

ISSUE 2
AUTUMN 2026

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE FROM
AQUATIC SPECIALIST

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- 5 POPULAR GOURAMIS
- NANO REEF AQUARIUM IDEAS
- LOW-TECH AQUASCAPING
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Aquatic Spec

Expert advice for aquarium & pond enthusiasts

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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the second edition of Aquatic Spec.

It's been great to see the response to our first issue, and I'd like to start by thanking everyone who downloaded the magazine, visited the Aquatic Specialist website or joined us since Issue 1.

As we move into autumn and towards the colder months, both aquariums and ponds begin to bring their own seasonal challenges. Garden ponds start to slow down as temperatures fall, while indoors many of us naturally find ourselves spending more time enjoying our aquariums and perhaps planning the next project.

As with the first issue, everything in Aquatic Spec is built around practical fishkeeping. After more than 25 years working professionally with aquariums and ponds, I've learned that good results rarely come from making things unnecessarily complicated. Understanding the animals and plants we keep, maintaining good water quality and getting the basics right will take you a very long way.

Over the past few months I've also been expanding the Aquatic Specialist Knowledge Centre. It now contains a growing collection of guides covering freshwater aquariums, fish species, aquascaping, ponds and marine aquariums, with new articles being added regularly. We've also started introducing practical tools and calculators designed to answer some of the questions that are surprisingly difficult to find straightforward answers to.

In this issue, we've brought together another selection of advice, ideas and inspiration from across the aquatic hobby. Some of it is aimed at solving common problems, while other articles are simply about discovering new fish, plants and ideas that might inspire your next aquarium or pond project.

Aquatic Spec will always remain focused on useful, honest information rather than chasing trends or recommending something simply because it's new. Where I can, I'll continue to include my own experiences from maintaining aquariums and ponds professionally, as well as keeping and breeding fish myself.

I'd also like to continue featuring the aquariums, ponds and aquascapes created by our readers. If you have something you're particularly proud of, send us a photograph and a little information about it. I'd love to feature more reader setups in future editions.

Thank you for supporting Aquatic Spec and Aquatic Specialist. I hope you enjoy Issue 2, and perhaps discover something useful along the way.

Happy fishkeeping,
Richard Trim
Founder, Aquatic Specialist

Richard Trim

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF





Preparing Your Pond for Winter

Autumn is an important time for any garden pond. As temperatures begin to fall, fish become less active, plants start to die back and falling leaves can quickly increase the amount of organic waste entering the water. A little maintenance now can make a considerable difference to how well your pond comes through winter.

Keep on Top of Fallen Leaves

One of the biggest autumn jobs is removing leaves before they sink. Once on the bottom, they begin to decompose, contributing to sludge and potentially reducing water quality.
A pond net can be useful if your pond sits beneath deciduous trees, although it should be fitted securely and checked regularly. Otherwise, remove floating leaves with a net and clear accumulated debris from accessible areas of the pond.

Cut Back Pond Plants

Hardy pond plants naturally begin dying back as the growing season ends. Remove yellowing and dead foliage rather than allowing it to decompose in the water.
Marginal plants can usually be cut back once their foliage has died, while submerged plants may simply need thinning. Avoid being too aggressive: the aim is to remove decaying material, not leave the pond completely bare.

Check Your Pump and Filter

Autumn is a good opportunity to inspect pumps, filters and UV units. Remove accumulated debris and make sure water is still flowing correctly.

Don't automatically switch everything off as soon as the weather becomes cooler. Many ponds benefit from continued filtration while fish are still active and feeding. What you do during winter will depend on the type of pond, its stocking level and the filtration system being used.



Reduce Feeding as Temperatures Fall

Fish metabolism slows as the water cools, so their appetite and ability to digest food also decrease.

Gradually reduce feeding as temperatures fall and pay attention to the behaviour of your fish rather than continuing with the same summer routine. A suitable wheatgerm-based food can be useful during the cooler transitional period.

