LIQUID MICROWORMS

Microworms rinsed down to corner of culture and removed with eyedropper

Microworms are one of the best live foods for tiny fish fry. They are smaller than newly hatched brine shrimp so they can be fed earlier. They will stay alive in the aquarium for 12 or more hours and are very nutritious. Because they sink to the bottom, they are especially available to bottom-hugging fry such as catfish, barbs, and many tetras. They are easy to culture and reproduce rapidly. So, what is the problem?

THE PROBLEM

The problem is that maintaining a culture and harvesting them can be a challenge. Because we usually don't need them continuously, we often neglect our cultures until they die, then throw them out. Also, after starting a new culture, we wait until it matures enough so the worms crawl up the sides of the container to harvest with our finger. This can take 2 or more weeks, but we need worms now! And we often have to scour around the club to find someone who has an active culture so we can get a start again. So how do we make culturing microworms easier, faster, and more predictable?

THE SOLUTION

The solution is to feed microworms "in solution"! If the temperature is around 80 degrees, a newly started culture will have ample worms after only 4 or 5 days. They can be seen on the surface of the culture as a shimmering mass. Yet they won't start climbing the sides of the container to harvest with your finger for

another week or two. To harvest them, tip the container slightly up with the corner down and put a few drops of water above the corner on the surface so it drains down to the corner. The liquid at the corner will contain the worms and can be removed with an eye dropper. Not much volume is needed, as tiny fry can't hold much and there are probably millions (if not billions) of worms in just a few drops. These drops can be fed to the fry in their aquarium.

MAINTAINING AND RENEWING A CULTURE

I like to use raw 1-minute oatmeal to start a culture. It provides a fairly firm substrate for this technique and oatmeal does not seem to have smell problems like some other mediums. Moisten a ¼ inch layer of it just enough to show a slight light reflection on the surface, but not enough to make it soupy. Then add a starter from a viable culture of microworms, and after 4 or 5 days you can begin harvesting. This culture will produce for a week or two and then begin to turn dark and lose production. When it starts to turn dark, add a very thin layer of dry oatmeal on the surface of the culture and enough drops of water to give a slight shiny surface (not soupy). In 12-24 hours there will again be plenty of worms to harvest by this liquid method. Although it will need replenishing a little sooner, this renewing can be repeated many times before a new culture needs to be started. It is best not to wash down the entire surface of the culture, which allows it to rebound faster. If one forgets about the culture for a month or two and it appears very dark , it often can still be renewed in this manner as long as there was some moisture in the culture and it has not dried out. It would be best to keep at least two cultures going to prevent loss. A constant availability of microworms when needed for new spawns of tiny fry can greatly increase your success at raising fish.

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