

LIVE ROCK

and how to add it to your aquarium

The very first thing we must stress with Live Rock is to make sure that you wear rubber gloves when handling. There are many unseen living creatures and organisms on the surface of the rock, and it would be very unpleasant to have an encounter with Mantis Shrimp, Snails or Worms. Mantis Shrimp have a very sharp claw which can slice like a razor blade. Snails can vary from being completely harmless algae eating snails, to the deadly Cone Shell. Some Worms have very fine glass like spines and although not deadly, if you do come across one they can leave fine spines in your finger together with a very painful sting.

Adding Live Rock

When the aquarium has been filled and filters have been running for about 1 week, you can add a few kilograms of Live Rock. If your aquarium is less than 500 litres we have found the best results are to add approximately 2kg of Live Rock to 100 litres of aquarium water. If you have trickle filtration and a protein skimmer on your aquarium you may be able to add a full box of Live Rock. One box of Live Rock weighs approximately 15-20kg, keeping this in mind a sturdy stand is needed to support all this weight.

Live Rock should also be added slowly so that bacteria has time to multiply in the filters and cope with the build up of waste. After the rock has been added the water quality must be monitored closely, as the many living creatures on and in the rock will cause ammonia levels to rise.

If there is not enough bacteria in the filters to break down and remove the ammonia the inhabitants will suffer. Fish, corals and invertebrates also contribute to ammonia build up, so to help overcome this problem we introduce bacteria.

Bacteria help to get the biological cycle started and can be added 2 days before the addition of Live Rock and continue each day for the first couple of months.

A partial water change of up to 25% should be done about 3 days after the initial introduction of Live Rock (to help reduce ammonia levels). If the aquarium becomes cloudy or smells this is a sure sign that ammonia is present and more water changes are needed. When ammonia and nitrite levels have fallen to nil more rock can be added. This process can be repeated until you have achieved the desired effect.

Once the rock has established it is best to maintain a regular water change routine of about 25% each month to remove nitrates which may build up. When all the Live Rock is added to an aquarium of any size water is displaced. A standard 48" x 14" x 20" aquarium may hold 200 litres, this will be reduced to approximately 140 litres if 60kg of Live Rock are added.

Test your Water

Water quality is monitored with several test kits. A Hydrometer for the specific gravity (amount of salt in the water), High Range pH test, Ammonia test (NH⁴), Nitrite test (NO²), Nitrate test (NO³), and Carbonate Hardness test (KH).

It is essential to know the quality of your aquarium water. Only by testing the water regularly will you know if you need to add more bacteria or whether a water change may be necessary.

Lighting

Initially when adding Live Rock it is better to have the aquarium lights off more than on. Lighting in the marine aquarium is extremely important, as many of corals and anemones have algae living within them, but in the early weeks intense lighting will encourage undesirable algae growth. If

this algae grows too quickly on the rocks this may smother and kill all the interesting life on the rock. The many types of desirable algae that grow on the rock will grow from spores that were on the rocks when it was put in.

Each day monitor your aquarium for algae growth then increase gradually the hours of light. At least four fluorescent tubes are needed to provide a light similar to natural sunlight. There are many different types of lights and tubes available for marine aquariums but it is important that one should be actinic (blue). The first week you may find that the actinic (blue) light should be on the majority of the day with the main light only on for about one hour. Gradually increase the hours of the main light each day over the next few weeks.

When the aquarium is established the lights should be on for approximately 10 hours a day. The actinic light being on the full 10 hours and the main light on about 1-2 hours after for about 8-9 hours, then finishing with the actinic light. This creates a dawn / dusk effect, allowing the inhabitants to wake up, and a chance to settle for the night.

Consult one of the Seaview team for more information on lighting.

Maintaining your Live Rock

Good filtration is essential in maintaining a marine aquarium with Live Rock. The filter should turn the water over at least 5 times per hour, and the addition of a Protein Skimmers is a great asset.

Temperature should be 25°C, with a range of 24°C to 28°C being acceptable.

Once the aquarium has stabilized, corals can be added, then fish. Keeping in mind that some Angelfish and Butterfly's for example can eat and strip much of the life on the rock, so its best to get some advice prior to adding your fish.



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