

# Caring for my fish

August 4, 2004

## 1 Introduction

I will be studying abroad in Japan for the 2004-2005 academic year. During that time, I need someone to take care of my fish. That person is you. Or maybe you're just a weirdo who likes reading things that don't apply to you. Hey, whatever floats your boat. It's cool with me.

## 2 The list

As of today's date, I have the following fish in the following aquariums:

- 1x 10 gallon rectangular aquarium
  - 1x Black Moor fancy goldfish
  - 1x Calico fancy goldfish
- 1x 5 gallon hexagonal aquarium, "Hex5"
  - 1x Red platty
  - 1x Black and white spotted platty
  - 2x orange dwarf plattys
- 1x 1 gallon bowl
  - 1x Blue betta

That makes a total of seven fish. Ideally, there will still be seven fish when I return. In fact, your physical well-being depends on it.

I also have the following peripheral items. The ones you really need to be aware of are bolded.

- Consumables
  - Food

- \* **1x can Omega One freshwater flakes**
- \* **1x can Goldfish Floating Pellets**
- \* **1x can Betta Bites**
- \* 1x can Bloodworms
- \* 1x can BettaMin
- \* 1x can TetraFin goldfish flakes
- Water treatments
  - \* **1x bottle Tap Water Conditioner**
  - \* 1x bottle Chlor Out
  - \* 1x bottle Stress Zyme
- Medications
  - \* 8x tablets Maracyn
  - \* 7x tablets Maracyn-Two
- Filters
  - \* **7x size B filters** (for 10 gallon)
  - \* **6x size Z filters** (for Hex5)
- Maintenance
  - **1x 3 gallon bucket**
  - **1x 1 gallon plastic container**
  - **1x small gravel vacuum**
  - **1x black towel**
  - **1x drinking glass**
  - 1x small fish net
  - 1x algae scrubber
- In tank
  - 2x Ammonia Alert indicators
  - 1x small water heater
  - 1x larger water heater
  - Assorted decorative items

## 3 Feeding

### 3.1 Amounts

Fish will take any opportunity to eat. Do not feed them just because they *look* hungry. They *always* look hungry. You should feed as follows:

- Goldfish: 2 **Goldfish Floating Pellets** per fish per feeding, 2 feedings per day (4 pellets total per fish)
- Everyone in the Hex5: A pinch of **Omega One freshwater flakes** per feeding, 2 feedings per day
- The betta: A pinch of **Betta Bites** per feeding, 1 feeding per day

Yes, “a pinch” is vague. What it says on the can is to feed no more than they can consume completely in five minutes. I have never actually timed them, so I myself may consistently be either under- or over-feeding. I suspect that I’m doing alright because they have not died yet. You will just have to experiment, although I will show you before I leave how much I generally feed them. A couple tips:

- When in doubt, err on the side of caution. *It is better to underfeed for a day than it is to overfeed. Skip a meal if you think you gave them too much.*
- “A pinch” for the betta is a lot less than “a pinch” for the Hex5 inhabitants. The can says to give about 8 of the tiny little pellets. I usually give a little bit more than that.
- *If they have long strings of shit trailing behind them, you probably gave them too much.*
- *If the betta seems to tend to float, he is probably bloated. Feed him less. Note, however, that floating is not the same as staying near the top. If, when he is at rest, his body tends to rotate toward the vertical (head up), then he is floating.*
- As a treat, give the betta some bloodworms. Don’t sniff them; they’re nasty.

## 3.2 Strategies

Feeding is not so simple. All of the fish will come to the surface for feeding, though it may take time for them to recognize you as a source of food. Here are some strategies to getting the fish to eat the right amounts with as little pain as possible:

- Goldfish
  - The black moor cannot see well because of his bulbous eyes. Sometimes he gets his pellets right away, sometimes he’s way off. If he’s way off, *pick the pellet back up and place it in front of him* such that the current carries it toward him. *You may actually have to push the pellet toward his mouth.*
  - The calico is more adept at getting his food, but he also has problems with vision when at the surface. The best strategy is to *get him to notice the food when he is well below the surface.* He will then swim straight up and nab it. If he still just can’t get it, let the pellet soak for a bit, then crush it with your hand. This will make it sink. *If you can get it to sink within his field of vision he will almost certainly get it.*

- The filter on the 10 gallon tank is powerful, and creates a considerable current that will push the pellets to the sides of the tank. *It is much easier to deal with only one pellet at a time.* The fish usually don't notice pellets hugging the sides, so you will have to either grab the pellets with your fingers or use your fingers to create an eddy current that brings the pellets away from the sides.
- Hex5 inhabitants
  - *Smaller flakes are better.* The fish will repeatedly suck in and spit out large flakes, and usually don't end up eating them.
  - *Fewer flakes at a time is better.* Many flakes at once usually results in many of them sinking and remaining uneaten.
  - *Avoid the area under the "waterfall."* The water will push flakes down and cause them to sink.
- The betta
  - Feeding the betta is a no-brainer, but sometimes he doesn't notice the food right away. Motioning toward the food with your finger should get him in the right direction.

