

Betta Fish Caresheet



INTRODUCTION

Bettas have become incredibly popular pets, and for a good reason. They're hardy, smart, unique, beautiful, easy-to-care for fish!

There are actually several species of betta, but the common one found in the pet trade is *Betta splendens*. After years and years of specialized breeding, there are now over five varieties/breeds and they can be found in almost any color!

As long as this fish is given a correct tank set up and a healthy diet, they'll live for two or three years (and some even live for five!).

IMPORTANT CARE FACT:

Bettas should be kept by themselves. NEVER place two male bettas into the same aquarium. Do not put a male and female together except for short periods of time for breeding. Do not attempt to keep multiple females together unless you've done research and are prepared for a proper betta sorority tank.

TOO MUCH DETAIL FOR YOU?

Skip to the end for a summary of betta care requirements!

BREEDS

Most betta varieties differ by size and shape of the tail. There are quite a few breeds, but only a few are listed here.



Veil Tail

This is the most common breed and is characterized by a long tail that arches at the top and bottom, giving the tail a veil-like shape. This variety is usually found at any fish store and tends to be cheaper than the other breeds.



Delta

The delta breed has a fuller, rounder tail than the veil tail but it doesn't spread at a 180° angle.



Halfmoon

Halfmoons have very full, round tails that span a 180° angle when spread.



Double Tail

Double tail bettas appear to have two tail fins.



Halfmoon Plakat

This is a short-finned breed with a tail that has a 180° angle when spread. This variety tends to be more active and is more resistant to disease.



Crowntail

Crowntail bettas have spikey fins and tails.



Giant Betta

This variety doesn't have anything to do with the tails or fins. It's all about size! Originating from two oversized wild-caught individuals, this breed is gigantic compared to normal-sized betta fish.

COLOR FORMS

The many different colors and patterns found amongst bettas all have names, but there are a few too many to go into here! Solid, piebald, Cambodian, koi, butterfly, marbled, dragon, mustard gas, Dalmatian, and mask are examples of terms used to describe color patterns. Lots of colors can be found on bettas too, including (but not limited to) opaque white, white, black, yellow, red, orange, pink, blue, purple, and brown.



"mustard" halfmoon
"koi" halfmoon plakat
"butterfly" rose petal



KEEP SEPARATELY!

It's no myth... male bettas should never be put in a tank together! They will fight each other and both will end up hurt or one may die. Not fun.

Males and females will also pester each other constantly. One will end up getting sick and will die. A male and a female should only be kept together for a short period of time during breeding!

Unless you've done your research and are truly prepared, you should also avoid keeping multiple female bettas together. Females can be pushy with each other and will fight unless given appropriate conditions. Read this [article](#) on bettafish.com about setting up a female betta sorority if you want to learn more.

HOUSING

All sorts of strange, unique, and tiny containers/aquariums are sold as betta housing. Yes, it's true that a betta fish can *survive* in an itty bitty amount of space, but *surviving* isn't the same as *living*.

Providing a betta with at least one gallon of space is a great rule of thumb to follow. One gallon tanks and containers are still small enough to fit into a tight space (if that's what you need), it gives a betta plenty of room to swim, and it's enough water to keep a stable balance in temperature and cleanliness.

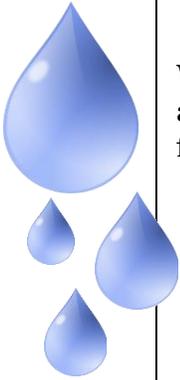
You don't have to choose a small container, either. Some owners choose to give their beautiful, showy bettas an entire 10 – 20 gallon aquarium to itself!

Keep in mind: the bigger the tank, the more stable the water temperature and the easier it is to maintain a healthy water cycle that will help keep the water from becoming toxic to your fish. Bigger tanks have room for filters and heaters too!



HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

WATER: Bettas need normal, clean water. Do NOT use distilled water (this kills fish)! Bottled spring water works but will get pretty expensive if you change it out as often as you should. Plain old tap water works perfectly fine, as long as you take a few steps to make safe...



