

Tetra or Characin

The Tetra or Characin group are part of the huge Suborder of fish Characoidei, which consists of 14 Families including Characidae. This family consists of many of the more popular Tetras including Neon Tetra (*Paracheirodon innesi*), Cardinal Tetra (*Paracheirodon axelrodi*) and GloLite Tetra (*Hyphessobrycon erythrozonus*).



Left: Neon Tetras, the most popular Tetra for aquariums



Top right: Cardinal Tetra



Middle right: Bleeding Heart Tetra



Bottom right: Red Eye Characin

Natural Range

These species originate from subtropical and tropical areas of Africa and South America, typically from tropical rainforest rivers and streams. Their origin stems back to when the African and South American continents were joined in one land mass.

Maximum Size and Longevity

Range from 2 – 12cm depending on species. Longevity ranges from around 1 year for some small species to several years.

Water Quality

The aquarium conditions required by these fish depend on their location of origin and cannot be generically listed. However, most Tetras purchased at aquarium shops are of South American origin and will do well in water that is soft and slightly acid.

Temperature: 20°C - 26°C

pH: 6 – 7.0

General Hardness: 20 – 300 ppm

Feeding

Most Tetras are omnivorous and will readily take most types of aquarium foods used in the hobby (NB. Due to the small size of many species, ensure the food particle size is not too big for their small mouths). Most Tetras will readily accept flake food like TetraMin^R Flake Food or Tetra Crisps. They also enjoy live food such as Blackworms, Daphnia and Mosquito larvae.

Compatibility

Tetras are best kept in large schools (minimum 6 in the group) and different species can generally be kept together with few problems. Tetras will also mix readily with a range of species and are generally an ideal community fish – however as many species are relatively small, it is not a good idea to mix them with species that grow large such as Oscars. Some species can be prone to eating aquatic plants

Colour and Varieties

Many species tend to have a silver coloured background to their body over which splashes of iridescent colours occur. There are a huge variety of colours such as the iridescent red and blues of Neon and Cardinal Tetras. The fins of many species also contain various colours and patterns. Today there are many species of commercially farmed Tetras that have different colour morphs (generally Albino or golden forms) or fins (long or short finned varieties).

Sexing

Many species show no sexual dimorphism at all making sexing of the fish difficult. As is common with most species, females carrying eggs can often be seen as fish with a distended abdominal area. However, in some species traits such as longer fins, more elaborate colours or patterns and size differences can be used to tell male from female. Tank breeding of Tetras is often problematic due to their particular needs for water quality; however, many advanced hobbyists are able to breed most of the common species. Most commercial Tetra species are now farmed throughout Asia and even in indoor facilities in Europe, USA and Australia.

General Information

Tetras are the most common type of fish found in South America after catfish. Their name is commonly used for a large group of fish characterised by the presence of a small adipose fin between their dorsal and caudal fin. The term Tetra is actually not a taxonomic grouping, as many unrelated fishes from differing families have been commonly called Tetras.

Tetras are the second most commonly kept fish in community tank setups, after livebearers (see our Livebearer Care Sheet for more information on these fish). They are popular because of their vibrant colours, manageable size, mild behaviour and schooling habits.