

So Many Fish, So Little Time

Article by Brent Lemanski, Kwas (BLeanski@limra.com).

As a child/teenager several years (OK, decades) ago I thoroughly enjoyed the hobby, raising anything from guppies to piranhas. In recent years, I'd been increasingly thinking about returning to the hobby, while living vicariously walking through tropical fish shops, secretly enjoying my fish fantasies.

After building a home office I finally had the perfect place to return to my habit – a jam cupboard beside my desk. So I went out and bought the largest aquarium that the cabinet could reasonably hold – an enormous 40 gallon tank that seemed to fill the room.



Actually, I didn't start with the aquarium. My first purchase was a piece of driftwood I fell in love with weeks earlier. On that same trip to the store, I was drawn to a heavily planted community tank – and my future was determined.

So, filled with enthusiasm, I returned to the store. I was very fortunate to be introduced to fellow 'plantie' Ed (sucker4plecos) Koerner who patiently educated me about both facts and fiction, (Fins & Tales you might say) regarding the hobby I was eager to rejoin. A lengthy 90 minutes (and several hundred dollars) later I exited with a 40 gal tank, special substrate, a seemingly 'nuclear' light source that would provide 3 watts/gal and various other essentials – including about a dozen plants.

Fingers raw from rinsing the substrate for what must have been hours, I finally was able to do my 'aquascaping'. Once finished I was feeling very pleased with myself. The driftwood looked beautiful, adorned with both Staghorn Fern and Singapore moss, foreground with Dwarf Babytears and Chain Swords backed by Crypts and Tiger Lotus. I also set up a DIY CO2 generator.

In a week I was ready for fish so, back to the store yet again, and another visit with my new best friend Ed. Little did I realize at the time, cycling wasn't something only done on a two-wheeler. Following another hour of EDucation I left the store with six Harlequin Rasboras, 3 Panda Corys, some flake and a package of frozen Bloodworms.

Within a week the Rasboras were spawning like rabbits. Clearly I must have been doing something right. Who'd have thought you could spend hours watching 9 tiny fish in all that water. Things were going swimmingly. Finally, I was an aquarist!

I'd always thought 'the green monster' was the left field wall in Boston's Fenway Park. Well, about 3 weeks into my new experience I encounter my own green monster in the form of algae – on the glass, on the top of my precious driftwood, and numerous threads emanating from the moss. Once again, back to my friend Ed for another lesson. Long story short, after spot treatment with Excel, and a 'settling in' period (along with the help of a Bristlenose Pleco) the situation seemed to be under control.

I then settled into a routine – water testing, water exchange, plant fertilization, automatic feeding while I'm away on business, and of course, the addition of more fish. I added 12 Rummy Nose Tetras, – excited by the addition of colour and movement. I was a little disappointed, though, to find that some of my plants lost their initial leaves – some due to 'natural causes', and no doubt some due to my rough initial handling. But I've been encouraged by their rapid recovery.

Next I struggled with the decision about what 'feature fish' to introduce to the tank. Perhaps foolishly, I had dreams of Discus. I spent many hours studying books and doing research on the internet. But as we all know, book learning is one thing, experience quite another. So, using the Kwas online forum, I consulted numerous helpful friends I have yet to meet, who willingly gave me guidance and insight. I was pleased to discover that there are many ways to suggest I was being an idiot without actually using those words. I was quickly learning the limitations of a 40 gallon aquarium and the need to be thoughtfully selective.

So, back to the store for the purchase of 4 Super Red Kribensis and some additional petrified wood to add a cave to my 'masterpiece'. Two of the Kribs quickly 'coloured up', paired off, and began to harass the other two who were banished to the relatively densely planted back corner of the tank. The pair have now taken up housekeeping near the front of the tank at the base of the driftwood. No eggs as of yet, but watching their courting ritual is fascinating. It seems that whenever I feed them frozen bloodworms or brine shrimp their colour deepens

and spawning activity becomes more frenzied. You'd think he was the one who bought her dinner. I expect any day now to find the male lying on the substrate smoking a cigarette.

I'm also learning of the need to think spatially about my now too small 40 gallon aquarium - not just in relation to the plants but also for the fish. I now plan to replace the 2 Kribs with a pair of German Blue Rams. The Rasboras tend to hover under the Riccia floating on the surface while the cichlids and tetras occupy the bottom third of the tank. So, next I'm going to remove a few of the tetras to make room for 'something showy' to occupy the middle to top portion of the tank. I continue to have difficulty making choices – and I now have Ed on speed-dial!

Currently, about 3 months into my 'rebirth', I'm thoroughly enjoying the hobby. I'm pleased with my progress to date and excited about future possibilities. Last night I attended my first Kwas meeting, enjoyed the camaraderie and was inspired to write this article.

My home office renovation plans for this fall have been adjusted to include a reinforced built in wall-to-wall filing cabinet that will support the weight of 120 gallons of water.



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