

Discus



Discus Fish (*Symphysodon* spp.)

Order: Perciformes - Family: Characidae - Subfamily: Cichlasomatinae - Tribe: Heroini



Type: Tropical

Origin: Symphysodon species inhabit the margins of floodplain lakes and rivers in the Amazon Basin of lowland Amazonia, where it is part of the highly diverse Neotropical fish fauna. The three species of Symphysodon have different geographic distributions. *S. aequifasciatus* occurs in the Rio Solimões, Rio Amazonas and the Rio Putumayo-Içá in Brazil, Colombia and Peru. In contrast the distribution of *S. discus* appears to be limited to the lower reaches of the Abacaxis, Rio Negro and Trombetas rivers. *S. tarzoo* occurs upstream of Manaus in the western Amazon

Overview: Discus belong to the genus *Symphysodon*, which currently includes three species: The common discus (*Symphysodon aequifasciatus*), the Heckel discus (*Symphysodon discus*), and a new species which has been named *Symphysodon tarzoo*. However, a further investigation published in August 2007 suggested that the genus held the three species: *S. aequifasciatus* (the green discus), *S. haraldi* (the blue/brown/common discus) and *S. discus* (the Heckel discus). Both studies suggest three species; the only disagreement is in the scientific names for each.

Description: Discus (*Symphysodon* spp.) are a genus of three species of cichlid freshwater fishes native to the Amazon River basin. Discus are popular as aquarium fish and their aquaculture in several countries in Asia is a major industry

Physical Characteristics: Like cichlids from the genus Pterophyllum, all Symphysodon species have a laterally compressed body shape. In contrast to Pterophyllum, however, extended finnage is absent giving Symphysodon a more rounded shape. It is this body shape from which their common name, "discus", is derived. The sides of the fish are frequently patterned in shades of green, red, brown, and blue. The height and length of the grown fish are both about 20–25 cm (8–10 in).

Sexing / Sexual Dimorphism:

Color Form: Discus fish are bright colorful tropical fish, which is why they are so darn popular in today's home aquariums.

Temperament: It should be noted that discus aren't that aggressive so be careful with selecting other fishy companions to go with them.

Diet: They are constantly looking for food. You have to be careful when feeding them. You can feed them a couple times a day but you must make sure that you are not over feeding them. It is recommended that you do not feed them more than 5 times a day but no less than 2 times. Commercially made food is less nutritious than homemade food but it is easier to use and far more convenient. There are a few varieties of discus food out that can be purchased at stores. Dry food includes flakes, pellets, granules and capsules. Frozen food is typically higher in protein and includes beef heart, brine shrimp and plankton. Live food is another option, which is what discus fish eat in the wild, but it can be difficult to manage and could introduce bacteria or other problems to the tank.

Breeding: Another characteristic of Symphysodon species is their care for the larvae. As for most cichlids, brood care is highly developed with both the parents caring for the young. Additionally, adult discus produce a secretion through their skin, which the larvae live off during their first few days. This behavior has also been observed for Uaru species. However when bred in captivity the larvae will tend to live off their parents secretion for up to 2 weeks.

Life Span:

Max. Size: An adult discus once fully grown will grow to a height and length of around 20 – 25cm (8 – 10 inches) so really a fairly big size fish.

Habitat: Discus fish are widely found in calm parts of small, blackwater rivers, lakes and deep pools throughout the Amazon River basin. The water is usually very clean with little or no pollutants, acidic (6.0-6.5 pH), very soft (0-3 dH) and warm with a temperature of around 77-84°F (25-29°C). They are usually found in small groups around submerged decaying trees, vegetation and aquatic grasses. Discus fish are wild-caught in the Amazon River basin at night by using a strong light to mesmerize the fish, the area is then encircled with netting and slowly drawn closer, with all obstructions such as wood being removed.

Care Level: Difficult

Minimum Tank Size:

Water Conditions:

- Temp:
- pH:

Aquarium Setup: Discus fish flourish in water with conditions similar to their natural habitat, however many Discus fish are raised in captivity and tolerant of a higher range of water conditions. While not ideal, most Discus fish can tolerate water with a pH of 5.0-7.5, water hardness of 0-8 dH and temperatures of 77-86°F (25-30°C). Peat moss can be a great way to naturally lower the pH of your aquarium, which I personally use in my planted freshwater Angelfish tank. You can buy some from any garden center for rather cheap, if they happen to not have any you can buy some online, after that put some in mesh bag (cut off panty hose also works) and place it in the compartment where the filter pad sits so water can flow through it. If you would rather not deal with peat moss, blackwater extract contains natural humic and tannic acids that simulates water conditions of the Amazon River basin created by soil, peat moss and decaying vegetation. It makes for better water chemistry, encourages spawning, aids the hatching process and tints the water a light brownish yellow color just like the Amazon River, which is rather cool looking.

Compatibility: The setup, plants and other inhabitants should be carefully chosen for optimal conditions, giving the Discus fish first priority. Discus fish are calm, timid fish who like to be kept in small groups of 5-8 fish, as like other schooling fish they need the security of a school around them. This also helps in reducing stress of acclimating to their new environment. Outside of other Discus fish, what tank mates you choose again entirely depends on the purpose.

Health and Disease: The biggest problem for most tank owners have with owning discus fish is combating disease. Discuses are very prone to everything so you're going to constantly be cautious with everything. Water changes must be frequent, tank must be cleaned as well, and fish that carry any illnesses must be taken out of the aquarium immediately to insure the safety of you fish. Make sure to read about the diseases discus fish can get, it will be crucial to know what to look for.

