

Plecostomus Catfish

Hypostomus plecostomus

to the Family Loricariidae



Natural Range

South America, and in particular the Amazon basin and its tributaries.

Maximum Size and Longevity

Some species can get very large with the common variety getting to be almost 46 cm and will outgrow most aquariums under 200 litres.

Lifespan can be 10 - 15 years.

Water Quality

Plecostomus are generally tolerant of a wide range of water qualities. Coming from the Amazon basin, they prefer soft slightly acidic to neutral water, but can also be kept successfully in African rift lake tanks.

Temperature: 23°C - 28°C

pH: 6.5 – 7.5

General Hardness: 100 – 250 ppm

Feeding

Plecostomus are herbivorous and prefer algae or plant based foods. They have a sucker mouth which they use to rasp algae and food particles off a surface – they are well known for their ability to remove algae from the sides of aquaria.

Try to supplement their diet with algae wafers or green vegetables such as shelled peas or broad beans, zucchini and cabbage/lettuce. Some hobbyists also have great success in feeding sheets of NORI (used to make Sushi) available from the supermarket. As they get older they may eat algae less often and you will need to supplement their diet with algae wafers that sink to the bottom of your tank. Shrimp or fish pellets that drop to the bottom of the tank are another favourite. Drop in the algae wafers or shrimp pellets after you turn off the lights for the day to prevent the other fish in the tank from getting the food before your Plecostomus can get to it.

Compatibility

Plecostomus are generally peaceful, but can be aggressive toward others of the same species. When small they are an excellent addition to the community tank, but when fully grown can be a bit boisterous for small tetras etc. They are an excellent tank mate for larger community tanks and can generally handle themselves against most large aggressive species kept in the trade – although the provision of hiding places in caves is advised.

Colour and Varieties

Plecostomus have a dark brown/grey coloured body with darker spots covering most of the body. As is common to Loricariidae catfish, the body is covered by bone plates rather than scales which form an armoured skeleton which protects the fish from predators.

General Information

There are no visible differences between the male and female when they are small. Larger specimens (12cm or larger) may be sexed based on the bodyshape. When looking from above, the body of the male fishes tapers evenly from the head to the tail, whereas the body of the female can be quite rounded in the stomach area due to the presence of eggs. It is difficult to breed them in a home aquarium, but they can be produced in outdoor earthen ponds. In the wild they dig tunnels into the sides of rivers where they breed, which can be simulated in outdoor ponds.