

IT'S SHOW TIME! - ARE YOU READY?

Written by Anita Hovanesian, BAS Pub in The Daphnian Sept 1990

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Folks spend many months conditioning their beauties for showing, but due to poor transport preparation, lose their chance at winning. Fish often tear their fins while being netted (I learned this at my first show) and sometimes even rip their scales off in the net. Goldfish and other large fish which tend to excrete lots of urea get reddened fins prior to judging if proper filtration is not used. Rapid temperature changes also play a very important role in the "Department" section of the judges chart. Within this article I will discuss catching, transporting, and maintenance techniques which I use with a high degree of success.

Two months prior to show time you should already have decided which fish are going to be entered. If you plan to use sponge filtration, the filters must be setup in an already established aquarium. Allow them to run for the full two months and a nice bacterial colony will establish itself within the sponges. These little fellows will maintain you show tank very nicely by keeping the water crystal-clear and the ammonia to a minimum. I personally like the Tetra Filli and Brilliant filters as they have suction cups to keep them in place and the entire surface of the sponge is utilized. Small fish also cannot become trapped by this filter.

If you prefer box filters, make sure that you use lots of Ammo-Carb to keep ammonia down. I

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like to use "dirty" filter fluff as some bacteria in the filter is better than none. The box filter also can be set up in an established aquarium with just the fluff in order to colonize it with bacteria. Then on "The Big Day" the fluff is spread out among all filters which will be used. Also if you can locate airline suction cups - get them. Using these to stabilize your filter prevents it from "traveling" around in your tank and possibly injuring your prized beauty. Make sure that you pre-rinse the carbon or ammo-carb prior to putting it into the filter - judges will mark you down for all cloudy tanks or fishes with reddened fins due to ammonia-induced stress.

Hopefully you have acquired all of the aquariums you will need for the show. Go down to your local pet shop and ask him if you could get some square-bottom bags which fit snugly into your tanks. When you get them, place them into the tanks. The fish should be transported within the tank in which they will be shown if at all possible in order to minimize injuries and temperature shock. I fill the bags $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ full within the tank and the fish are transported to the facility in this manner. Bring a pail of TANK water with you so that you can add to the tanks when the fish have been released out of the bags.

All you have to do, is take off the elastic band and tip the bag to release your fish. Keep the temperature the same in the pail as it is in the tank. Low temperatures or sudden changes make your fish lie down on the bottom of the tank. If he continues to be sluggish at judging time - he will lose points on deportment. Deportment is often used to break ties when two fish have identical points in all other categories.

Now it's time to learn how to properly catch your fish without injuring him. If he resides in a pond, use a soft net. Try to catch the fish from underneath and "corral" him in the net without lifting him out of the water, Put your foot on the handle leaving both hands free to pick him out of the net. Place him into his tank - ready with $\frac{1}{2}$ filled plastic bag. Make sure the tank is very close so that you don't drop him onto the ground! Aquarium fish can be trapped by using the bag or another smaller tank against the glass. This way a net is not needed and your fish cannot be injured. If you must use a net- again take him out by hand.

Other handy items you should bring along are several pails, a syphon hose, net, gang valves, and air pumps if not supplied by the aquarium society. Extra tanks and bags can also come in handy if either of them break in transport. Bring plenty of elastics to close your bags after the show. The fish easily can go back home again as they came - in their bags within the tank.

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I find preparation ahead of time, saves lots of the rushing around just prior to the show. Keep all of your equipment together in a designated place. Each year you will need mostly all of the items mentioned above - keep them separate from other aquarium supplies. Your show tanks can be placed into each other and nearly stacked into a closet for next year. Each year becomes easier and you may even adapt better methods in transporting and handling your fish. If all goes as planned, you may come home a winner or even Best of Show. Good Luck - may the best fish win!