Once fish become largely inactive in genuinely cold water, feeding should normally stop until conditions improve.

Don't Over-Clean

One of the most common mistakes is treating autumn maintenance as an excuse to completely strip down the pond.

There is rarely any need to empty a healthy pond, scrub every surface or replace large quantities of water. This can cause unnecessary stress to fish and disrupt the established biology of the pond.

Instead, concentrate on removing excessive organic waste, maintaining good water quality and making sure equipment is functioning properly.

Prepare for Winter

Finally, check that the pond is ready for freezing conditions. Make sure equipment that will remain running is secure and consider how you will maintain gas exchange if the surface freezes.

Autumn pond care is mostly about prevention. A few simple jobs carried out before winter can reduce sludge, protect water quality and make spring maintenance considerably easier.
A clean, stable pond going into winter gives your fish the best possible start when temperatures begin to rise again.

If you want to know some more handy tips and ideas visit our website at Pond Knowledge.

TROPICAL FISH SPOTLIGHT: CORYDORAS CATFISH



Corydoras Catfish

Peaceful, active and full of character, Corydoras are among the most popular catfish for freshwater community aquariums.

Corydoras are small South American catfish that spend much of their time exploring the lower levels of the aquarium. Rather than hiding away like many catfish, they are often remarkably active, particularly when kept in a good-sized group.

There are well over 100 recognised species, ranging from familiar aquarium favourites such as the bronze and peppered Corydoras to more distinctive species including panda, sterbai and pygmy Corydoras.



More Than a Clean-Up Crew

Corydoras are sometimes sold as "cleaner fish", but this can be misleading. They will certainly search the substrate for food, including pieces missed by other fish, but they still need to be deliberately fed.

Sinking pellets, wafers, frozen foods and small live foods can all form part of their diet. Don't assume enough food will simply reach the bottom after the other fish have finished eating.

Give Them the Right Substrate

Fine sand is an excellent choice for a Corydoras aquarium. It allows the fish to search naturally through the substrate using their sensitive barbels without having to push through coarse or sharp material.

Add areas of planting, wood and other cover while retaining plenty of open substrate for foraging. Good filtration, stable water conditions and regular maintenance are also important.

A Social Catfish

One of the most important things to understand about Corydoras is that they are social fish. They shouldn't be kept individually. A group of at least six is a sensible starting point, although larger groups can produce much more natural behaviour when aquarium space allows.

Watching a group forage together is part of their appeal. They will regularly gather before separating to investigate different areas of the substrate, often becoming particularly lively around feeding time.



Choosing the Right Corydoras

Not every Corydoras has identical requirements. Adult size and preferred temperature can vary between species, so choose one suited to the aquarium rather than simply buying whichever species catches your eye.

For smaller aquariums, species such as the pygmy Corydoras can be particularly interesting. Unlike many of their larger relatives, pygmy Corydoras frequently venture into the middle levels of the aquarium as well as spending time near the bottom.

For a peaceful planted community aquarium, a properly sized group of Corydoras can be an excellent addition. Give them suitable conditions and enough companions, and you'll quickly discover that these little catfish are far more interesting than simply being the aquarium's clean-up crew.





BEGINNER CORALS: 3 OF THE BEST SOFT CORALS TO START WITH

Adding your first corals is when a marine aquarium really begins to develop into a reef. But while some corals require very stable conditions and careful management, others are considerably more forgiving. For beginners, soft corals are often a sensible place to start. Here are three hardy choices that can provide plenty of colour and movement without immediately stepping into more demanding species.

Zoanthids

Zoanthids are one of the most colourful choices available to new reef keepers. They form colonies of small button-like polyps and are available in an enormous range of colours, from bright greens and oranges to reds, blues and combinations of several colours.

They generally adapt well to aquarium conditions and don't require the intense lighting demanded by many harder-to-keep corals. Given suitable conditions, colonies can gradually spread across the surrounding rockwork.

