

Fish Tank Checklist

A step-by-step checklist for setting up a brand-new fish tank, from equipment to adding fish.

Choose Tank & Location

- ☐ Select a tank size suited to the fish you plan to keep
- ☐ Choose a sturdy, level stand that holds the full weight
- ☐ Place the tank away from direct sunlight and drafts
Sunlight encourages algae and temperature swings
- ☐ Ensure a power outlet is within reach for equipment

Gather Equipment

- ☐ Filter rated for the tank volume
- ☐ Heater and aquarium thermometer
- ☐ Lighting suited to the setup
- ☐ Substrate such as gravel or sand
- ☐ Water conditioner or dechlorinator
- ☐ Water test kit for ammonia, nitrite, nitrate and pH

Set Up the Tank

- ☐ Rinse the tank, substrate and decorations with water only
- ☐ Add and arrange substrate and decorations
- ☐ Install and position the filter and heater
- ☐ Fill with dechlorinated water and start equipment
- ☐ Set the heater and let the temperature stabilize

Cycle the Tank

- ☐ Begin a fishless nitrogen cycle to grow beneficial bacteria
- ☐ Add an ammonia source to feed the cycle
- ☐ Test ammonia, nitrite and nitrate every few days
- ☐ Wait until ammonia and nitrite read zero with nitrate present
This usually takes several weeks; do not rush it

Add Fish

- ☐ Choose beginner-friendly, compatible species
- ☐ Add only a few fish at first to avoid overloading the cycle
- ☐ Float and slowly acclimate fish to temperature and water
- ☐ Quarantine new fish if you have an established tank
- ☐ Observe new fish closely for the first days

First Weeks of Care

- ☐ Feed small amounts and remove uneaten food
- ☐ Continue testing water regularly
- ☐ Perform partial water changes as needed
- ☐ Watch for signs of stress or illness
- ☐ Add more fish gradually once the tank stays stable