

Keeping Siamese Fighters

Siamese fighting fish are beautiful and affordable and perfectly suited to those that are looking for a low maintenance pet that needs very little space. Their majestic fins and stunning array of colours makes these fish as much a part of the décor as they are a pet to be enjoyed and cared for up to three years.

Siamese fighting fish are native to the still waters around Thailand (formerly Siam), Cambodia and Vietnam and survive in rice paddies, stagnant ponds and drains. Male fighters can be very aggressive towards each other as they must fiercely protect their tiny territory or risk losing their breeding ground. Ornamental fish have been bred in Thailand for thousands of years and although strictly illegal in Australia, the Thai will often place wagers on fights between two males.



Siamese fighters are different to almost all other fish as they are able to breathe through their gills as well as from air gulped-in through the mouth. This enables them to survive in oxygen-poor or stagnant water.

Although aggressive towards other Siamese fighting fish, when kept on their own, these are peaceful pets that add a calm, serene element to the home.

Ornamental Siamese fighting fish with their flowing fins are available in a rainbow of colours in almost any combination which is why they are called *Betta splendens* or the 'splendid betta'. They may be totally iridescent, partly iridescent or have a dull matte skin and like many in the animal kingdom, the males are much more flamboyant than females. There is some variety in the shapes of the fish as well, especially with the tails which might be fringed, round, single or double.

AQUARIUM CARE

In the wild, these fish can survive in a hole made from a buffalo's hoof and so in the home, they can live in the smallest of tanks, including decorative vases as well as specific Betta barracks. However, the water temperature in small containers fluctuates greatly and they also require more frequent water changes. For easier maintenance, a tank of about 10 litres might be more suitable. Avoid adding sharp rocks or ornaments to the tank as these may rip or tear at the beautiful fins.



These fish like to jump so the water should be kept at least 2cm from the top of the tank and a weighted lid put in place at all times. Ensure that the lid does not form an air tight seal.

Siamese fighters are solitary and do not need company although they can be kept in a mixed tank with loaches, platies, snails and Cory catfish. However, there are some types of companions to avoid completely such as "fin nippers" like tetra that will be drawn to the long flowing fins. It is also a wise idea never to keep Betta fish in the same tank as each other as they will fight, even with their own reflection in a mirror or shiny object.

WATER CARE AND MAINTENANCE

Weekly water changing of about half the water will keep the tank clean and the fish healthy. However, Siamese fighting fish are highly susceptible to ammonia which accumulates faster in smaller containers so these will need more water changed more frequently. These ornamental varieties are prone to suffer diseases such as fin rot which are associated with dirty water and although it can be treated with medications, the best solution is to keep the water fresh and clean.



Add water conditioner to the tank with each change as this will remove any harmful chlorines from the tap water. Any filters and sponges should also be cleaned once a week but be sure to rinse these with the removed fish water as using tap water will kill the beneficial bacteria living in them.

Never use soap or detergents to clean the fish tank as any residue can potentially kill the fish. Using a scrubbing sponge kept only for this purpose and warm water is sufficient for the glass as well as any ornaments.

Siamese fighters are tropical, fresh water fish which thrive in warm temperatures of around 30°C and so temperate regions of WA should not really require additional tank heating. However, if the water temperature drops to below 18°C then a heater may be required.

COMMON SIGNS OF ILLNESS

Changes in the fish's usual colour and vibrancy can relate to stress caused by direct, bright light, a living environment that's too small or constant loud noise near the tank. If any of these factors have been ruled out, the fish has fallen ill and advice should be sought.

Constant gasping at the water surface for air or extreme lethargy often indicates a lack of oxygen in the water or dangerous levels of ammonia. Change and condition the water more frequently to add oxygen and prevent ammonia and nitrate build up. Red-brown streaks around the gills show a deprivation of breathable oxygen. In this case, act quickly by changing the water and getting advice from a fish expert.



White spots on the fins or body are parasites living on the skin and can quickly overwhelm the immune system. For this, aquarium treatments are available. Visit any Better Pets and Gardens store for advice.

FEEDING

Siamese fighters are carnivorous and love live food such as brine shrimp and bloodworms and supplying these will keep them active and busy. Betta food is also available in flake or pellet form and is often easier for everyday use. For variety, offer finely grated vegetables like broccoli, carrot and chopped soybeans.

As water temperature drops, the metabolism of the fish will slow and feeding is required less often. During the warmer months, a small amount fed daily is sufficient.

**For advice on caring for your fish,
drop in to any Better Pets and Gardens store.**

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