

## Checklist

Before purchase make sure that:

- 1 You have the appropriate equipment and position for the aquarium.
- 2 You have researched all the species you are interested in and your final choices are all compatible.
- 3 You are familiar with how to transport and release your fish.
- 4 You are aware of the daily, weekly and monthly maintenance your aquarium will require.
- 5 You are prepared to look after your fish properly for the duration of their life.

## Equipment

- 1 Glass or plastic aquarium
- 2 Gravel cleaner
- 3 Water testing kit
- 4 Tap water conditioner
- 5 Gravel
- 6 Filter
- 7 Food

Before purchase make sure:

- 1 The aquarium is large enough to house a fully grown specimen as these fish can grow quite large
- 2 Water parameters are as advised, if not make adjustments slowly



### Never release your aquarium animals or plants into the wild

Never release an animal or plant bought for a home aquarium into the wild. It is illegal and for most fish species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death because they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment.

### Important things to remember

#### Always buy...

test kits and regularly check the water for ammonia, nitrite, nitrate and pH. This will allow you to make sure the water in your aquarium is not causing welfare problems for your fish.

#### Establish a routine...

for testing the water in your aquarium. Record your results to enable you to highlight fluctuations quickly. Also check the temperature of the water.

#### Maintain...

the water in the aquarium within the accepted parameters highlighted in this leaflet. You may need to do regular water changes to achieve this.

#### Always wash your hands...

making sure to rinse off all soap residues, before putting them into your aquarium. Wash your hands again afterwards and certainly before eating, drinking or smoking.

#### Never siphon by mouth...

A fish tank can harbour bacteria which can be harmful if swallowed. Buy a specially designed aquarium gravel cleaner which can be started without the need to place the siphon in your mouth.



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If in doubt contact your OATA retail member for further information



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How to care for...



# American Cichlids

29 Tropical freshwater fish



# Introduction

This is a group of moderately aggressive to aggressive fish which originate from Central and South America and are members of the cichlid family.

Some of the more common species you are likely to find for sale will be covered in this leaflet including the Angelfish, Oscar, Parrot cichlid, Severum, Firemouth cichlid, Convict cichlid and Jack Dempsey.

## Water requirements

This group of fish are fairly robust and do well in an appropriate aquarium water. In the wild they thrive in slightly soft acidic water but can acclimatise to different water in time:

**Temperature:** 22 to 28°C

**pH:** 6.0 to 8.0

**Ammonia:** 0mg/l (0.02mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

**Nitrite:** 0mg/l (0.2mg/l may be tolerated for short periods)

**Hardness:** Soft to hard (0 to 20°dH)

## Biology

These fish get relatively large in size. The common aquarium sizes are listed below:

**Oscars:** 25 to 45cm. **Parrots:** 15 to 20cm. **Convicts:** 10 to 15cm. **Severum:** 15 to 20cm. **Firemouth:** 15 to 20cm. **Jack Dempsey:** 10 to 25cm. **Angelfish:** 7.5 to 15cm.

These fish can all (except the parrot cichlid) be found inhabiting American river systems, including the Amazon.

The parrot cichlid is not a true species. Instead, it is believed to be a hybrid between two or more Central American cichlids, although the exact ancestry of this species is unclear. Being a hybrid, this fish does not possess a scientific name.

In good water quality and without ailments these fish can live for many years. They grow quickly and will reach maturity within a short time frame.

Sexing: **Parrots:** unknown. **Convict:** adult males are larger with longer fins and develop a fatty lump on the forehead.

**Jack Dempsey:** males have pointed dorsal and anal fins.

**Firemouth:** adult males are larger and more brightly coloured.

**Severum:** Males have pointed fins. **Oscar:** no obvious difference.

**Angelfish:** adult males usually larger.

## Aquarium requirements

Due to the size and aggressive nature of this group of fish a relatively large aquarium is required. This may be best provided with a tank of 90 to 250 litres dependant upon species. Be aware that if a smaller aquarium is purchased initially it will need to be upgraded as these fish grow.

These fish require an open swimming space and a planted area. It is also advisable that the base of the aquarium should contain rocks and bogwood to provide some cover. For the more aggressive species such as the Severum, Jack Dempsey and Convicts it is advisable that these plants are artificial as they will be dug up and damaged easily. The Angelfish require a taller tank due to body shape and it is advised that it is planted.

The aquarium will also require lighting and heating. Be careful where the heater is situated as some of these more aggressive fish can break it if they swim into it.

Filtration should be effective, these fish get large and like other cichlids are messy and will quickly pollute tank water with faeces and waste.

## Maintenance

At least once every two weeks a partial water change of 25 to 30% is strongly recommended (a siphon device is useful to remove waste from the gravel). The water should be tested regularly to ensure that pollutants such as ammonia and nitrites don't build up. Ensure you either allow the replacement water to stand or aerate it to remove any chlorine present. Ideally treat all replacement water with tap water conditioner before adding to the aquarium.

Filters should be checked for clogging and blockages. If the filter needs cleaning then do not run it under the tap as any chlorine present may kill the beneficial bacterial population that has established in the media. Instead, it can be rinsed in the tank water which is removed during a partial water change as this reduces the amount of bacteria which are lost.

Good husbandry is essential as these fish can be stressed by even the smallest amounts of ammonia and nitrite. Test the water to monitor the ammonia, nitrite and nitrate levels every week, especially during initial set-up and after adding extra fish.

## Feeding

Oscars and Severums are both carnivores feeding upon small fish, worms and insect larvae. The remaining fish are omnivores, however meaty foods are preferred.

In the home aquarium, these fish will accept most foods. It is important to supplement tropical flakes and pellets with live, frozen and freeze dried foods. These fish should be fed what they can eat within a few minutes 1 to 2 times a day. Remove any uneaten food to reduce waste build-up.

## Potential problems

A water quality problem will affect fish behaviour and can be shown by clamped fins, reduced feeding, erratic swimming and gasping at the surface. Immediately test the water if any of these symptoms are shown. If in doubt ask your OATA retailer for advice.

## Compatibility

It is normal for cichlid species to be very aggressive. This is true for the Oscars, Firemouth, Jack Dempsey, Parrot and Convicts. For these fish it is suggested they are kept alone or with other robust aggressive cichlids. There needs to be plenty of space because these fish are territorial. They can be kept with large bottom feeding fish such as Synodontis catfish and plecos.

The remaining two fish, Angels and Severums, are not as aggressive. Severums can be kept with other medium-large peaceful fish. The Angelfish is a good addition to a community tank and can be housed with small fish if bought as a juvenile.

## Breeding

The majority of these fish can be successfully bred in the home aquarium except for the Parrots, due to them being a hybrid species and many hybrid species are infertile.

They are all egg layers and will be seen cleaning a flat surface prior to breeding. Once the eggs are laid the parents will protect their fry either in a small school, or in the case of the Jack Dempsey, their fry will be placed into pre-dug pits in the substrate. The Severum use bi-parental mouth brooding, meaning both the male and female carry the young.