

Betta Splendens Or better known as the Siamese fighting fish

In the wild bettas are not as attractive as the domesticated ones, the colour and long tail and fins have all been bred into these beautiful fishes as long ago as the early 1900 hundreds by the Orientals. The western cultures also contributed their share to these fishes as far back as 1910. Now we see many different varieties of fighters, long, round short tails are found on the males and even the females have much more colour. The females were drab and pale looking compared to the males which was why you didn't see many females in shops for sale, no-one wanted a drab looking fish in their tank. Females were scarce to buy from the shops, so if you wanted to breed them, you would have to go to many shops and even ask them to order next time they placed an order to their wholesaler. Many times they would say sorry none on the list. Now that there is many people breeding these fighting fish and females are in supply and with stronger and better colours. Tank requirements for the fighter fish is what ever suits the hobbyist, it can be very small as small as a one litre bottle cut in half. They will live in such small containers where other exotic fishes won't. Care and maintenance for the Siamese fighter are few; they still need good water conditions free of chlorine and other chemicals. They have a lung built into their gill system to enable them to breathe oxygen from the air. They need no filtration or air bubbles in their tank, just change some of their water once a week so it doesn't pollute. Around 30 to 50% is quite sufficient. Siamese fighting fishes love the warmth, more than most other exotic fishes. For instance let's say the temperature is under 22c the fish will lay at the bottom of the container semi dormant. Raise the temp to 28 or 30 and he will be active. Food for the fighter is readily available and come in many forms. I have found the sachets which you snip the corner off and tap a few little pellets into the tank, he will take three to four of these pellets twice a day which will be sufficient. Do not over feed as this may cause the water to pollute. There are other foods like blood worms, mosquito larvae, and brine shrimp and so on. It is up to the individual on what they feed their fighter fish. So you can see there are little requirements for this fascinating little fish. Now if you wanted to breed this little fish there are some alterations required, first a tank of at least 18 inches long, by ten inches wide and around the same in height. At one end a removable divider is placed approx. one third in, this is to house the female and the other (the larger end) the male. A small sponge filter is placed in the females end with a little amount of bubbles; this is for later when the young are in the tank. You only place the filter in so it will start the bacteria cycle which takes around 3 weeks at a temp of 28c, or place a seeded filter from another tank and you will be able to start breeding earlier. The filter is only necessary for the young as feeding them continuously without a filter will spell disaster. With no good bacteria the tank will end up with an ammonia explosion and this is an invisible killer. You can't see it in the water and fish will start to die. Back to the breeding now you have the tank setup and are ready to introduce the male, this should be of good specimen with good tail and mane. The tank should be filled to a depth of around 4 inches and a piece of styrene foam 2 inches square placed in the far corner away from the females end. The fish is in the tank, the divider is in place and the foam is in the corner, the filter is going in the females end. By placing the male in a day earlier than the female is so he will establish the tank as his territory. The next day is the time to place a fat female into her side of the tank in full view of the male. The male has

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established the tank as his territory and the female has excited him. He will charge at her with his gills flared then realises he cannot reach her. He will do this often and it will excite the female at the same time. As he charges at her he will go to the foam and start to place air bubbles under it, this may take a few hours, you will notice the female will change from the excitement. There will be a small white spot on the under belly called the papillae and she will have vertical bars starting to show, when this sign is evident the divider can be removed slowly. Try not to bang it on the glass so as to spook them. The male will do another charge at her realising he can touch her. There will be an ongoing chase in the tank until the female is ready. This is when the female will swim up under the bubble nest the male has built. The female will do this a few times then settle down and the male will wrap his body round the female as she drops 10 to 20 eggs at a time while the male fertilises them. The female will lay motionless while the male frantically dives down to pick up the eggs and deposit them under the bubble nest this motion will go on for a long time till the female has finished laying her eggs (approx. 300 eggs) After she has finished the male will chase her away as he does all the house work, looking after the eggs and then the fry. This is the time to catch the female and take her out or the male will rip her to bits or even kill her. Now there are eggs under the bubble nest and the male will tend to the bubble nest adding more bubbles when needed, picking the fallen eggs up and placing them back. This is only a short time that he has to tend the eggs as they hatch around 24 hours. The hotter the water the sooner they hatch and you will have more males than females. Which is a better way to go as more dividends are paid for the male fighter fish? The best way is to place a heater in the tank and a lid to keep the air temp and water the same. This is crucial for the fry when they are around ten days old and go for their first breathe of oxygen. If the air temp is colder than the water they will fill their lungs and then die. The heater should be set on around 30c for best results. Now the eggs have hatched and the fry hang vertical under the nest and father will watch for any that fall from it and pick them up and place them back. This can be the time to remove the male if you wanted however I like to leave him in till the fry are swimming. This will be in two to three days and this is the time to start feeding the fry and not before. I use a liquid fry for egg layers for the first few days then introduce newly hatched Brine Shrimp. This will make them grow; there is a micro powder that is good too. The fry on their own should be fed 4 to 5 times a day, and the water level can be raised a little at a time over the next few days till the tank is full. A few water changes will be needed and this can be done with a small piece of airline, just to keep the bottom clean, it is best to siphon the muck into a bucket so you can see if you siphoned any fry in with the muck. After a few weeks it will be time to start catching the males as you see them and place them in single containers. 2 litre coke bottles cut just above the centre line are great for growing out the young to adults (make regular water changes to them and this will make sure they live to be adults like their parents) With the water changes on the bottles, it has to be chlorine free and to do this with no expensive outlay is to obtain a large container like a 200 litre plastic drum. Clean it well, cut the top off and fills with water, place an air stone in it and the next day it will have no chlorine and will be safe to use. With many bottles filled with fighters and female can stay together in one tank. It will be necessary to have a large amount of water ready to use.

I hope this will help anyone that is interested in breeding these beautiful fishes!

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