Making Tap Water Safe

Water straight from your sink faucet usually has chemicals added to it that makes it good and healthy for people but dangerous for fish. There are two methods to prepare tap water for use in a fish aquarium:

1. Let tap water sit in an open container for 24 hours. This allows the chloride chemicals to evaporate and makes the water safe.
2. Treat the water with dechlorinator or conditioner products that can be purchased in any pet store selling pet fish products. Just follow the instructions on the package for the correct dosage, and the water will be ready to use within minutes!

OXYGEN: Betta fish have a special adaptation in which they can gulp air from the water's surface, meaning they don't have to rely entirely on the amount of oxygen dissolved in the water as other fish do. Because of this, bettas should always be kept in an aquarium with adequate ventilation! An air stone (used to dissolve oxygen into aquarium water) can be provided if you'd like, but it's not required as long as the betta has access to the water surface.



TEMPERATURE: Bettas are tropical fish and thrive when given a water temperature of 77°-80° Fahrenheit. For most owners, a heater is required to obtain this temperature (when kept without a heater under average room temperature conditions, aquarium water is usually in the high 60's to low 70's ... too cold!). When bettas are cold, they are inactive and their immune system becomes compromised. A cold betta is a sick (or soon-to-be-sick) betta.

LIGHTING: No special lighting is required. Just make sure a betta gets a normal day-night cycle. Ambient room lighting is usually fine. However, if you plan on keeping live plants in the tank, special lighting will be required for plant growth.

SUBSTRATE: Any typical aquarium substrate will work for bettas (sand, gravel, or no substrate).

DÉCOR: Décor is up to you! Just make sure all items are aquarium-safe. Driftwood, certain rocks, metal, and paint can leach harmful substances into the water and kill your fish. Be cautious and careful when choosing décor for a tank!



TANK MATES: Honestly, it tends to be much easier and more worthwhile to keep a single betta by itself. However, bettas can occasionally be kept with other fish species as long as the conditions are right. However, this can get tricky, so be ready for some possible challenges! ... You need to

have AT LEAST a 10 gallon aquarium, though I think you'd be better off with 15 gallons or more. The fish you choose to house with your betta need to be nonaggressive species that do not nip fins and tails (a betta is too slow to get away from other fish, so its roommates have to be nice!). Bettas will attack any colorful fish because they are seen as competition; you'll have to choose tankmates that are drabber in color such as danios. Also, individual bettas have different personalities. Some bettas may tolerate tank mates while others will not.

FILTER: Bettas do not require filters, but they help. A LOT. If you do not use a filter in your betta's tank, you will need to make sure the water doesn't foul from being stagnant. And you'll need to change the water more often. It's up to you!

WATER CARE

Keeping the water clean and in perfect condition is crucial for a healthy betta! Water changes are an absolute MUST and will be one of the most important things you do when caring for your fish.

A betta's waste, any leftover spoiling food, or rotting pieces of plant (if you have live plants in the aquarium) create a toxic, invisible substance called ammonia. This is the first product in a very important process known as the nitrogen cycle, also known simply as the water cycle. Long story short, this is why you MUST do routine water changes to keep your betta healthy and safe. Doesn't matter if you have a filter or not, water changes still need to happen (though filters DO help the nitrogen cycle process).

Water changes are also the primary defense against diseases caused by dirty conditions (like fin rot, which bettas unfortunately are very prone to).



Important Note: Adding or topping off your aquarium to compensate for evaporated water is NOT a water change! Even though water evaporates from your tank, the toxic ammonia and other substances produced during the nitrogen cycle do not. The result is your aquarium's water becoming more and more concentrated with dangerous toxins. A proper water change means you're actually removing old water and replacing it with new water.

Guidelines for Doing Water Changes

SIZE of Your Tank	How Often to do a Water Change	How Much Water to Change
Smaller than 1 gallon	3 times per week	100%
1 gallon up to 2 gallons	2 time per week	100%
2-4 gallons	1 time per week	50-75%
5 gallons up to 10 gallons	1 time per week	50%
10 gallons	1 time per week	25-50%
Over 10 gallons	1 time per week	20-35%

DIET

Variety is the spice of life! It's important for people to keep a varied diet of fruits, veggies, grains, fats, etc in order to get all the nutrients we need and to keep us from getting bored. It's no different for bettas! Many different foods ensure a betta gets all it needs from its diet, and they definitely appreciate the variety.

