facts on
fish keeping & tap water

can I use tap water in my pond or aquarium?

Water quality standards are derived to ensure that tap water is safe for humans to drink. The standards do not take into account the specialised requirements of fish or other aquatic organisms, which are kept in fish bowls, aquariums or ponds filled with tap water. As such, tap water may require further treatment to make it suitable for fish keeping, but as long as you follow some basic rules you can use tap water in your aquarium or pond.

specialised aquariums

Some types of fish require very specialised environments, so it is important for you to find out the specific water requirements of the fish you intend to keep. For example, marine fish need added sea salt, whilst some Amazonian fish require 'soft' water. To compare these requirements to your mains supply, contact Severn Trent Water on our freephone number, 0800 783 4444 for a summary report of water quality for your area. Alternatively, visit the Severn Trent Water website at www.stwater.co.uk/waterquality where you can input your postcode and view the summary on-line. Ask your aquarist's advice on any specialised equipment you may need to treat the water, particularly for marine and tropical fish that require very specific environments.

the basic rules

Always use tap water from a mains-fed cold tap, do not use a tank supply. Allow the tap to run for a sufficient period to remove standing water from the pipework before filling your container. Some fish are very sensitive to the metals taken up from domestic pipework like copper and zinc, which can accumulate to problem levels in your tank or pond. Never use water from a hot tap, or artificially softened water.

temperature

Tap water is generally much colder than the water in indoor aquariums and fish tanks, and can also be colder than pond water in summer. Fish are vulnerable to rapid temperature changes and if exposed to them can go into shock which may be fatal. Repeated instances of thermal shock may affect growth and resistance to disease. Always make sure that you have allowed the tap water to reach the same temperature as the ➤

aquarium (+ or – 1ºC). For heated aquariums you can achieve this by adding a little boiled water heated in a non-metallic container, or by using an aquarium heater to raise the temperature. Slowly adding a mist spray of water to top-up evaporation losses from a pond shouldn't cause problems, provided small amounts are added on a daily basis.

chlorine

To make sure that tap water is free from harmful organisms we disinfect it using low concentrations of chlorine. Whilst this is not harmful to humans, it is harmful to fish and other aquatic organisms. It is important therefore to remove chlorine before filling or topping up your aquarium or pond. For partial water changes (<10% of the volume) or topping up an aquarium, ensure you aerate the water before adding it to the tank to allow the chlorine to dissipate. For ponds, use a fine mist nozzle (pointed skywards). In both cases confirm added water doesn't raise chlorine levels above 0.02 mg/l using a test kit available from aquarist shops. If you need to change the water in an aquarium or pond set-up a temporary tank or pond to take your fish whilst the 'show' tank or pond is out of action. If you have a biological filter, use it for the temporary tank or pond. This preserves beneficial bacteria, and prevents filter contents turning sour when stood unused for a long period. Again chlorine dispersal can be hastened by aerating new water, but for large ponds some people use a Granular Activated Carbon (GAC) filter to quickly adsorb chlorine chemically.

does mains water change once it's added to a tank or pond?

Yes, fish waste, plant and algal growth, overfeeding and poor filtration, all produce toxic nitrogenous waste, and lower dissolved oxygen levels. If nitrogenous waste is allowed to accumulate this will cause distress to the fish and they may die. Biological filters can be used to remove nitrogenous waste, but must be maintained to ensure they are effective. Many good books on pond design and husbandry of aquaria and ponds are available from libraries. Specialist books, equipment and test kits are available from your local aquarist's shop.

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