Care should always be taken when handling zoanthids, as some can contain palytoxin. Wear gloves, avoid damaging the polyps and never boil rocks containing zoanthids.

Toadstool Leather Corals

Toadstool leather corals are a long-established favourite in reef aquariums. Their distinctive mushroom-shaped form becomes increasingly impressive as they grow, with the surface of the coral covered in small polyps that provide gentle movement.

They're relatively hardy and adaptable, making them a good introduction to coral keeping. Moderate lighting and good water movement will suit many specimens.

Don't immediately worry if a toadstool closes up and develops a shiny appearance. Leather corals periodically shed their outer surface and may remain closed while doing so. Once the process is complete, the polyps normally extend again.

Remember that some toadstools can eventually become very large, so leave plenty of room for growth.

Mushroom Corals



Mushroom corals such as Discosoma and Rhodactis are another excellent choice for a first reef aquarium.
They're available in numerous colours and patterns and are generally tolerant of a range of aquarium conditions. Many are also comfortable under less intense lighting than more demanding reef corals.

Once established, mushrooms can reproduce and spread onto nearby rockwork. This can create an impressive display, although particularly successful colonies may eventually need controlling.

Start With Stability

Even hardy corals aren't indestructible. A new reef keeper will usually have much better results by waiting until the aquarium is stable rather than rushing to add corals to a newly established system.
Keep salinity and temperature consistent, maintain good water quality and introduce new corals gradually.
Zoanthids, toadstool leathers and mushroom corals won't remove the need for good reef keeping, but their forgiving nature makes them an excellent place to begin while you gain the experience needed for more demanding corals.

Learn More
Want to create your own thriving marine aquarium or full reef?

Visit the Aquatic Specialist Knowledge Centre for our full guide click the link here: Knowledge Centre Marine Aquariums

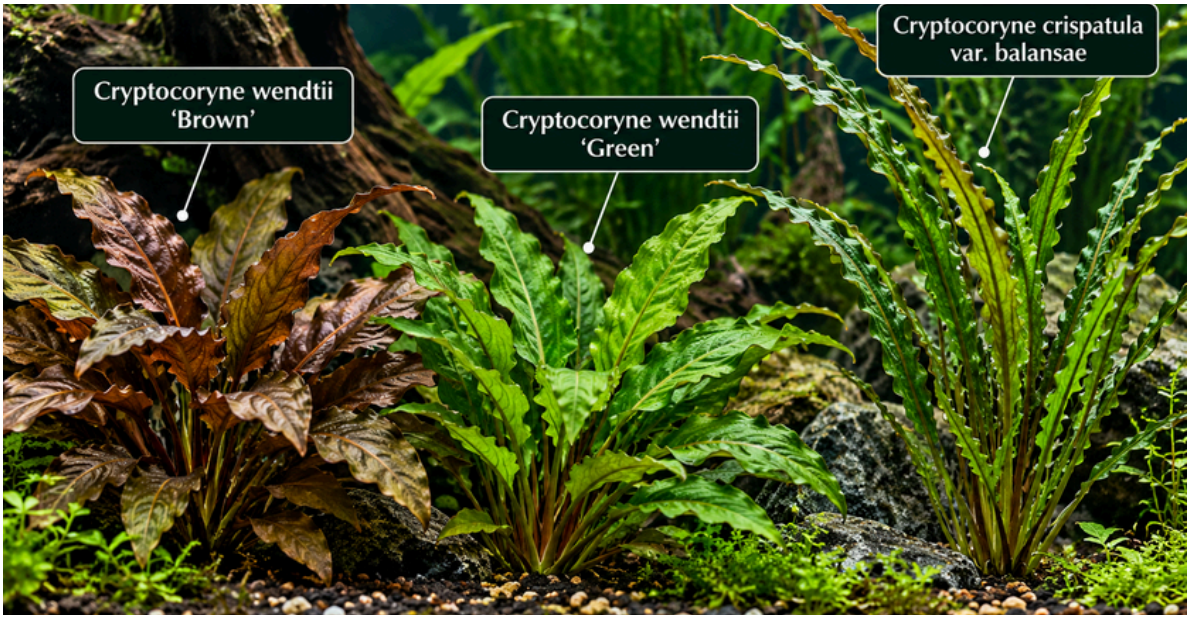
You'll find detailed care advice, aquarium requirements and tips for building a beautiful, balanced marine aquarium.

