

GREAT GRAZERS!

By Chase Klinesteker SWAM, Jan-Feb 2009



Plecos help keep our tanks clean (Longfin variety)

POLLUTION CAN KILL

Maintaining tank cleanliness is a big job, especially when one has a number of aquariums. Disease and even death of our fish can result if we neglect them. Pollution buildup from uneaten food, excessive fish waste, or slime can stress our fish considerably, making them more susceptible to diseases. Luckily, we have fish and other animals that can help us in our tank cleaning chores. Many of the fish we keep are not “grazers” or fish that will pick at the bottom, sides, and plants in a tank to remove uneaten food and slime buildup. This includes betas, many killiefish, rasboras, tetras, danios, and gobys. Yet we have many species available which do pick and clean surfaces to help in this task, some better than others.

A GOOD CLEANER

One of the most effective and my favorite is the Dwarf Bristlenose Plecostomus. Algae, slime, and uneaten food are mowed down quickly to give us a much cleaner aquarium. We still need to siphon out fish waste, filter, and make water changes, but they sure make our job a lot easier! They are so efficient that sometimes I will rotate them from tank to tank as needed (if I can find and catch them!) or put algae covered plants in their tank to be cleaned. They have some disadvantages that make it necessary to use other “grazers” also. Big slow fish like angels and discus can be attacked by plecos for their slime. They are just as efficient at eating eggs as they are cleaning up waste, so I don’t use them if I expect any fish might spawn. They will even sneak into caves where eggs have been laid and bully cichlids protecting them. They also can be quite aggressive at feeding time so any shy or timid fish would not get enough food to eat.

OTHER GRAZERS

Additional effective grazing fish include other catfish, gouramis, geophagus, livebearers (especially goodeids), loaches, boitas, and barbs. There is a wide variety of possible fishes that could be added to an aquarium to help keep things clean. Selection of compatible fish is important. I find reading and learning about behavior and compatibility of different fish very interesting and fun. Then purchasing the suitable fish and observing their behavior adds to the total knowledge we have acquired about our hobby. Continuing to learn about our hobby

is key to maintaining interest and motivation. If we stop learning, we tend to lose interest and our fish will suffer. I am constantly going to my reference books and online to learn about new and different species of fish.

GRAZERS FOR FRY

Fry tanks especially need good grazers because they need to be fed often. For very tiny fry I like to use snails and daphnia. Feeding Liquifry and APR can cloud the water easily, and the daphnia will not harm the fry and will reproduce to fill the demand. As the fry get larger, small corys, plecos, or snails can be added to help.

TAYLOR TO TANK

Each group of fishes cleans in a slightly different way. Corydoras clean the bottom well, especially sand, and stir up debris that can be picked up by the filter. Gouramis work well on tank sides and plants (think kissers!) and even will eliminate hydra. Geophagus sift through gravel and bottom debris to create and remove decaying particles. Livebearers like mollies, platys, and wild types seem to be constantly picking around for food. The goodeids are especially effective. I have found that *Illyodon xantusi* will even eat hair algae! Loaches and botias are effective at finding scraps of excess food in the furthest reaches of any aquarium. Other animals that can help keep things clean are the many kinds of snails, shrimps, and crayfish. Each of us has a favorite that helps us in the cleaning of our tanks. The more we learn about the care and feeding of different species and their compatibility, the happier our fish and cleaner our tanks will be!