



Livebearer

Guppies, Mollies, Platies, Swordtails, etc.

Care Guide

First Fish

There are four Families of freshwater fish that are considered livebearers. This care guide deals with the Family Poeciliidae, which includes mollies, platies, swordtails, guppies and mosquito fish. They are called livebearers because the females retain their eggs until they are fully developed and give birth to free-swimming fry. Over the years, livebearers have been selectively bred to create a host of different colors, body shapes and fin types. They make great beginner fish because they tend to be peaceful, colorful and hardy. For many experienced aquarists, their first aquarium fish was some type of livebearer.

Natural Habitat

Poecilid livebearers are native to the southeastern United States, Mexico, Central America, northern South America and many islands of the Caribbean Sea. Guppies and mosquito fish have been introduced to many parts of Asia to help control malaria-causing mosquitos and are now established in virtually all tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world. They inhabit streams, rivers, pools, lakes and estuary environments.

Water Requirements

Livebearers are native to hard, alkaline water, but farm raised fish sold today will thrive in a wide range of water conditions. In nature, they are often found in brackish to full marine environments and will benefit from the addition of 1 teaspoon of sea salt or non-iodized aquarium salt per gallon of water. Make sure the other fish in your aquarium are tolerant of salt before deciding to add it. Most livebearers do best between 74° and 78° F and pH between 7.0 and 8.4. If the aquarium is kept in a room below 74° F, use an Aqueon® Aquarium Heater to maintain the correct temperature. Maintain good filtration and do a 10% water exchange 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 aquarium!

Housing

Livebearers are top to mid-water swimmers and most varieties can be kept in aquariums of 5 to 20 gallons, however, larger aquariums are easier to take care of and give the fish more room to swim. They will be less stressed and show their best colors in a well decorated, dark bottomed aquarium with moderate current. Keep a secure lid on the aquarium to prevent fish from jumping out if they feel scared or threatened.

Behavior/Compatibility

In general, livebearers are peaceful and make good community fish. Male livebearers can be aggressive towards each other and are constantly trying to mate, so a ratio of 2 to 3 females per male is advised to prevent excessive harassment of the females. Most livebearers live 5 to 7 years. Good tank mates include tetras, rasboras, danios, peaceful barbs and rainbowfish. Always consult an aquarium expert before buying any new fish for your aquarium.

Feeding

Livebearers are omnivores and need both vegetable matter and meat-based foods. They will thrive on Aqueon® Tropical Flakes, Color Tropical Flakes and Spirulina Flakes, as well as Aqueon® Betta Treat. Frozen and live foods can also be fed as treats, or to help induce spawning and improve color. For best results, rotate their diet daily and feed only what they can consume in under 2 minutes, once or twice a day.

Breeding Level - Easy

Livebearers reproduce without any help from the aquarist. A well-planted aquarium will give newborn babies a place to hide until they are big enough to swim with the other fish. Male livebearers have a rod-like anal fin, called the gonopodium, that they use to fertilize the females. Females can give birth approximately once a month. You can tell when a female is about to have babies by her enlarged abdomen and the appearance of a large dark spot near the back of her belly. Pregnant females can be placed in a hanging "breeder net" to prevent the babies from being eaten by other tank inhabitants.