

Discus

Sympysodon sp.



Left: Marlboro Red Discus
Right: Red Snakeskin Discus

These two pictures illustrate the difference between colour forms.

Images courtesy of Stendker Discus, supplier of high quality Discus. Aquarium Industries has the sole Australian distribution rights to these spectacular Discus.



Common name

Commonly referred to simply as Discus, they may also be identified by their colour variety as well.

Scientific names

There are two species of Discus, which have been divided into the following sub-species.

Symphysodon aequifasciata axelrodi (Brown Discus)
Symphysodon aequifasciata aequifasciata (Green Discus)
Symphysodon aequifasciata haraldi (Wild Blue Discus)
Symphysodon Discus Discus (Heckel Discus)
Symphysodon Discus willischwartzii (Pineapple Discus)

Natural Range

The natural habitat of Discus is the Amazon Basin, where they live amongst the protection of submerged tree roots, logs, and heavy aquatic vegetation. The water is soft, with a GH of 30ppm, and acid, with a pH between 5 and 6. (This differs from the water parameters under which Discus are held in commercial, retail, and home aquaria. See below for these recommended parameters.) It also has a low bacteria count, and is high in humic acid and tannic substances. Discus spawn in natural ponds, created during the annual rainy season floods. Here the water reaches temperatures of 32° Celsius.

Tank Range

Discus will hover around the middle to top of the water.

Maximum Size and Longevity

These fish will get to a maximum size of about 20cm. Discus can get to an average age of 10 if kept happy and healthy in the correct water parameters.

Water Quality

- Temperature: 27°C - 30°C.
- pH: 6.2—6.8
- General Hardness: 50—100 ppm.

Feeding

Discus will take food from all parts of the aquarium—they will feed at the top and middle, and also graze from the bottom of the tank. It is very important to vary the Discus' diet with a range of foods. We recommend the addition of Aquarium Industries Naturals Range Frozen Discus Mix, as it has been manufactured for the specific dietary requirements of Discus. Discus have healthy appetites, but they eat in a slow and careful manner. A few *Corydoras* catfish are useful to clean up left over food.

Handy Hint: We recommend feeding at least 3 times a day with small portions of defrosted food all throughout the tank so that smaller Discus can get food also.

Compatibility

We recommend keeping Discus with species that originate in South America. Some other community species also do well with Discus. Acceptable tank mates include cardinal tetras, neon tetras, rummy nose tetras, *Corydoras* and South American dwarf cichlids, like the genus *Apistogramma*.

Handy hint: Discus are a shoaling fish and best kept in groups. As a guide, we suggest keeping 8-10cm size Discus at a rate of 10 to 12 per 180l.

Colour and Varieties

In addition to the wild forms which are available, line breeding has resulted in some spectacular colour forms.

A great deal of confusion exists over popular names of the different Discus colour forms. Many commercial breeders give any new colour form their own "popular" name, which leads to very little consistency across the industry. The following descriptions would seem to represent the most accepted definitions:

Brown

A brownish coloured fish, showing a few wavy, blue, iridescent lines over the head, and the dorsal and anal fin.

Turquoise

Wide, wavy, iridescent blue/green lines over the body and fins. Good quality turquoise have the coloured lines extending all over the body from the snout to the caudal peduncle.

Brilliant Turquoise

As above, only the colour lines are a shiny iridescent blue/green.

Red Turquoise

As for Turquoise, only the colour lines are a little wider and the background colour is reddish.

Cobalt Blue

As for Turquoise, only the colour lines are a distinct cobalt blue colour.

Solid colour

Where the term solid is used in front of the colour variety, it means the iridescent lines have merged together, giving the fish a solid colour.

Red Dragon

These fish have broad, irregular and often fragmented wavy lines over the body. The colour of these lines is usually very light, a silvery turquoise.

Young Discus under 5cm show little colour, so a good deal of trust must be involved when buying youngsters.

There are also colour fed Discus offered on the international market. Fortunately with Australia's 14 days quarantine regulations, any imported colour fed Discus should be back to natural colour by the time they reach the shops, thus providing a safeguard for buyers when purchasing fish from Aquarium Industries. (To ensure the integrity of our Discus colours, we do not artificially colour feed.)

Sexing

As they both have similar colours, it is quite hard to distinguish the difference between male and female Discus. It is difficult to determine the sex at sizes below 12 - 15cm.

Once Discus reach approximately 12 - 15cm, differences in the dorsal fin tips become apparent, with females developing a rounded tip, and a more pointed tip emerging in males. Females will sometimes show a breeding tube or ovipositor, but this will only show when the mature adults are breeding.

Discus have a most interesting method of reproduction. The parents pair up, lay eggs, and care for and protect the newly hatched fry. The young actually derive their nutrition by feeding from a special protein rich secretion or slime produced by special glands in the skin of their parents

General Information

Discus are considered by most hobbyists as the ultimate fresh water aquarium fish. Few other species can rival their majestic behaviour, fabulous colour, and incredible intelligence.

Ease of Keeping

Ease of aquarium keeping = 4
(1 = easy, 5 = difficult).

These fish can be difficult to look after but, as their many enthusiasts will attest, they are well worth the effort.

For more Care Sheets like this, visit our website: aquariumindustries.com.au