

Betta splendens

Probably one of the most beautiful of the freshwater fish found in the world, the male Siamese fighting fish (also called Betta) is both lovely and dangerous. It is not dangerous to us of course, but the males cannot be kept together and that's where their name, "Siamese fighting fish", comes from. Individuals can be kept in small bowls easily, as they are graceful, slow moving, and are one of the very few fish that can truly get air from the surface when necessary. A Betta can come in many different colors such as blue, green, red, white, black, purple, and gold, or any combination of these colors.

General Diet:

A general good quality Siamese Fighting fish flake or pellet food is a must for your Betta's basic diet. The most important thing to remember about feeding fish is that it is very easy to overfeed them, and it is very hard to starve any fish. So feed only once a day or even better every other day, and give only 4 to 6 flakes or pellets to your fish.

Treats/Extra Foods:

Never feed any type of people food! Stick with foods made for Bettas. Different types of special fish foods should be offered at least twice a week instead of the basic diet. Variety is important. These extra foods can include frozen or freeze-dried brine shrimp, bloodworms, and other types of "meat". Bettas are carnivorous fish.

Housing:

A fish bowl can be used for Bettas, although they can be kept in a fish tank with other types of tropical freshwater fish. But some fish may pick on Bettas, and Bettas may go after some fish, so be sure all fish will get along by asking us if all your fish will be compatible. It is best, however, to keep one Betta in a one gallon or larger bowl, or even a small tank. Minimum water temperature for a Betta is 72 degrees, 75 is better. Choose a consistently warm location for your bowl or install a small heater. Most of the small desktop aquarium kits come with a light on top which can provide some heat as well.

A cover is not needed, but recommended, as sometimes a fish will jump out. A light can be used, and if it is should be kept on 8-12 hours a day, during the daytime, and off at night. Fish need to sleep just like we do. One inch of gravel at the bottom will provide enough surface area for the good bacteria that help break down some of the Betta's waste. A filter is not necessary, but it is highly recommended, as it will help remove both solid and chemical waste and keep the water looking clear. Tap water cannot be used on it's own to keep fish, so water conditioner must be added first before the fish to remove chemicals like chlorine and heavy metals which can kill fish. Lastly, as Bettas are most comfortable in water that is not too high (alkaline) or low (acidic) in pH.

Sanitation/General Care:

Feed fish every day to every other day. It is best, and much less stressful to the fish, to do small water changes more frequently than large ones once in a while. For bowls or tanks under four gallons, change approximately one cup of water every day, and one half of the water twice to three times a month by putting half of the water and the fish in a bucket and then cleaning the gravel inside the container. For tanks over four gallons, change 10% of the water once a week, and once a month remove one third or so of the tank water by siphoning the water through the gravel with a gravel vacuum. Cleaning the gravel will keep the good bacteria healthy and take out excess solid wastes.

General Maintenance:

Filter cartridges that contain charcoal should be changed once a month as they will not absorb any bad chemicals after this time. Sponge cartridges can be used until they are ratty looking, about 3-4 months, but should be rinsed every month in water that has been dechlorinated first. Good bacteria, besides living on the gravel, also live on the sponge areas of the filter, and chlorine will kill them. Using water just siphoned out of the tank or bowl will work as well for rinsing sponge material. Clean filter and parts such as the impeller at least every 3 months. Algae (which can be green, brown, or red) may grow in the tank or bowl sooner or later. Using an aquarium scraper or sponge will work well to clean the algae off the glass and other surfaces of the bowl or tank.

Health Care:

Fish will catch diseases whenever they become too stressed. Moving from one tank or bowl to another, not changing water frequently, overfeeding, and adding too many fish at once can be causes of stress. Keep only one male Betta in a bowl or tank. Female Bettas can be kept together if desired, as they are not as aggressive as the males. If you take your time and keep to a simple schedule with feeding and water changes, the chances of diseases showing up in your tank or bowl will diminish greatly.

Special Section - Getting the Name:

Siamese Fighting Fish are called that for one reason, they will fight viciously with other males to the death. This fact can be used to our advantage to see these fish at their best. Once in a while (but not too often and for no more than five minutes) put a mirror up against the container your Betta is being kept in. When he sees his reflection, he will think it's another male and will fan his fins and gill plates out. He will look absolutely magnificent when he does this!

Supplies checklist:

Fish tank or bowl	Cover or full hood with light (optional)
Gravel	Books about Betta splendens
Water conditioner	Betta foods
pH kit	Decorations
Filter with cartridges (optional)	

This information is brought to you by the Pet Professionals at:

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