

Bettas

(*Betta splendens*)

AKA Siamese fighting fish.



Most bettas are two – five inches (7cm) long, with the females being slightly smaller than the males. They prefer low to medium light levels, any light sufficient for your needs will be fine for your betta. The best temperature for keeping your betta is between 25 - 27°C a heater is almost always needed to maintain this temperature. Nano heaters are also available for smaller tanks. They are best in a pH7 environment.

Bettas are not particularly long lived, a typical life span is one – three years and it is not uncommon for them to die prematurely due to misinformation. Environmental factors will also impact on their life span greatly.

They are a labyrinth fish, meaning they have an accessory organ that enables them to breathe air (this evolutionary adaptation serves them well in the often oxygen-poor stagnant swamps which they live in), but due to this they must have direct access to the water's surface, if prevented from this access they can actually "drown" since they cannot get sufficient oxygen from the water itself.

It is possible to keep a bettas in a small vessels or bowls, but this of course will require more maintenance on your part. Technically aeration is not an important consideration for your betta environment, as they are a labyrinth fish this greatly minimises a betta's need for water volume to obtain its oxygen needs but will have no effect on the fish's need for sufficient water in which its wastes can dissolve. Therefore filtration is an important consideration, the volume of water will influence maintenance regimes.

A litre of water will last a single betta only two – three days at which time the water will become toxic with ammonia. When a bacterial bio filter is unavailable (such as in small bowls) frequent water changes are the only way to keep the ammonia levels down. If you only want to change your water once a week, you should have at least four litres of water and consider a small air operated sponge filter which are perfect for smaller bowls.

Male bettas are naturally belligerent towards each other, the male betta will make a vivid display when facing another of his species, whether male or female. Males will respond to one another with flaring displays that quickly lead to actual combat, with fins and scales being damaged. If the newcomer is female the courtship will soon progress to the male luring the female under his bubble nest, but if she is not ready to lay eggs she too will be attacked, therefore it is important to keep a male separately unless wanting to breed.

Bettas are easy enough to breed, raising their fry however is a bit more challenging. Bettas spawn most readily in water volumes between eight and 40 litres and at the higher end of the temperature scale. The males' bubble nest is a vital and distinctive part of the spawning process, but varies between males. Many will build a bubble nest even when kept alone, some start blowing bubbles when they see another betta, and others wait until they meet up with a receptive female.

