bind and inactivate the chlorine. Note that if your water contains chloramines, these will not be removed by resting water, but will

More on the back!

be removed by sodium thiosulfate or zeolite. Bettas require tropical water temperatures between 75 and 82F. Temperature should be maintained with a submersible heater and measured with a thermometer. Lights can be used during the day for viewing or to support plants, but should be turned off at night. The bottom of the tank should be lined with gravel.

Temperament:

Male bettas should never be housed together, as they will fight to the death. Males should also not be housed with female bettas, except for breeding, due to aggression. Bettas can be kept in community fish tanks with other species, however, male bettas sometimes also behave aggressively towards other fish species, particularly those that are smaller. It is also common for other fish species to nip at and damage more docile male bettas' fins. Even female bettas can be quite aggressive to one another and should only be housed together in large aquariums, over 10 gallons, where each can set up her own territory.

Diet:

Despite the common misconception that bettas will feed on plant matter, they are naturally insectivores and should be fed diets high in protein. Formulated pelleted diets can be used, but should be supplemented with bloodworms, daphnia, brine shrimp or other aquatic invertebrates.