THE AQUASCAPER : AQUASCAPING WITH CRYPTOCORYNES: MY THREE FAVOURITE VARIETIES



The above image is of a 350L low tech planted aquarium maintained by Aquatic Specialist.

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When it comes to creating a natural-looking planted aquarium, Cryptocorynes have always been among my favourite aquatic plants. They are relatively easy to maintain, come in a wonderful range of colours and leaf shapes, and can transform an aquarium without the need for complicated equipment or high levels of CO_2.

Over the years, I've developed a particular liking for three varieties: Cryptocoryne wendtii 'Brown', Cryptocoryne wendtii 'Green' and Cryptocoryne crispatula var. balansae. Each brings something different to an aquascape, and together they can create a beautiful, natural underwater landscape.

Cryptocoryne wendtii 'Brown'

One of my favourite Cryptocorynes has to be Cryptocoryne wendtii 'Brown'. Its rich bronze-brown foliage provides a wonderful contrast against green aquatic plants, particularly when planted around rocks or pieces of driftwood.

The leaves have a slightly textured appearance, with colours ranging from olive green to deep reddish-brown depending on growing conditions. Under moderate lighting, it can develop particularly attractive bronze tones.

I find this variety especially useful in the midground of an aquarium, where several plants can gradually establish themselves into dense, natural-looking groups. Like most Cryptocorynes, it prefers a nutrient-rich substrate but will also grow in ordinary aquarium gravel with the addition of root fertiliser tablets.

Cryptocoryne wendtii 'Green'

Although closely related to the brown variety, Cryptocoryne wendtii 'Green' offers a completely different appearance.

Its vibrant green foliage creates a fresh, natural look that works particularly well in woodland-inspired aquascapes. The leaves often have gently rippled edges, adding texture without overpowering the surrounding plants.

One of the reasons I particularly like this plant is its versatility. It works beautifully around the base of driftwood, between rocks or in groups across the middle of an aquarium.

When planted alongside Cryptocoryne wendtii 'Brown', the contrasting foliage creates visual interest without needing lots of different plant species.

It is also an excellent choice for low-tech aquariums, growing steadily under modest lighting without requiring additional CO_2.

Cryptocoryne crispatula var. balansae

The third Cryptocoryne on my list is quite different from the other two.
Cryptocoryne crispatula var. balansae produces long, narrow leaves with distinctive crinkled edges. These can grow to 40–60 cm or more under suitable conditions, making it particularly useful for taller aquariums. I especially like using this plant towards the rear of an aquascape, where its long leaves create height and movement. In a mature aquarium, the foliage can arch gracefully across the water, giving the impression of a natural underwater riverbank.

Its unusual leaf structure also provides an interesting contrast against the broader leaves of the two wendtii varieties. Although it can take time to establish, once settled it can become an impressive feature plant. A nutrient-rich substrate and moderate lighting generally produce good results.

Creating an Aquascape with All Three

One of the things I like most about these plants is how well they complement each other.
A simple arrangement using Cryptocoryne wendtii 'Green' around the foreground and midground, with groups of 'Brown' positioned around driftwood or rocks, can create a lovely contrast.
Adding Cryptocoryne crispatula var. balansae towards the rear introduces height and a completely different leaf shape.
Rather than planting individual specimens evenly throughout the aquarium, I prefer grouping Cryptocorynes together. This produces a much more natural appearance and allows the plants to develop into established colonies.

