



CARE SHEET FOR CAPTIVE BRED SEAHORSES

This care sheet provides guidelines for maintenance of captive-bred (CB) seahorses by new seahorse keepers. Wild caught (WC) seahorses bring with them a host of challenging husbandry issues and often they do not survive for long. CB seahorses, properly cared for, live for several years in the aquarium. Wild caught seahorses appear to be cheaper, but cost more to maintain. **We recommend all beginner keepers purchase captive bred seahorses only.**

Selecting healthy seahorses

If you are buying from your local fish store (LFS), observe the seahorses carefully before you purchase. If buying from an e-tailer, be sure they have a good reputation and live guarantee. Confirm the seahorses are captive bred. It is important to observe/ask:

- Is the seahorse eating?
- What food is it eating and how often is it being fed?
- Is the body well-rounded with no signs of abdominal concavity?

Do not buy a seahorse that is not eating. You should be able to observe CB seahorses eating frozen mysis shrimp, krill or plankton. If a CB seahorse is not eating frozen food, it may not truly be CB, or it may not be healthy. The dwarf seahorse, *H.zosteriae*, is an exception, whether CB or WC, it requires live food, generally enriched brine shrimp nauplii.

Potential problems

Do not buy a seahorse if you see:

Signs of skin sloughing or discoloration, inflammation, odd swimming behaviour, not using a hold-fast, lying on substrate or hitching upside down, minimal eye movement, protruding eyes, blisters, inflamed gill slits, eroded snout, body or tail lesions or continuous heavy respiration.

If you observe any of the above signs, play it safe and pass on the purchase. Do not try to "rescue" an obviously malnourished or sick seahorse.



Acclimation and Quarantine

It is good standard practice—even for CB seahorses—to be given a fresh-water dip or formalin bath and be kept in a quarantine tank for six weeks before introducing them to a tank with other seahorses. Observe new purchases carefully for any odd behaviour or external lesions, spots or other anomalies. Usually the first sign of illness is cessation of appetite.

If illness is suspected, refer to the disease guide and treatment recommendations on www.seahorse.org. Alternately, you can post on the discussion board in the **Emergency Forum**. Several expert keepers will be available to help you. Do not treat a seahorse without knowing what is affecting it. Only use recommended treatments.

The seahorse tank

Before you buy a seahorse, be sure you understand the basic principles of how to keep seahorses in the home aquarium. The best overall source for this knowledge is [Seahorse.org](http://www.seahorse.org). Keeping marine fish of any type requires knowledge of basic marine aquarium keeping and water chemistry. There are many books and other sources of information available. If you prepare adequately and set up an appropriate sized, fully cycled, and stable tank, you will greatly improve your chances of success.

Seahorses need “hitching posts”—something to cling to while they are resting. Not having these resting places is stressful for a seahorse.

Seahorses should be introduced into a mature, cycled aquarium. Various filtration methods and tank set-ups can result in a healthy, stable aquarium. A seahorse tank must have gentle to moderate currents, with 3–5 times tank volume turned over per hour. Water parameters should be stable before animals are added:

pH – 8.0 to 8.3

Specific gravity – 1.020 to 1.024

Ammonia – 0

Nitrite – 0

Nitrate – <20 ppm

Optimum temperature is dependent on whether the seahorse species is tropical, subtropical or temperate. Generally, beginners should start with tropical species as heating a tank is much less expensive than cooling one, and it is easier to maintain a stable temperature in a tropical tank. Try to keep to the lower end of the temperature ranges, and let the temperature fluctuate up towards the higher values of the temperature range.

Taller tanks are preferred. Seahorses need height (2.5 to 3 times the uncurled length of the animals) in their tanks to court and mate. As a minimum, the internal height of the tank, excluding the substrate, should be at least 2 times the uncurled length of the seahorse you are keeping.

Temperature and stocking density table for common seahorse species

Use this table as a guide. While we list a recommended volume per pair of seahorses, this volume per pair is not the same as the minimum recom-

mended tank size. For example, for *H.erectus*, allow the first pair 15 gallons, then 8 gallons per pair after that.

