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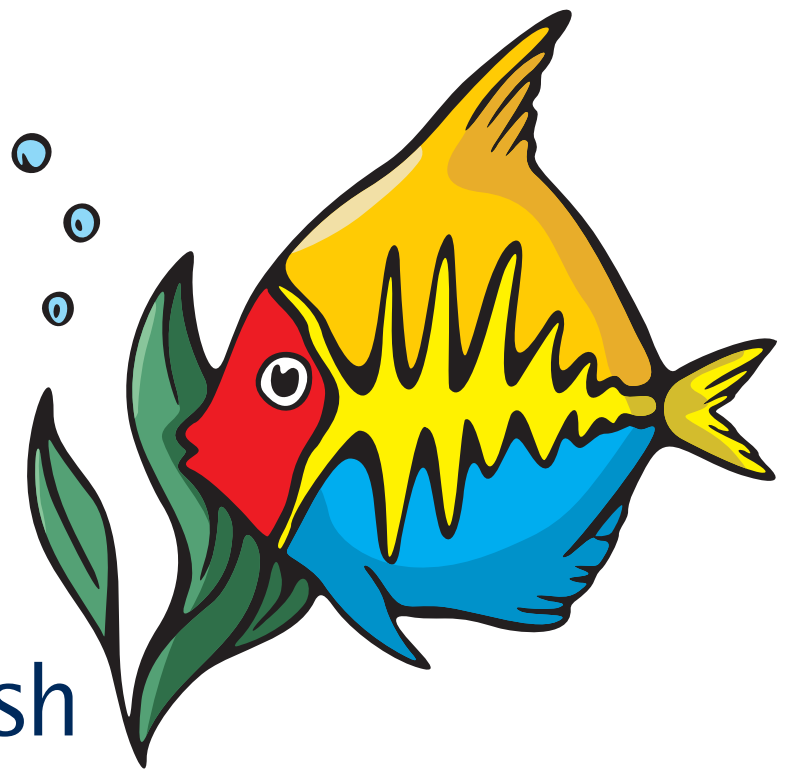
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# Just Add Water Then Add Fish

By Mark Berry



In our last edition (Issue 8 available as a back issue or on our website [www.urbananimal.net](http://www.urbananimal.net)) we dealt with the beginning phases of choosing a freshwater tank, equipping and positioning it, what types of pumps and filters are needed as well as other things the neophyte aquarist needs to know.

Now it's time to create the environment and add the water, then the fish. But first, you need to deal with the gravel bottom that you will add to the tank. You might assume you can add gravel straight from the shop but what's needed is an initial clean to get rid of gravel dust that can cloud the water and any other things that might be in the package. Consider that you are going to be staring at this gravel for a number of years so choose colour and other factors wisely.

You will also have your eye at the shop on decorations—that bubbling pirate chest, castle, fake octopus or other toy. Remember again that you are going to have these in for a while so choose with taste. It's also time to get advice on what plants to have in the tank, before you go back and pick up the fish in a subsequent trip after you've filled the tank and allowed the water to condition and age. Know what type of fish you are going to have and get advice on the appropriate fish to choose in relation to each other if various types will be chosen and also in relation to the size of tank, numbers of fish and plants that will work.

In choosing plants, you have to decide between live or artificial. While artificial plants of plastic and silk rival live ones in colour and looks, they don't require maintenance and do not create waste as live ones do when they decay. Then again, live plants absorb carbon dioxide and give off oxygen in daylight, harbour beneficial bacteria, serve as a food source and inhibit algae growth. It's a tough choice so take advice and choose wisely.

You can combine, using mostly artificial plants with a few live ones and change over time, knowing you can remove and clean the virtual plants.

You will already have purchased a large bucket—about 20 litres or so—strictly for aquarium use and labelled as such. You never want to use detergent in this or any other chemicals other than those you use for adding water, such as a conditioner. Using a large sieve or colander, pour the gravel into it until half full and set on top of the bucket. Pour water over it while shaking gently and continue until the water runs clear. Repeat with remaining gravel until you have cleaned enough to create a layer at least 20-50mm for smaller tanks or 50-100mm for larger tanks.

Once the gravel is rinsed, place it in the tank to the shapes and levels desired (it doesn't have to be flat) and place a large plate or baking pan on top of it to cushion the addition of water. Using the bucket, fill it and slowly pour the water into the plate or pan until the tank is half full.

