Are Coldwater Fish Easier To Keep Than Tropicals?

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It's the question that's almost as old as the hobby itself. Many people who want to get into fishkeeping do so because they believe that fish are an easy, low maintenance pet they just need to feed once in a while. And many think that the easiest way to keep fish is by keeping it cold water because they've been falsely led to believe that goldfish are the easiest fish to keep and they're perfectly fine in an aquarium. But it isn't so.... So are coldwater fish actually easier than tropicals?

What exactly are coldwater fish?

Coldwater fish are actually outdoor fish, such as Koi and Comet Goldfish, but many think that fish that can be kept in cold water aquariums are also in this category. Those are actually called temperate fish and what defines them is that their temperature range matches up with the average household. Typically under 18°C. These are typically smaller shoaling species such as White Cloud Mountain Minnows and Danios, but the range can include certain barbs and even tetras.

The Demands of Fishkeeping

Whilst it is true that fish are less demanding than a dog or an alpaca, there is a certain amount of maintenance that must be done, regardless of whether you keep it cold or heated. Your fish are animals after all and they do produce waste. Your filter will help keep the pollutants under control and safe for the fish, but you will also have to clean the tank and remove waste that wasn't collected by the filter. Algae should be wiped and a partial water change should be carried out weekly. This isn't actually a terribly time consuming affair if the routine is in place, but will be more difficult if the tank is an inappropriate size to the fish (Again, goldfish in small aquariums) or if you put too many fish in the tank. So keeping one Goldfish is actually a lot harder than keeping 20 Neon Tetras simply because the goldfish is so much larger. It requires substantially more food, which adds more nutrients and waste to your water whilst leading to larger volumes of poop. The goldfish produces so much waste all by itself that you may find your algae building up much faster and their poop building up on

the gravel long before it's cleaning day. Meanwhile, your smaller fish, though larger in numbers, produce very little waste and demand very little food and therefore your aquarium will see a more gradual build up of nutrients that lead to algae and poor water quality. So in a sense, tropical fish are easier to keep because there is a much wider range of species available in smaller sizes and choosing fish that are appropriate to the aquarium is so much simpler.

Bigger Is Always Better

Contrary to what newcomers may think, the smallest possible tank is actually a lot harder to look after than a bigger one. The length of time that it takes a smaller aquarium in comparison to a larger one is not that dissimilar, but the likelihood of waste building up and water quality diminishing is much smaller simply because it is a larger body of water that also accommodates a larger filter. The size of your aquarium will also determine what fish you can purchase for it. And here is where the coldwater vs. tropical becomes very important. Coldwater aquariums should not be anything smaller than 50-60 litres. This is because the options are very limited and none of them are small enough to really thrive in a really small tank. Conversely tropical fish can be as small as a pinkie nail (See Chilli Rasboras) and you'll have a much wider range to choose from whether you have a 15L or a 1500L aquarium. No self respecting fish shop will sell fish for an inappropriately sized aquarium and a fancy goldfish will require a minimum of 150L for one adult with another 100L for each additional goldfish

But Aren't Tropical Fish More Delicate?

There is a significantly larger range of tropical fish and so there will always be some species that are very sensitive. Equally, there are temperate species that are also very sensitive and have specific needs. But most tropicals are just as robust and easy to look after as the humble Zebra Danio. Any member of staff in a fish shop should be able to advise you on the difficulty of the fish you like the look of and whether there is anything you should know about. There is also a wealth of knowledge online with some sites like www.seriouslyfish.com giving detailed descrptions of just about any species imaginable! We also have a tropical fish section on our own site where you'll find all the basic information you need to make an informed decision.

So What's the difference between coldwater and tropical aquariums?

Absolutely nothing. They require the same care and the same rules apply. One just requires an additional piece of equipment in the form of a heater, but the heater doesn't actually require any real attention or maintenance. Your heater will operate on a thermostat, meaning that it only comes on

(and use electricity) when it's below the target temperature. It's a cost effective and simple way to broaden your horizons and maybe even enjoy fishkeeping even more! In Short, Coldwater fish are not easier than keep tropicals