A Little Patience Goes a Long Way

One thing worth remembering is that Cryptocorynes don't always appreciate being moved. Newly introduced plants can occasionally suffer from what aquarists call Crypt melt, where some or even all of the existing leaves deteriorate following a change in conditions.

Fortunately, this doesn't necessarily mean the plant has died. Provided the roots and crown remain healthy, fresh leaves will often appear once it has adapted to its new surroundings. My advice is to choose their positions carefully, give them time to establish and avoid repeatedly disturbing them.

Final Thoughts

Cryptocorynes may not be the fastest-growing or most colourful plants available, but that's part of their appeal. For me, Cryptocoryne wendtii 'Brown', Cryptocoryne wendtii 'Green' and Cryptocoryne crispatula var. balansae offer an excellent combination of colour, texture and natural beauty.

Whether you're creating a simple low-tech planted aquarium or a more elaborate aquascape, these three plants are well worth considering. Sometimes the most attractive aquariums aren't those filled with dozens of different plant species, but those that use a few carefully chosen favourites exceptionally well.

A Juwel Rio 280 set up as a low tech planted aquarium



Discover More

Looking for inspiration?

Visit the Aquatic Specialist Knowledge Centre on our website for our complete guide:

10 Great Plants for a Low-Tech Nano Aquascape

You'll also find planting advice, species profiles and practical aquascaping ideas based on real aquariums.



Read the full review:

Visit the Knowledge Centre.

Nexus 220

Still One of the Best Pond Filters?
The Evolution Aqua Nexus 220 remains one of our favourite pond filtration systems, particularly for koi ponds and larger garden ponds. Combining mechanical and biological filtration, the Nexus uses an Eazy filter to remove debris before water passes through moving K1 media, where beneficial bacteria break down harmful waste.

One of its biggest advantages is the simple cleaning process. Rather than washing messy filter foams, the mechanical section can be cleaned using air agitation, making routine maintenance much easier.

Our Verdict
Although expensive and fairly bulky, the Nexus 220 remains one of our preferred pond filters. Its reliable filtration, straightforward maintenance and proven design make it a worthwhile investment for serious pond keepers.
We do, however, have some reservations about certain optional electrical accessories.