## 4 Maintenance

A good aquarium owner will change his tanks' water weekly or daily or some shit like that. I'm sure they'd kill me to hear me say this, but don't bother. *I usually do water changes monthly, or every six weeks or so.* If there is an emergency, like a sick fish, I do them more often, usually daily. Here is how you go about these tasks.

### 4.1 The tanks

These instructions apply to both the 10 gallon and the Hex5, except where noted.

1. Beforehand, fill the **1 gallon container** with *cold* water, and treat it with *one drop* of **Tap Water Conditioner**. Let it sit out until it is room temperature. *Do not* mix hot and cold water to get to room temperature! Hot water usually contains much more shit leached from the pipes; that's why it's cloudy. I recommend preparing the water the night before you plan to do all this.
2. Rub algae off of any surfaces that look ugly, including the decorations. If you like the look of algae, then just leave it.
3. Remove all of the decorations from the tank. Lay them out on the **black towel** so you don't get fish water on your floor.
4. Without harming the fish, stir the gravel around with your hand. Stir it really well and you will see that the water gets very cloudy. That's all the uneaten food and fish shit. Yum.

5. Take a break. Give the particles some time to get sucked up by the filter or settle to the surface of the gravel. Don't wait too long, though, because the tank decorations will get dry and any algae growing on them will get crusty and flake off when you put them back in the tank. An hour or so should be enough.
6. Prepare the **bucket** and **gravel vacuum**. The tube end of the vacuum goes in the bucket, and the other end is the handle. Make sure that the tube end is facing down into the bucket (as opposed to curling back upwards) and that there are no kinks or tight bends in the tube. Also make sure that the tube end is *not* submerged in water; if it is, you will not be able to start the vacuum action.
7. Vacuum! Holding the large cylindrical end submerged in the aquarium, vigorously jerk it back and forth, forcing water through the tube. When the water passes a certain point, gravity will pull it down and you will have a continuous stream. Once the stream has started, apply the opening of the cylinder to the gravel and suck up all the particles. You'll get the best results from shifting the gravel around with the cylinder. Be sure to clean as much of the gravel as possible.
8. Stop before you take out too much water! In the Hex5, you only want to take out about a gallon. In the 10 gallon aquarium, take out about two gallons. The bucket holds 3 gallons, so guess based on how full it is.
9. After vacuuming, fix the gravel back up. Make sure it's even, but you can rough it up a bit if you think that looks nicer. Follow your heart.
10. Replace the tank ornaments. Be sure to do this before the next step, or the ornaments could make the tank overflow, especially the tree trunk in the 10 gallon.
11. Fill the aquarium back up with the water you prepared in the **1 gallon container**. You will have to prepare another batch of water for the 10 gallon aquarium; that's fine, they can survive with nine gallons just fine.
12. Check the **filter**. If it's got a lot of gunk on it, wash it off in the sink and then replace it. If it's old and nasty, replace it with an appropriately sized new filter. I replace the filter every two months or so. If you run out of filters, which you probably will over the course of the year, buy new ones from PetSmart and I will reimburse you.

#### 4.1.1 Some additional points

- If for some reason you remove more water than I specified above, you should put in some Stress Zyme according to the instructions on the bottle.
- To get to PetSmart by bus, take the outbound 6 to Prairie Town Center (end of the line). Then walk across the busy street towards Home Depot. PetSmart is in that strip mall. Yes, it is a huge pain in the ass. Note that most, but not all, 6 buses go all the way to Prairie Town Center.

- The Ammonia Alert detectors detect... ammonia! You shouldn't need to worry about this, though, as ammonia is only a big worry when starting a new aquarium, or when adding new fish. If for some reason the ammonia detector does show something other than "safe," do a water change as above. If it gets into "alarm" or "toxic," do daily water changes and add Stress Zyme until it goes back down.
- I don't have pH or other water quality detectors. I probably should, but I don't. I've never had a problem (to my knowledge) with these things, so as long as you're in Madison and your tap water isn't complete crap then you should be fine. If not, the fish will probably die before you can figure out what it was, so don't worry about it.