1) Tropical, 71-78 degrees F (22-26 degrees C)

<i>H.zosteræ</i>	1 pair/1.5 gallons (6 liters); recommended size 5 gallons (20 liters) Recommended to keep in groups of 3 pair.
<i>H.kuda</i>	1 pair/8 gallons (30 liters); min size 15 gallons (60 liters)
<i>H.barbouri</i>	1 pair/8 gallons (30 liters); min size 15 gallons (60 liters)
<i>H.erectus</i>	1 pair/8 gallons (30 liters); min size 15 gallons (60 liters)
<i>H.reidi</i>	1 pair/8 gallons (30 liters); min size 15 gallons (60 liters)
<i>H.comes</i>	1 pair/8 gallons (30 liters); min size 15 gallons (60 liters)
<i>H.procerus</i>	1 pair/8 gallons (30 liters); min size 15 gallons (60 liters)
<i>H.fuscus</i>	1 pair per 5 gallons (20 liters); recommended size 10 gallons (40 liters)

2) Subtropical, 68-75 degrees F (20-24 degrees C)

<i>H.whitei</i>	1 pair/8 gallons (30 liters); min size 15 gallons (60 liters)
<i>H.ingens</i>	1 pair/13 gallons (50 liters); min size 45 gallons (180 liters)
<i>H.tuberculatus</i>	1 pair/5 gallons (20 liters); min size 15 gallons (60 liters)

3) Temperate, 64-71 degrees F (18-22 degrees C)

<i>H.capensis</i>	1 pair/5 gallons (20 liters); min size 10 gallons (40 liters)
<i>H.abdominalis</i>	1pair/13 gallons (50 liters); min size 60 gallons (240 liters)
<i>H.breviceps</i>	1 pair/5 gallons (20 liters); min size 10 gallons (40 liters)

Choosing safe tank mates

Seahorses are not strong swimmers and are not competitive feeders. They have few defences against aggression. Many keepers recommend seahorse-only tanks. This is a partial list of compatible "clean up crew" animals most likely to be safe with small to large seahorses. See the **Tank mates** section of **Seahorse.org** for a more comprehensive list including fish and corals.

- Fan worms including Feather Dusters (Phylum *Annelida*)
- Astrea Snail (*Lithopoma [Astraea] spp.*), Turbo Snail (*Turbo spp.*), Nassarius Snail (*Nassarius vibex*), Trochus Snail (*Trochus niloticus*), Cerith Snail (Family *Cerithiidae*), Nerite Snail (*Nerita spp*)
- Blue-legged Hermit Crab (*Clibanarius tricolor*)*
- Peppermint Shrimp (*Lysmata wurdemanni*)*
- Grass Shrimp (*Palaemonetes vulgaris*)*

*Shrimp and most hermit crabs are not considered safe around seahorse fry or *H.zosteræ* dwarf seahorse.

Nutrition

We recommend you purchase CB seahorse species that have been trained to eat frozen foods. This makes feeding a simple task. Offer the frozen

food, pre-thawed and rinsed, once or twice daily. You can supplement frozen foods with live foods offered once per week for nutritional variety. Frozen food can be supplemented with fish vitamins, carotenoids and HUFAs (highly unsaturated fatty acids, such as Selcon or Zoecon). An exception to this recommendation is if you use Piscine Energetics brand frozen mysis, which does not require HUFA supplementation. Live foods should be gut-loaded with nutritious and vitamin-supplemented foods prior to feeding.

You can find information about sources of foods on www.seahorse.org

Know your species

Any information claiming that temperate or subtropical species can be kept at tropical temperatures is false and will most likely cause the death of these species within a few weeks. Do not buy from breeders or suppliers that claim otherwise. These seahorses may appear to do well, but are susceptible to disease due to the stress of being kept at temperatures beyond their natural tolerances.

Of the medium and large seahorses, we recommend CB *H.erec-tus* as the hardiest "beginner" seahorse species.

Dwarf seahorses (*H.zosteræe*) are one of the hardier species, even as WC, but will require live food daily and have other special requirements. They merit a care sheet of their own. Refer to the Library and **Dwarf Seahorses Discussion Forum** on www.seahorse.org for more information.



Identification

If you are not certain of the scientific name of your seahorse, you can identify your individual(s) at the photo gallery at gallery.seahorse.org. If you are still unsure, you can upload a photo of your seahorse to the Seahorse.org website, and experts will assist in the identification. Make sure you research the specific needs of the species you intend to purchase.

- Website:** <http://www.seahorse.org>
Gallery: <http://gallery.seahorse.org>
Discussion: <http://forum.seahorse.org>
Library: <http://www.seahorse.org/library.shtml>



*This care sheet was created for new seahorse hobbyists by **Seahorse Dot Org Limited**, a non-profit organization committed to education about and ethical treatment of seahorses in captivity.*