

Tangs, Surgeonfish

Family name *Acanthuridae*

Right: Powder Blue Tang

Far Right: Scopas Tang



Common Name

Tangs or Surgeonfish are a wide and diverse group, but not all are commercially available to the Aquarium industry. Some of those which are readily available for the home enthusiast include: Blue Tang, Scopas Tang, Purple Tang, Mimic Tang, Powder Blue Tang, Sailfin Tang, and Epulette Tang. Surgeonfish get their name from the sharp spines on each side of the fish near their tail.

Scientific Name

Surgeonfish are classified under the family name *Acanthuridae*. Within the group there are various different genera including *Acanthurus*, *Naso*, *Ctenochaetus*, and *Zebrasoma*

Natural Range

Surgeonfish are found in and around offshore reefs in most tropical and sub-tropical marine waters.

Tank Range

Surgeonfish are very active fish, and will swim throughout the entire tank at all layers. As a result, they require a large, spacious living area. The smaller surgeonfishes, such as species of *Zebrasoma*, need at least a tank of 200L, while the larger species such as the *Naso* would require a tank of a minimum 1000L.

Maximum Size and Longevity

Most Surgeonfish that are available to the hobbyist will grow to between 15 – 30cm, although there are larger varieties which can be seen in public aquaria. It is essential to research the maximum size of the fish you are considering purchasing, to ensure that you have provided adequate space in which to keep them happy and healthy.

In nature, most fish in this group can live for quite a long time, with some varieties known to live for up to 20 years.

Water Quality

- Temperature: 24°C - 26°C.
- pH: 8.0—8.4
- Specific Gravity: 1.020—1.025

Colour and Varieties

Surgeonfish will add colour and interest to the marine tank, from the royal blue of the Blue Tang to the brown Scopas tang, with all varieties in between.

Feeding

These fish are primarily an herbivorous animal and feed predominantly on marine algae, but they will readily accept frozen foods including AI Naturals Brine Shrimp and Marine Mix. They may also accept Nori sheets (sushi paper).

They will eat from any where in the tank, and will forage at the bottom of the tank.

Compatibility

Surgeonfish are ideal community fish, and will get along with most other fish if none of them “own” territory. Some surgeonfish will swim happily together in a large tank, but care must be taken for some species which have been reported to be aggressive to one another. Refer to Aquarium Industries Marine Compatibility chart for further information. Surgeonfish are very good at controlling undesired algae and plants, but can also consume desired algae and plants, so caution is advised.

Sexing

It is quite difficult to determine separate sexes in Surgeonfishes from external physical appearance, but like most fishes, the male is generally larger than the female. There are very few occurrences of surgeonfishes breeding in captivity.

General Information

The *Acanthuridae* species are one of the most popular in the industry. Due to the variety, they have members that are peaceful as well as aggressive. Maintaining water quality is vitally important in this group if it is to be successfully kept in captivity. This will also help to reduce the incidence of marine white spot, which can flare in these fish if they become stressed. The best way of avoiding this is to check the water quality regularly, feed a nutritious diet, and ensure that they have correct housing. You will get many years of pleasure from these beautiful fish.

Ease of Keeping

1-3 – depending on species, ranging from easy (scopas tang) to moderate-difficult (lined surgeon)