

# AFRICAN CICHLIDS

## (Cichlidae)

African cichlids are a popular choice for intermediate-skilled aquarium hobbyists, due to their bright and exotic colours and interesting personalities. They are especially bright for freshwater fish.

Cichlids are highly territorial and without the proper care and environment, aggression and fighting will cause harm and even death to other fish in the aquarium. With the right care, African Cichlids are full of personality and are known to 'greet' humans!

## TANK

The size of your cichlid aquarium will depend on the type and number of cichlids you want to keep. A 40L tank is a good starting point for dwarf cichlids, but a 100L+ tank is advised for other species. For multiple cichlid tanks, the following formula will help you calculate the appropriate tank size:

*8 litres of water per 2.5cm of fish*

Your cichlid tank will need to be well filtered. If you plan to overstock your tank - a common tactic to curb cichlid aggression - overfiltration is recommended. Strong filtration is also recommended because cichlids usually make a mess when they eat and their excrement is also considerably messy. Ideally, your filter should process the tank water between 3 to 5 times per hour. For a 40L tank, this means your filter should process 120L per hour. Given the volume of water required, a strong, sturdy base is required to hold your tank.



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## AFRICAN CICHLID CARE SHEET

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## WATER CONDITIONS

For best results, your cichlids' tank should be cycled before bringing them home. Water cycling involves setting up your tank without any fish in it and monitoring the water until the ammonia and nitrate levels are undetectable. You can monitor and test your water conditions using a Freshwater Test Kit. Cichlids require well oxygenated water, so aeration is highly important. To calculate the oxygen needed, a few factors need to be considered. The warmer your water, the less oxygen it can hold. The more cichlids in your tank, the more they need a steady supply of oxygen. To facilitate this oxygenation, [air stones](#) or aerating ornaments should be added to your tank.

The ideal pH range for African cichlids is between 7.6 to 8.0. Due to their high pH preference, African cichlids are one of the rare types of freshwater fish which can share a tank with marine coral, rocks and coral sand, which may aid to increase your pH levels.

Ideally, once your tank is up and running, you should test your water conditions once a week to identify any water quality issues early. A weekly water change of a minimum of 25% is recommended. A [water conditioner](#) should be added during each water change. During the water change it's a good idea to use a gravel vacuum to clean any signs of detritus on the substrate to help keep your tank clean.

Additionally, your cichlid tank will require a monthly rinse and clean of your filtration. A thorough scrub and rinse will suffice here, and you should be careful to never use chemicals of any kind.

## TEMPERATURE

African cichlids require a warmer environment, with an ideal range of 24-27°C. A thermometer is recommended to monitor your water temperatures. Depending on your climate, a heater may be necessary to keep your cichlids in their optimal environment. Most aquarium heaters are equipped to shut on and off as required, but you may be able to switch your heater off (or run without one) in a constantly warm environment.

## FOOD

A high quality food is important to keep your cichlids healthy and their colours bright and vibrant. Cichlid sinking pellets, either [medium](#) or [large](#) (depending on the size of your fish), can be used to help keep your fish healthy and beautiful. You can also treat your cichlids with frozen brine shrimp or mysis shrimp.

'Malawi Bloat' is a prevalent disease which, despite its name, can affect African Cichlids from all origins, not just Lake Malawi. While little information is known about this disease, it is commonly thought that the best prevention is feeding your cichlids a proper diet and never feeding out of date foods. Your cichlids should be fed carefully, with only enough food that they can consume comfortably within 3 minutes. You can feed them twice daily - for example, morning and night. If your tank experiences aggression problems, more frequent feeding - 3-4 times per day - can help curb aggression.

## LIFE SPAN

Depending on the particular species of African cichlid, 5-10 years is a common life span when their water and environment conditions are maintained in a healthy way.

## TANK ACCESSORIES

Decorations are particularly essential for your African cichlids. Tanks with rocks, caves and ledges are critical for your various fish to establish their own territories without encroaching on each other's spaces. Dark caves and other hiding places will be appreciated by your cichlids and give any potential catfish places to hide during the day. There are a variety of rocks which are suitable for your cichlids, however you should select rocks which are smooth, as rough or jagged rocks can harm your cichlids' fins. Rocks with holes and crevices are an excellent choice, as they provided natural hiding places for your fish. You should always be careful not to have any rocks resting on the glass of your tank, as this can eventually cause cracking, damage and leaks.

## COMPANIONS

African cichlids can be kept with other cichlids, however - they are a known aggressive fish and you will need to watch your fish carefully. They should never be kept with fish of other types, particularly smaller fish - as they will likely be relentlessly, and often fatally, bullied! One companion exception are pleco catfish, as these will often be tolerated. Even when adding other cichlids, care needs to be taken. Your tank will ideally be well-stocked with fish and with a large assortment of rocks, caves and hiding spots. This allows more timid fish room to get away and provides more 'territories' for your more aggressive fish to claim.

