

HORNWORT

by Chase Klinesteker



Hornwort floating on surface

A USEFUL PLANT

The last few years, besides the breeding of fish, I have enjoyed the growing and propagation of aquarium plants. The plant that has helped me the most to improve my success with other plants and fish is what some might refer to as "lowly hornwort". Following are some of my observations that may help you appreciate and utilize this plant more to your advantage.

MINIMUM LIGHT

---A lot of my plants are grown in 20 gallon long tanks side by side with only one 40 watt florescent bulb across 4 tanks in the middle. Hornwort grows quite fast in these tanks and will even survive at the ends of these tanks where there is little light. The fact that hornwort floats, is right under the surface gathering maximum light, and moves around probably helps. Yet this does not seem to stop the growth of potted plants or those planted in gravel underneath. Since these tanks are fairly shallow and most of the plants in them have lower light needs(cryptocoryene, Java fern, anubias, etc.), I get adequate growth under the hornwort.

POLLUTION INDICATOR

---One of hornworts' greatest assets is the fact that it is a great indicator for when pollution is building up in the tank. As soon as I see any algae or debris on the hornwort, I remove that part and throw it away (or feed it to my Uaru!), leaving fresh

sprigs to grow back. This reminds me that I need to do a water change right away, especially if nitrate sensitive fish are in the tank. The rest of the tank and plants underneath are not covered or affected by the algae.

THIN TO CONTROL

---I try to keep the hornwort only one layer thick, so it does require thinning. This is very beneficial to the tank, since all the pollutants used in its growth are removed from the system. I wish we could use this method to clean up our lakes. Now, the most popular way to "control" weeds in our lakes is to treat our lakes with herbicide and to let the dying weeds rot at the bottom of the lake! I wonder how many of us would allow that in our tanks!

GET RID OF WASTE

---If the hornwort clogs up with fine particulate matter, I know that I need more filtration in the tank. Some fish are just plain messy (especially cichlids). Throwing it away helps get rid of some of the waste.

FRY PROTECTION

---A layer or two of hornwort on the surface is perfect to protect live bearing fish fry. Most fry will come to the surface quickly and the parents have difficulty swimming through the hornwort to catch them. One end of the tank should be kept free of plants so the fish can be fed on the surface. A good sized potted plant with leaves near the surface will hold the hornwort at bay.

SPAWNING MEDIUM

---Hornwort is also excellent for egglayers to spawn in, especially surface spawners. Even corydoras will lay their eggs in it. Non-adhesive eggs will fall out, so other plants and/or gravel are recommended if fry are to be raised with the parents.

NOT MESSY

---Finally, hornwort is not messy like duckweed, watersprite, or many other floating plants. It is usually a continuous growth so that if you wish to net fish, the whole mass can be lifted out in one piece, set aside in a pan or another tank, and then easily put back afterward (this is a good time to thin it also).

So there you have it! Lowly hornwort has become one of my best allies in fish and plant keeping. Try it. You may like it!