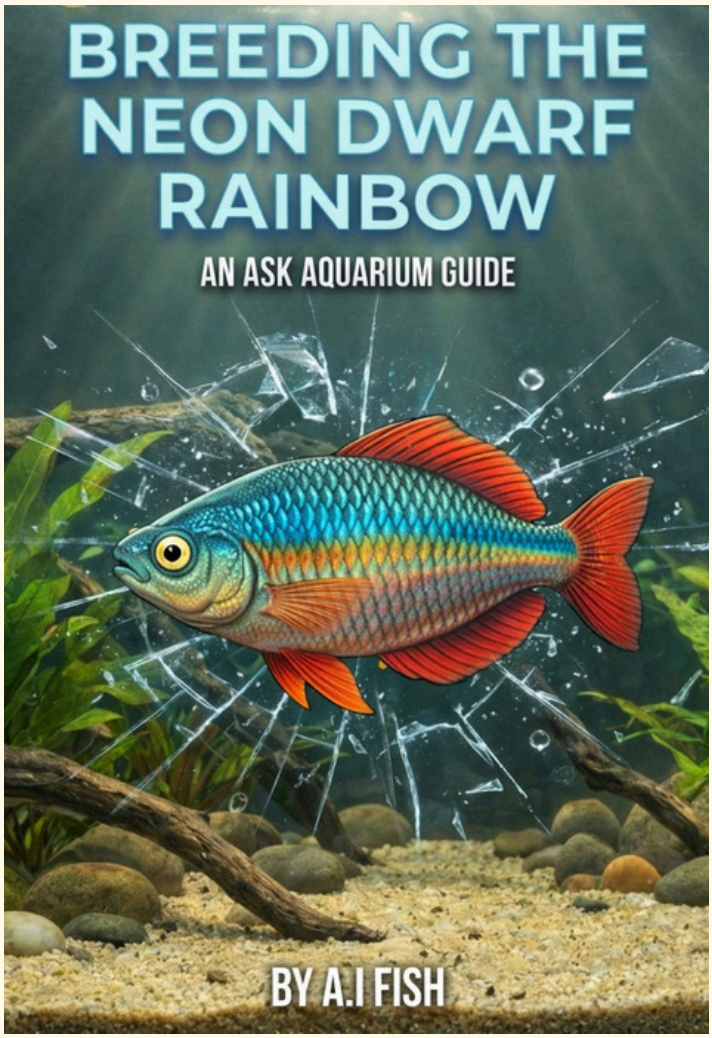


BOOKS & RESOURCES

Continue Your Fishkeeping Journey

Whether you're breeding tropical fish, creating a planted aquarium or simply looking to learn more about the hobby, our growing collection of practical guides is designed to help you build your knowledge with confidence.

Every book is written from real-world experience gained over more than 25 years of maintaining aquariums and ponds professionally.



WWW.AQUATICSPECIALISTUK.COM/
OUR-BOOKS

Featured Book:

Breeding the Neon Dwarf Rainbow

A practical guide to breeding one of the world's favourite rainbow fish. The Neon Dwarf Rainbow fish has earned a reputation as one of the most rewarding freshwater fish to keep and breed. Peaceful, hardy and fascinating to observe, they are an excellent choice for both beginners and experienced aquarists.

Whether your goal is to breed your first successful batch of fry or to better understand the behaviour of these remarkable fish, this guide takes you through every stage of the process using practical techniques developed through years of real-world fishkeeping experience.

Inside you'll discover:

- Choosing healthy breeding adults.
- Setting up the ideal breeding aquarium.
- Water conditions that encourage spawning.
- Feeding and conditioning your fish.
- Caring for eggs and raising healthy fry.
- Avoiding the most common breeding mistakes.

Beautifully illustrated and written in a clear, practical style, this guide is designed to help aquarists achieve success while understanding why each stage of the breeding process matters.
Available now for Amazon Kindle.
Discover this book and explore our growing collection of fishkeeping guides by visiting:

Showcase Aquarium

This low-tech planted aquarium is a brilliant example that you dont need to spend a lot of money to get a great looking tank. This beautiful freshwater aquarium is stocked with a variety of small hardy species that thrive without pressurised CO_2, providing natural shelter for the fish while maintaining a vibrant green appearance throughout the year.

A community of peaceful tropical fish brings movement and colour to the aquascape, while the natural wood and planting create a balanced layout that continues to mature over time.

Like all successful aquariums, the secret isn't expensive equipment–it's regular maintenance, patience and understanding the needs of both the fish and the plants.



Aquarium Facts

- **S**tyle: Low-tech planted aquarium
- Plants: Easy-care freshwater species
- Livestock: Peaceful tropical community fish
- Maintenance: Professionally maintained
- Experience Level: Suitable for most aquarists

Would you like your aquarium featured in a future issue of Aquatic Spec?

We'd love to see your aquarium, pond or reef aquarium.

Send your photographs to: aquaticspecialistuk@gmail.com

Next Issue:

Coming this Winter

Inside our Winter edition you'll discover:

🍂 Preparing Your Pond for Winter
🐟 Tank Buster Spotlight
🌿 Aquascaping tips
🔧 Understanding Beneficial Filter Bacteria
📖 Featured Book
📸 Reader Aquariums

Thank you for reading the 2nd issue of Aquatic Spec.
We hope you've enjoyed this collection of practical advice, inspiration and professional experience.

Visit our Knowledge Centre for more expert articles, explore our growing collection of Books & Resources, and keep an eye out for the Winter edition.

Enjoying Aquatic Spec?

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