



Dwarf South American Cichlid

Care Guide

The Little Guys

There are a number of cichlids from South America that do not grow more than 4 inches and are well suited to aquariums up to 20 gallons. They tend to be peaceful, colorful and can be kept with a wide variety of community fish. Blue rams, Bolivian rams and several species of *Apistogramma* are the most popular Dwarf South American Cichlids, but there are many others. While many species are considered challenging to keep, captive bred strains are becoming more available and are well adapted to aquarium life. New and interesting color morphs continue to be developed by breeders.

Natural Habitat

Dwarf South American Cichlids are found in a wide range of habitats from tropical rainforest to open savannah. They typically inhabit slow moving streams and rivers, quiet backwaters, oxbows and other still water areas. Leaf litter often covers the bottom, and light is subdued due to overhanging vegetation and/or aquatic plants.

Water Requirements

Most Dwarf South American Cichlids live in soft, acidic water in the wild, however, many species sold today have been adapted to a wider range of water parameters through captive breeding. A pH between 7.0 and 7.5 and alkalinity below 5° dKH is recommended for captive bred fish. Wild caught fish may require pH from 5.0 to 6.5 and KH from 1° to 3°. Temperature should be between 78° and 84° F. If your tap water is hard or has a pH greater than 7.5, use reverse osmosis or deionized water to achieve the desired water chemistry. Adding peat moss or peat pellets to the filter will also help lower pH and alkalinity. Maintain good filtration and change 10% of the water every week or 25% every 2 weeks using an Aqueon® Aquarium Water Changer or Siphon Vacuum Gravel Cleaner. Don't forget to treat tap water with Aqueon® Water Conditioner before refilling your tank!

Housing Recommendations

Dwarf South American Cichlids can be shy, and they do best in heavily planted or well decorated aquaria. The size of the aquarium needed will depend on which species and how many fish you want to keep. A 10 to 20 gallon aquarium will suffice for a mated pair, however, larger aquariums allow for larger groups and/or additional tank mates. While dwarf cichlids are generally peaceful, males may quarrel over territory, especially if they have a mate. Provide caves, grottos and overhangs for cover as well as a few flat rocks for spawning.

Behavior/Compatibility

Wild caught specimens should be kept in a species aquarium due to their special water chemistry needs, however, captive bred individuals can be kept with peaceful fish. Some of those include neons, cardinals, rummynose, lemon tetras, hatchetfish, pencilfish, small rasboras, pygmy gouramis and Corydoras catfish. As mentioned, males can be aggressive towards one another, so be sure to provide plenty of space and structure for them to coexist peacefully. Always consult an aquarium expert before adding any new fish to your aquarium.

What Do Dwarf South American Cichlids Eat?

Captive bred Dwarf South American Cichlids will thrive on Aqueon® Tropical Flakes, Tropical Color Flakes, Tropical Granules, Shrimp Pellets and Cichlid Pellets. Wild caught specimens can be finicky and may require live foods at first, but with patience, they will accept frozen and dry foods. For best results, feed a variety of high-quality foods and rotate your fishes' diet daily. Feed only what your fish can consume in 2 to 3 minutes, once or twice a day.

Breeding Level – Intermediate

Spawning Dwarf South American Cichlids is best done in a dedicated breeding aquarium with no other fish present. They typically spawn in crevices, caves or other secluded areas. Eggs are laid on a hard, flat surface. Some species practice bi-parental care, while others may require removing the male after spawning as the females can become aggressive.