Food Options:



High quality betta pellets and/or flakes



Live, frozen, or dried bloodworms



Live, frozen, or dried brine shrimp



Live, frozen, or dried tubifex worms



Live fruit flies
(Very similar to a wild betta's prey... fish love it!)



Finely-chopped, fresh earthworms



Live daphnia
(Daphnia are very small. Typically used to feed baby bettas)

Special Notes:

- Frozen food items must be thawed and brought to room temperature before being fed to a betta.
- Dried food options lose much of their nutritional value during the preparation process and should not be fed exclusively.

How Often and How Much?

Bettas should be fed once a day and should only be given as much food as they can eat within three minutes. One fasting day a week (a day when you don't provide food) is fine, and might actually benefit your fish! Overfeeding tends to be a problem (it can even cause disease and death!), and one fasting day a week helps calm down a betta's digestive system and get it back on track.

A betta fish should not look shrunken and super skinny, but it also shouldn't have a bulging belly! You can visually see when a betta has been given too much food during a feeding and you should use this to gauge how much food to provide your fish. Look closely at the betta's belly after it has finished eating. A poofed up stomach means you've fed too much food and you should offer less next time!



This female betta's stomach looks a bit too full and has a bloated/bulging appearance.



DISEASE/ILLNESS

The best way to treat a sick betta is to never let it get sick! Prevention is the best medicine and the prognosis for a sick fish usually isn't good. If the aquarium is always kept clean, proper water temperature is maintained, and a nutritional diet is offered, a betta probably won't get sick.

Sometimes a betta will still get sick and some betta breeds are actually more prone to disease than others. Always keep a close eye on your fish and routinely monitor its health. The prognosis is much better if you catch health issues very early.

Signs of a Healthy Betta: very active, swims around and explores often, loves to eat, colorful, skin is clear and free of lesions/patches/growths, eyes and gills and belly are normal.

Indicators of a Sick Betta: lethargic, floats at the water surface or sits at the bottom, can't seem to figure out which way is up or down, patches or lesions or growths can be seen on skin, bloated belly, not very hungry and may spit out food, turning weird colors, fins and/or tail are clamped or are receding or are falling apart, eyes or gills are abnormal, scales are pointy and poke out from the body.

Clamped fins are a sign of an unhealthy betta.



Follow These Steps for a Sick Betta:

Isolate the sick fish.

Set up a temporary hospital tank for your sick betta or remove any other animals from its aquarium and put them in a separate tank. Whatever you choose to keep the sick fish in needs to be incredibly easy to clean and has to support an aquarium heater. Most fish diseases are infectious and will travel quickly to other tank inhabitants, so definitely separate the sick betta as soon as possible! Do not leave any snails or invertebrate inhabitants with your sick fish; most medicines will kill these animals.

Keep the water VERY clean and fresh.

Some treatment regimens will require 100% water changes daily. Others may only call for a water change every five or seven days. But make sure to keep the water super clean!!!

Raise the water temperature.

A sick betta will benefit from a slightly higher water temperature. Normal temps for a healthy betta are 77-80° F. Sick bettas should be kept at 81-82° F. (Do not let the temp go higher than 82°F!!!)

Medicate.

There are different types of medications for each health issue, including antibiotics, antifungals, and meds to kill parasites. Once you track down the correct one, carefully follow the instructions on the package.



Common Diseases/Illnesses:

Fin or Tail Rot → Fin rot is a very common illness caused by dirty water conditions. A betta's nice long fins and/or tail begins to fall apart or appear as if they're being slowly eaten away. This condition is very treatable if caught soon enough! Fins and tails will even grow back (though they may not have the same appearance once they return.) An extremely mild case may potentially be cured with no medications; just do complete water changes daily and keep the water temperature in the correct range. More serious cases will require medications such as tetracycline.

Ich → This incredibly contagious parasite causes white fluffy spots or patches to grow on a betta's body. It can be prevented by adding a tiny amount of freshwater aquarium salt (sold in pet stores) to the tank. If a betta gets sick with it, remove all old water from the aquarium and replace with fresh new water. Then raise the temperature to 81-82°F and treat with aquarium salt. If ich persists, use a medication designed specifically to treat ich. This is one of the cases

where, if you keep your betta in a tank with other fish, ALL fish should be treated because they've all been exposed to the parasite.