This is the point that you can add the decorations and plants that you have chosen at the aquarium shop which is easier if the tank is half full. Once you're happy with your design, you can install the heater and filter but wait until after you've filled the tank before plugging into an outlet and powering them up. Remove the plate or pan, add water conditioner according to the instructions and ratio for your aquarium's capacity and let the heater and filter run for at least 24-48 hours before adding the fish. Some experts suggest a week to let dissolved gases and chemicals to stabilise. Test the pH and chlorine levels before buying the fish and adding them.

Back to the shop to make the choice of fish. Carry an esky with you with bubble wrap or towelling in the bottom to protect the bags of fish you will bring back home. Plan to make the trip to the shop and immediately back, not stopping off and letting the car overheat.

You'll need to start small and let your fish acclimate to the tank without crowding them. You will need your bacterial colonies to be established to handle the load of waste they will consume and convert which takes time. So hang back on the urge to have four of every variety you want. And also make sure that the species you choose are compatible. Some fish fight, others need different water conditions to thrive. Choose small hardy fish first.

The biggest mistake a friend of mine made was adding a pair of yabbies to the tank one afternoon, thinking they'd be cute and would help clean it. They did. They cleaned the tank of the fish, leaving little skeletons behind before going for the vegetable course and shredding the plants!

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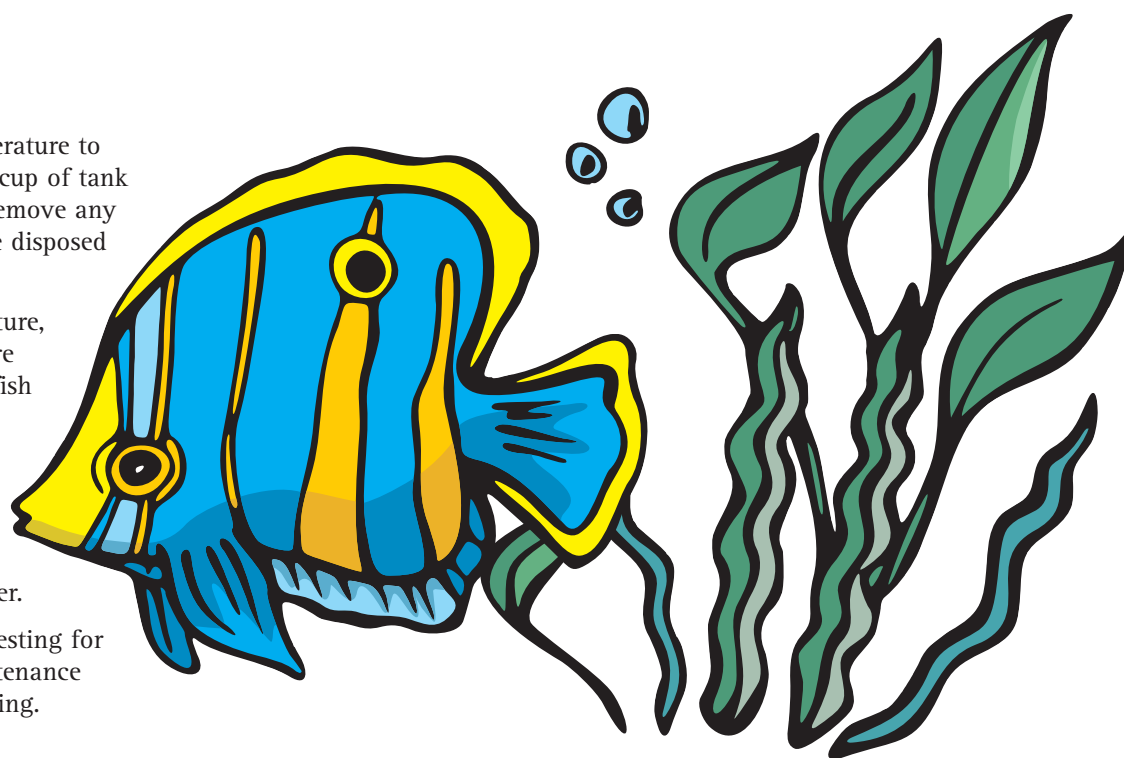
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When you get the fish home set the bag in your tank, allowing the temperature to equalize and turn off the aquarium light. After a half an hour, add a 1/4 cup of tank water to the bag. Repeat this process every 15 minutes for an hour, but remove any water if the bag gets too full. Any water removed from the bag should be disposed as it may contain parasites or other nasties.

