
The Aquarists Guide To Purchasing Livestock Online

By: Peter Cunningham & John Cunningham

<http://www.salt-water-aquarium.com>

Presented By: [Marc Dufour](#)

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Legal Notices And Disclaimer

As much as we would love to believe that everyone who reads this guide will follow the advice given and benefit from it, unfortunately this cannot be guaranteed.

We cannot guarantee that you will actually read this guide and follow the information given. Even if you do read this guide and follow the information given we cannot guarantee that your aquarium will be a success. We also cannot guarantee that any livestock purchased will survive, that your corals will grow and that no accidents will happen.

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Introduction.

Firstly, congratulations on acquiring this guide. I am sure that this guide will alleviate any fears you may have about purchasing livestock online.

Marine fish keeping and marine reef keeping is a fantastic hobby to be involved in – one that is both challenging and rewarding. I hope that you find this guide useful and will assist you in making your purchases via the internet.

OK - on with the guide...

It was not long ago that the majority of marine saltwater purchases were made at fish shops which were local to the aquarist.

Purchasing such items online was not even considered. People would not hesitate to purchase equipment online but purchasing livestock in that way was not really heard of. Recently however, this has all started to change and people all over the world are actively looking to purchase their livestock on the internet.

So why have people like you started to investigate going online for new purchases?

There are numerous reasons as to why both marine fish keepers and marine reef keepers are now starting to acquire livestock online:

1. The inability of local fish shops to be able to locate and purchase the rarer and more colourful varieties of livestock which are now available.
2. Lack of stock and variety at their local fish shop.
3. No local fish shop nearby.
4. Aqua cultured corals and captive bred fish
5. More choice of live rock
6. Cost
7. Convenience

There are of course many more reasons as to why people like yourself go online in order to purchase livestock for the aquarium.

One of the reasons which is heard of quite often is that there is simply more variety available online. Whilst the majority of local fish shops do have the ability to be able to get fish, corals etc in upon request this does depend upon whether their wholesalers holds and ships these items. Each fish shop does not use the same wholesaler or distributor and it is quite common nowadays for them to use multiple wholesalers so that they can introduce extra variety to their client base. When marine livestock arrive in a country they are sorted as soon as they arrive to go to the relevant fish shops etc who have ordered them – what's left is either available to the general public or remaining fish shops.

Unfortunately this does lead to the smaller fish shop getting slimmer pickings.

I have actually been in a marine wholesaler when a shipment arrived – loads of boxes full of livestock. The lights were turned off and special red lighting was turned on so that the livestock would not get stressed. The boxes were carefully unpacked and checked. Once checked lots of bags full of fish, corals, invertebrates etc were simply re-boxed up, heat packs added and shipped out to the dealers. What was left was made available for dealers and on some occasions the general public can come and hand pick what remains. Don't get me wrong there was a lot of livestock remaining (and some very nice ones to) but the prize picks had all gone.

It was simply amazing how much came in and out again so quickly.

This guide is designed so that if you do decide to purchase items online (or mail-order) then you know what to expect from the seller and what your rights are. This guide also details what to look for when purchasing online, how to choose the right reseller and much more.

Note : Throughout this guide when livestock is mentioned this term relates to fish, corals, live rock and live sand unless specified differently.

Considerations.

There are of course things which need to be considered prior to purchasing livestock online.

What is your reason for purchasing online?

As discussed in the introduction to this guide there are various reasons people purchase online but you need to think to yourself about your reasons for doing so.

This is important because for example if the reason is cost then you may not be aware of the shipping costs which are involved for shipping animals. It could be that you are attempting to source a fish as you have not seen one at your local fish shop, however have you asked if they can obtain one for you?

One of the things which you really need to consider and one of the things I am very passionate about is to leave animals on the reef where they belong and to purchase captive bred fish and aquacultured corals. The variety available in both of these areas is very large and getting larger and larger all the time. If either aquacultured corals or captive bred fish are available then I highly recommend that you consider these items so that we can protect the reefs.

You can have a beautiful tank which is your own perfect little eco-system whilst protecting the very reefs all marine hobbyists are so passionate about.

Is your tank ready for the introduction of new animals?

