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