

Live aquarium plants vs artificial

Aquascaping, the planning and decorating with plants, rocks, driftwood, and decorations in your aquarium, is one of the most enjoyable things about keeping fish. Some prefer to go for a natural look, while others prefer something fun and whimsical. Plants are an important part of your tank; besides making your tank look beautiful, they provide shelter for fish, helping reduce stress and protect babies. One of the earliest decisions you need to make is whether to use real plants or artificial ones.



Artificial plants versus live plants? They both have their pros and cons:

Artificial plants



Artificial plants are the simplest and easiest option - since they don't grow they do not need any maintenance – no cutting, no leaves to prune, nothing to trim. There are many styles and brands now, many of them looking incredibly realistic and life-like – and plenty in fun, whimsical colors if you want to add some pop to your tank!

Artificial plants also do not do anything for your water quality, so you need to do more frequent water tests to keep an eye on your parameters. Algae can be more of a problem when you have artificial plants in your tank, especially if water changes are not done on a regular basis, so you may occasionally have to remove them and wipe off any algae that has built up on the leaves.



Placing in your tank: most artificial plants have a weighted or bucket style base. Simply dig them under or fill them with gravel and you're done!

Live plants

Live plants help water quality by soaking up ammonia and nitrites, using them as a fertilizer to grow. This helps prevent ammonia spikes, balances water chemistry, and will starve algae out of the nutrients they need to grow, keeping your tank more attractive.

Real plants grow, so they do need some maintenance. Periodically you'll have to cut the plants down so they don't overtake and crowd out your tank. Leggy plants (where they have long stems without any leaves), should be shortened and

replanted. Any dropped leaves and dead plants need to be removed so they do not disturb your water quality. Many bunch plants can be cut, and the cuttings rooted in the gravel, where they'll keep growing.

When first starting to decorate your tank, don't go crazy with plants. As they grow, they'll begin to fill in the empty spaces; if you have too many in the beginning, as they grow the tank will get more crowded, and you'll find you're doing more maintenance and will have to eventually remove some.

Create a layered effect: plant the shortest plants at the front, medium size plants in the middle of the tank, with the tallest toward the back.

There are a wide variety of plants available for the aquarium, but some need more intense lights than most of us have in our tanks. Some of our favorite plants are:



Anubias sp.

A slow growing, low light plant, the anubias species, looks gorgeous when tied to rocks and driftwood.



Cryptocoryne sp.

Very hardy plant that does well in aquariums. It comes in a variety of textures and sizes, great for every tank.

Moss ball

These slow growing masses of moss do a great job of soaking up nitrates and organic debris.



Be sure to stop by and talk with our experienced staff about your tank, what plants will do well in it, and how to care for them.



Hygrophila sp.

With a wide range of species, shapes, and sizes, these hardy plants are a must for any aquarium. Wisteria, blue, and giant hygro are some of our

How to plant: Because they're alive, some care needs to be taken with planting live plants to allow them to thrive. Bunch plants, like wisteria and hygrophila, should have their base gently tucked into the gravel. The metal weight can be left on or removed and the plants spread out to create a more full look. Plants with rhizomes should not have their base buried; plants like anubias work well if the rhizome is tied to rocks or driftwood. Plants in pots should stay in their pots; it helps protect the roots while letting water flow through. Moss balls and banana plants are the easiest to place – just drop them in! Plants with root systems like Amazon swords should have the roots tucked gently into the gravel, making sure the crown, where the leaves emerge, is above the substrate.

Many of our customers will blend both real and artificial to get the benefits from both. They'll have live versions of the hardier, low light plants, and use artificial version of the more delicate and sensitive plants. It makes it easy to have a beautiful and elegant aquarium that looks great in your home.