Quite often people look to the internet to stock their tank, sometimes for the introduction of their first inhabitants. It is imperative that your tank has completed the biological cycle and that your parameters are stable.

If you are having a few problems with the stability of parameters at present – for example maybe your nitrate levels are a bit too high then I would not recommend purchasing any livestock until you have located the problem and resolved it. There should not be any ammonia or nitrite readings whatsoever.

The shipping of livestock is an exceptionally stressful time for them; this stress in turn can bring out diseases in fish, loss of colour in corals etc.

With this in mind your tank needs to be of a mature status and have stable parameters (Suggested parameters are shown in the table below) All the aquascaping should be complete and the water flow, lighting etc should already be setup.

Parameter	Fish Only	Reef
SG	1.020 – 1.025	1.023 – 1.025
Temperature	72 – 78 F	72 – 78 F
pH	8.1 – 8.4	8.1 – 8.4

Alkalinity	8 – 12 dKH	8 – 12 dKH
Ammonia	Undetectable	Undetectable
Nitrite	Undetectable	Undetectable
Nitrate	< 30 ppm	< 10 ppm
Phosphate	< 1.0 ppm	< 0.3 ppm
Calcium	350 – 450 ppm	425 – 480 ppm
Magnesium	1150 – 1350 ppm	1250 – 1350 ppm
Iodine	0.06 ppm	0.06 ppm
Strontium	4 – 10 ppm	8 – 14 ppm

Is price an issue?

When you first look on the internet the prices shown may appear to be lower than the prices shown in your local fish shop, however don't forget that there will be shipping costs. It may be feasible to team together with other marine keepers to make a larger order if possible so that the shipping costs can be shared between all.

How will you introduce the livestock?

It is recommended that no matter where you purchase fish from that you use a quarantine tank.

Unfortunately less than 5% of marine fish/reef keepers actually utilise a quarantine tank. Did you know that every time a new inhabitant is introduced to your aquarium there is a risk of introducing diseases and parasites to the aquarium which could in turn affect the existing inhabitants of the tank? There is also the opposite side in the effect that the fish purchased has been under a considerable amount of stress due to shipping which will therefore make it susceptible to any diseases etc you may already have in your aquarium. This may sound a bit strange but you may have a small amount of parasites in your aquarium or a type of disease already which your current inhabitants have built up immunity to – any new purchase will not have this immunity.

Quarantine Tank Information

Basically a quarantine tank gives you the opportunity to protect the livestock in your display tank whilst also giving the new purchase time to recover from shipping and regain their health.

The main reason that the majority of fish keepers do not run a quarantine tank is down to the extra cost and maintenance involved. Don't forget though that a quarantine tank does not need to be large and it certainly does not need to be expensive. Quite often when people start to use a quarantine tank and see the benefits that it brings them they often wonder how they ever did without one.

As talked about above the prime purpose of a quarantine tank is to protect you existing inhabitants and give your new fish time to regain its health, however it also needs to become adjusted to the new water. The water quality in your tank will be different to that of the wholesalers/retailers.

Also don't forget that a quarantine tank does not need to be used purely as a quarantine tank – it can also be used as a treatment tank. Treating the entire display tank for a problem which is only affecting a few fish is not recommended. Using the quarantine tank as a treatment tank as well will allow you to treat the fish in their own area without damaging any other

species in the display tank or impacting the water quality in the display tank in any way.

Another good use for them is to use them as an area to place fish which are being harassed or bullied in the main tank. If you do decide to use a quarantine tank, which I recommend, then a small 20 odd gallons or so tank would suffice. It does not need to have anything fancy in it. Basic requirements are lighting, heater, an internal filter to provide the filtration and some rocks and/or plant life so that the fish can feel safe. A skimmer is not normally a definite requirement for a quarantine tank; however the addition of a small cheap one could be beneficial.

It is recommended that water changes are performed on a quarantine tank at frequent intervals to keep the water polished.

The majority of fish keepers who do use a quarantine system tend to keep their new purchases under quarantine for 2 – 4 weeks. During this time they can be treated for numerous diseases as required or just observed closely. Remember that if you do decide to dose the quarantine tank and also keep corals and/or invertebrates in your main display tank not to use a copper based treatment as this is deadly for corals and invertebrates.