After the fish have acclimated to the tank's water chemistry and temperature, quickly net the fish from the bag and place them in the tank without store water getting in the tank. Leave the light off for several hours to let the fish adjust to the new setting.

The next issue will be what you choose, how much and how often to feed as well as testing and basic maintenance. You need to make sure you are knowledgeable and confident in how to test the water since levels of chemicals rise and fall quickly on first starting up. And you have to be aware of how to clean your gravel of waste and add or replace water.

In our February edition, we deal with the issues of food, test kits, water testing for nitrites, nitrates, ammonia, phosphates and pH, algae, cleaning and maintenance and in our May issue we'll deal with common problems and troubleshooting.



# Cat's Abilities to Think & Feel

By Brad Kollus

**A**nthropomorphism is attributing human emotions and thoughts to animals and objects. Pet owners around the world are continuously accused of committing this as though it were a sin. Much of mainstream science still holds the view that animals including cats and dogs do not have the abilities to feel love, anger, joy, shame, fear, jealousy, or, have conscious thoughts and make decisions. However, new studies are proving what many pet owners have known for some time—our cats and dogs make decisions every day and are capable of feeling emotions like love and fear.

A new branch of science has developed to examine animal's emotive and cognitive abilities. "The branch of science is called cognitive ethology, and it involves looking at the thoughts and feelings of the animals. Pondering questions of why they are conscious. Note I said why are they conscious, not if they are conscious," said Professor Marc Bekoff Ph.D., of the University of Colorado's Department of Biology and author of 'Minding Animals.' "I think that people are now realising that all animals, cats, dogs, fish and chimpanzees have individual personalities and they have very rich emotional lives. The reason we are so attracted to cats and dogs is because they are emotional, and they can share their feelings with us," said Dr. Bekoff.

## Should I Wait For the Good Cat food?

One of the indicators of an animal's ability to think and demonstrate their consciousness is their ability to make choices between alternatives. In their forthcoming book 'Cat Culture: The Social World of a Cat Shelter,' sociology professors Janet and Steve Alger Ph.Ds, of Sienna College and the College of St. Rose in New York respectively, conducted an in depth study of cats at a shelter. "One criteria of consciousness is an animal's ability to make choices in situations and cats came up very high on their ability to make choices. In the shelter they made many choices, about what foods they liked, what foods they didn't like, how they wanted to sleep together in different places, to be friends with some cats and not others. These are all choices that suggest a sense of self in cats," said Dr. Janet Alger.

*"Cats are a mysterious kind of folk. There is more passing in their minds than we are aware of."*

- Sir Walter Scott

## The Many Meanings of Meow

Cognitive Ethologists recognise communication is one of the essential determinants of an animal's ability to think, feel and have consciousness. Cornell Doctoral Student Nicholas Nicasastro researched cats' different meows as a method of communication for his doctoral dissertation in psychology. "I went out and recorded hundreds of cat meows in situations between cats and their owners. Then took those recordings and went into the lab and had listeners, not the owners, but unfamiliar listeners listen to the calls and give me their impressions of them," said Nicasastro. He found there are different types of meows people can identify that have different general meanings. "What I found was there are certain acoustical qualities that correlate with something sounding pleasant or urgent and I speculate that the cats can use these acoustical changes to manage our impressions of how their meows sound to get what they want out of their human caretakers," said Nicasastro.

## Communicating Without Meowing

Most of a cat's ability to communicate comes from non-vocal gestures. This form of communication is another example of cats' ability to think and evidence of their being conscious. Professors Janet and Steve Alger conducted a study published in the academic journal *Society and Animals* Vol 5 No. 1, 'Beyond Mead: Symbolic Interaction between Humans and Felines'. The Algers studied 20 cat owners and their cats looking for evidence of symbolic interaction between the two. "Symbolic interaction focuses on the ability to communicate through symbols and the development of shared meanings," said Dr. Janet Alger. "What our research results have shown is that both between humans and cats and between cats themselves can develop shared meaning. This allows them to do all the things that are associated with symbolic interaction such as taking on the role of other people or other animals and develop a sense of self, and understand things from the other's perspective," said Dr. Steven Alger. They gave as an example the case of an owner who, whenever she went to a certain rug in her house, communicated to her cat it was time to play, and the cat would come over and expect to play. There was nothing inherent about the rug that meant play. However, the owner and her cat had developed a shared meaning through the rug (the symbol) that when the owner went over to this rug it communicated to the cat it was play-time (the interaction), a shared meaning between the two.