

# AMERICAN CICHLIDS

## (Cichlidae)

American Cichlids are diverse fish that are hardier and easier to care for than their African counterparts.

Male American Cichlids in particular are brilliantly coloured, adding beauty to your aquarium.

They have a much more peaceful temperament than African cichlids, and while they are still full of personality and make wonderful pets, they can be quite shy!

## 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*

Given the volume of water required, a strong, sturdy base is required to hold your tank.

A [heavily-planted](#), well-decorated aquarium is best for American cichlids. This allows your shy fish room to hide and feel comfortable.

While American cichlids are typically placid, arguments can break out over territory. Adding plenty of caves, hiding spots, rocks and covers will help curb any potential clashes and provide enough territories for all your fish.



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## AMERICAN 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. In the wild, Central American cichlids are used to hard water with a pH above 7.6. South American cichlids are used to softer waters with a pH of 7.0 - 7.5.

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

## TEMPERATURE

American 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.

American Cichlids, particularly Oscars, are susceptible to Head and Lateral Line Disease (or Hole-in-the-Head Disease). This disease begins as small pits on their head and face, commonly just above the eye. This disease is attributed to a nutritional deficiency of Vitamin C, Vitamin D, calcium and phosphorus. While the exact cause is unknown, it is thought to be caused by a poor or lacking in variety diet, or insufficient water changes. 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.

## COMPANIONS

Smaller species of American cichlids, such as Dwarf South American Cichlids, can be kept with numerous other species such as neons, tetras or cardinals. For larger cichlids, avoid small tankmates and instead opt for larger fish such as silver dollars or medium to large catfish.

Male American cichlids can be territorial and aggressive towards one another, so it is advisable to introduce them together as juveniles. Growing together will encourage your fish to accept each other more easily. Remember to provide plenty of coverage, hiding spots and territories will help your fish to get along without fighting.

## TANK ACCESSORIES

Your American cichlid tank should be heavily planted and decorated - including [live plants with driftwood](#), rocks, caves and ledges. Your fish will want to establish territories and the more you can provide, the more peaceful your tank will typically be.

As American cichlids can be quite shy, providing dark hiding places such as caves will allow your cichlids to find a safe place to hide and feel comfortable. Rocks are an important decoration in your cichlid tank, but they should be chosen carefully. Smooth rocks without rough or jagged points are ideal, as these 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.

## LIFE SPAN

Depending on the particular species of American cichlid, 5-15 years is a common life span, if their water and environment conditions are maintained well.



*A Red Tiger Oscar*