## 4.2 The bowl

The bowl is small and the betta is hardy. For that reason it doesn't need to be cleaned all that often. If you keep water handy in the **1 gallon container** and replace evaporated water, the bowl doesn't really need to be cleaned more than once per six weeks.

1. Prepare water in the **1 gallon container** in advance, the same way as above. However, *because the bowl is small and you are replacing all of the water every time, the temperature of the new water is critical.* Make sure it is room temperature.
2. Remove the plastic plant. If it looks crusty you can clean it, but that's entirely optional.
3. Pour the betta into the **drinking glass**. You do not actually drink from the glass. It is just a convenient place to keep the betta while cleaning the bowl. Do this over the sink, *with the drain plugged*. The best strategy is to pour the bowl water into the glass, and just keep pouring until the betta falls into the glass. To make sure he doesn't flop out once he's in there, pour out some of the water so that the surface of the water is well below the rim of the glass.
4. Pour the remaining bowl water out, and stir the gravel while rinsing it in tap water. If there are ugly mineral deposits on the glass, take some gravel in your fingers and use it to scrape the deposits away. Pour out the tap water and repeat the rinsing a couple times.
5. Pour out all of the tap water, then fill the bowl about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the way up with the water you prepared in the **1 gallon container**. *Don't fill all the way to the top* because the betta wants as much surface area as it can get. Yes, the maximum surface area would be at  $\frac{1}{2}$  full, but more swimming area is also good.
6. Level off the gravel and replace the plastic plant. It can be tricky, but you have to bury the plastic base in as much gravel as you can, or else it will come loose.
7. Without pouring out the betta, get rid of as much of the bowl water as you can from the **drinking glass**. The betta will not be harmed by a few seconds of sitting in super-shallow water, so don't be shy.
8. Pour the betta back into his bowl.

## 5 Medicating

Sometimes the fish get sick. I've managed to cure exactly two sick fish; all the rest have died. If a fish gets sick, treat it with Maracyn, Marcyn-Two, Maroxy, or all three. They treat different diseases, but they can be used at the same time. Use the *Fish Disease Guide* in the Mardel medication boxes to help determine what the problem is; Google can also be a good resource. Here are some tips:

- None of the medication can be used in the betta bowl. There is some kind of tea tree cure-all available for bettas but I have never looked into it. If the betta is acting strange and you feel like investigating, that's where I'd start.
- None of the medication will harm other fish when used at the appropriate doses. Don't hesitate to use them out of concern for healthy fish.
- In treating the Hex5, you will need to cut some of the tablets in half. I've found that the best way to do this is to use a serrated knife and gently saw into the diameter of the tablet. It will break into two pieces and dust; you probably should clean the dust up before someone inhales it or something.
- After treating with Maracyn, the tank might become cloudy. Water changes and time will clear this up.

Some general things to watch out for:

- Floating. In goldfish, this is usually an indication of a swim bladder problem. I don't think there's much you can do about it. If one of the goldfish gets this and somehow recovers, switch to a sinking pellet food so that it doesn't have to take in any air when feeding. In bettas, they will usually get over it if you don't feed them for a day or two.
- Popeye. If a fish's eye or eyes are popping out, treat it with one of the Maracyns. They both apparently treat popeye. This is one of the diseases I've managed to cure a fish of.
- General listlessness and/or loss of appetite. Try doing a water change. If that doesn't help, it may be a symptom of a disease; try to look for other symptoms. Treat with a Maracyn as a last resort.
- Localized, large white protrusions. The black moor once had a large, puffy white protrusion on the back of his right eye-bulb-thing. I believe this was from a physical injury he suffered while I was aggressively stirring the gravel. I treated with Maroxy, which is for fungus, and Maracyn. He recovered within about a week. This is *not* the same as small white spots all over the body. That's usually ick, and is treated with stuff I don't have. See the Fish Disease Guide.

## 6 Miscellaneous

- Temperature
  - The tanks both have heaters. The Hex5 doesn't really need one because the filter pump is submerged in the water and keeps it pretty warm. It is rare for the Hex5 to drop below 75° F. In other words, don't worry about it.
  - The 10 gallon one will need the heater depending on where you put it. I've had it in front of a window since I got it; at night it can get pretty cold. Make sure the heater doesn't allow it to drop below 72° F. In general, goldfish like it colder than the others.
- Never attempt to move an aquarium while it is full of water. That's just stupid.