Swim Bladder Disease → This noncontagious condition is caused by overfeeding. There really isn't a good way to treat this illness but the fish may recover on its own. While sick the betta may float sideways, lie on the bottom of the tank, or act very disoriented. Sometimes owners treat their bettas by feeding it a tiny piece of frozen pea that has had the "shell" or skin removed. However, the best thing to do is to reduce the amount of food fed to the fish. If it is having problems eating anything at all, lower the water level so the fish can access food more easily.

Dropsy → This very contagious bacterial infection is incurable. A sick betta's scales will poke out from its body, giving the fish an almost pinecone-like appearance. The fish will eventually die.



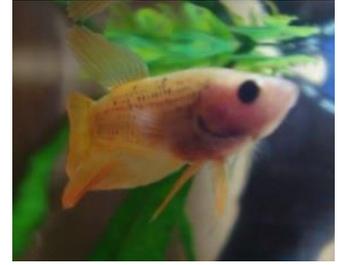
Velvet → Velvet is a contagious parasitic disease. An affected fish will rub against objects in the tank as if it's trying to scratch itself. If you look very closely, you may also see a very fine "dusty" coating of a slightly yellow or gold color on the betta's body. This is one of the cases where, if you keep your betta in a tank with other fish, ALL fish should be treated because they've all been exposed to the parasite. BettaZing is a good medication to use.

Popeye → Several issues could cause popeye, including a bacterial infection or even tuberculosis! (WARNING: fish tuberculosis can transmit to humans!) When a betta gets popeye due to a bacterial infection, it's a result of the aquarium being too dirty. Clean the aquarium and do a complete water change. Then treat the fish using an antibiotic such as ampicillin. If it turns out to be tuberculosis, there is no cure and the fish will eventually die.

Fungal Infections → A sick betta may have strange fuzzy patches or spots on its body. Clean the tank and add a little freshwater aquarium salt. If the infection persists, use an antifungal aquarium medication.

Other Bacterial Infections or Other Parasites → Inflamed gills, strange patches on the skin that cause scales to fall off, and other symptoms may be other bacterial infections or parasites. Clean the water and treat with an antibiotic for bacteria or medications designed to kill parasites.

CARE SUMMARY



Provide bettas with at least one gallon of space in order to better maintain proper water conditions and temperature. Fill it with tap water (make it safe for aquarium use by letting it sit in an open container for 24 hours or by using a dechlorinator product found in pet stores). Never use distilled water! Décor and substrate must be aquarium-safe and the betta needs to have a place to hide and feel secure. Otherwise, tank layout and décor is up to you and your personal preferences! No special lighting is required; a day/night cycle achieved via ambient room lighting is just fine. Water temperature must be kept at 77-80° Fahrenheit or the betta will be inactive and its immune system will not function properly. Use an aquarium heater and monitor the tank's temperature regularly. As long as the tank has good ventilation, a betta does not need an additional source of oxygen. Filters are recommended but not required; keep in mind that stagnant water fouls quickly and can cause disease if not changed/cleaned often. Feed bettas a varied diet consisting of food items such as a high-quality betta pellet or flake food, live/frozen/freeze-dried bloodworms, live/frozen/freeze-dried brine shrimp, live/frozen/freeze-dried tubifex worms, finely-chopped fresh earthworms, live fruit flies, and live daphnia. Feed once a day and only offer what the fish



can consume in three minutes. Choose one day a week to fast your betta (don't feed it) so its digestive system can clear out and to compensate for overfeeding. Water changes (physically removing old tank water and replacing it with fresh, new water) is crucial for betta health! Invisible toxins created during natural processes will kill or sicken a betta unless routine water changes are completed. Topping off the aquarium to replace evaporated water does not count as a water change because the toxins do not evaporate and become more concentrated. Smaller tanks may need 100% of their water changed up to three times a week while larger aquariums (10 gallons or more) will only need about 25-50% of the water changed once a week. Prevention is the best medicine when dealing with a sick betta! Most of the common health issues occur because of dirty tank conditions or overfeeding. Always keep the tank clean. Treat with the appropriate medication if necessary.

Enjoy caring for your betta!

Image Sources

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