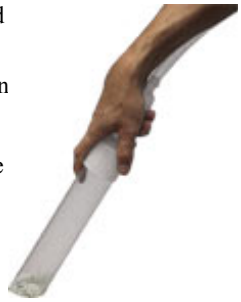
Aquarium Maintenance: 10 Easy Steps for Water Changes and Cleaning a Freshwater Aquarium

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Regular changes are one of the most important aspects of maintaining good water quality. For live plant tanks, weekly changes are best to replace trace elements lost. In an unplanted freshwater aquarium, water parameters should be checked weekly with test kits, and water changes performed accordingly. Aquariums with a good filtration system, should have a monthly water change at the minimum, regardless of test results, generally to reduce the amount of nitrates in the water.

Here are 10 easy steps to efficiently clean your freshwater tank and perform a water change while reducing the stress on your fish.

1. Unplug the heater.
2. Remove any artificial plants and decorations, and clean all sides of the aquarium with an algae sponge.
3. Turn off the pump. Disconnect the filter and take it, along with the artificial plants and decorations, to a tub or sink.
4. Clean the filter, artificial plants, and decorations. During this time, any debris that was stirred up will settle in the tank.
5. Connect a gravel cleaner. This may be a siphon which attaches to a faucet, or a manual siphon used with a bucket to collect the water. Start the siphon and push the gravel cleaner into the gravel all the way to the bottom, and leave it there as debris rises into the siphon. Continue until the water starts to clear, then either pinch the tubing or partially close the valve to let the gravel fall back down. Lift the gravel-cleaning tube out of the gravel and push it back down right next to the last section you just cleaned.



6. It's time to stop when you have removed 25-30% of the water (the water level drops to 3/4 to 2/3 of what it was before you started). If you did not get through cleaning all of the gravel, you can start where you left off with the next water change.
7. Take the temperature reading in the tank, then go to the sink and adjust the water temperature to match. This is a very important (but often overlooked) step. Adding water of a different temperature can unnecessarily stress the fish, making them more susceptible to diseases such as Ich.
8. Flip the faucet pump to run water into the aquarium, or fill a bucket and pour the water back into the tank to original levels. If using a faucet pump, while the tank is filling, add some de-chlorinator if you have chlorine in your water source. If you are using a bucket, add the de-chlorinator to the water before pouring it into the aquarium.
9. Replace your artificial plants and decorations and reconnect the filter.
10. Plug in the heater and restart the pump.

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