Corals do not necessarily have to be placed in a quarantine tank, some aquarists do and I praise them for this. If you do not decide to utilise a quarantine tank for corals and decide instead to house them straight into your display tank make sure that you fully inspect the coral for any signs of disease and parasites. Also check the rock or whatever it is growing on for signs of problems for example bristle worms, bad crabs etc.

Live rock which is pre-cured obviously does not need to be homed in a quarantine tank and can be introduced into an existing or new aquarium.

Bear in mind here that live rock is shipped damp, therefore some die off can be experienced which will cause a spike in ammonia – nitrite – nitrate, therefore it is imperative that you wait for the cycle to complete if the tank is new. If the tank is an existing setup then I recommend that you only add small portions of live rock at a time to minimize any issues which you could experience.

Is there any risk with purchasing online?

When purchasing livestock online, as with purchasing anything there is a risk.

You do not have the ability to watch the fish in a tank swimming happily around interacting with its tank mates, observe it feeding etc – you only have a picture, probably a description and price to work on. You also do not have the ability to see the filtration room, holding tanks, cleanliness etc of the shop as you would in a local fish shop. Of course there may be pictures on the website but how do you know these are real or have just been really tidied up especially for the pictures?

When buying online there needs to be a level of trust – not just with buying fish but with buying anything. You are not talking one on one to someone – you are talking via a computer screen.

Check the website for testimonials, read about the company in their 'about us' section, find out as much as you can about them. Check with internet marine forums for any information. If you are not completely happy yet to do business with them pick up the phone and have a chat with them.

Packaging and transportation are the biggest problems with purchasing online.

When you purchase a fish from your local fish shop it will probably be double bagged and either placed in a bag or a box for you to take home with you, however this is not possible with an online purchase. The packaging needs to be entirely different using similar methods to the way wholesalers use to transport the fish to the dealers.

Packaging of fish amongst online retailers does vary, however the norm is that the fish will be triple bagged or more using water of the recommended parameters. These bags will then be topped up with pure oxygen and properly sealed with a clip rather than being hand tied. This gives it an absolute air tight seal. The bag(s) are then placed into boxes (sometimes cooler based) which then have either heat packs or cool packs added dependant upon the weather to keep the temperature levels correct.

These are then added to another box and padded up with polystyrene etc for safety. All the relevant transit stickers are then added ready for transit.

Corals are normally packaged in the same way, however there are lots of people nowadays who are packaging corals (especially aquacultured corals) in plastic bottles or jars. The coral is held in place with polystyrene so that the coral floats in the bottle and does not hit the sides.

Live rock is normally packaged wrapped in damp paper with a small amount of water in the box. This of course creates some die off in the live rock. When you open a box of live rock it really reminds you of being by the sea!

One of the biggest problems other than bad packaging is the actual transit of the package itself. You can have the best packaged item in the world but if it gets lost or delayed in transit then there is going to be trouble.

You are in the hands of the retailer here as they choose the transportation firm; however the majority of retailers online will have used these transit firms for a long time and will have built trust with them. There will be times that something will go wrong – unfortunately this is inescapable.

What is the weather like?

Have a look at the weather forecast and see what the weather is going to be like. This is important as the weather in your area may be entirely different to the weather in the location of the retailer. If you are having a heat spell for example then you will need to contact the retailer and inform them of your weather so that they can package the livestock accordingly. Another good example is that the weather in the location of the retailer is -5C but in your location it is +22C. In this instance the retailer would either have to pack the box very carefully (not recommended), you would have to either choose another retailer or wait a while for the weather conditions to change.

Will someone be available to accept delivery?

When your new livestock is delivered you need to ensure that someone is available to accept the delivery and start the acclimatisation process.

After the long transit time that the fish has endured the last thing you want to happen is for

no-one to be in and the package is either taken away for re-delivery or left on your door step getting colder (or warmer).

Always try to get a delivery time from either the retailer or the transit company and ensure that someone is available at your home.

What Can You Purchase Online.

There are numerous items which can be purchased online in relation to livestock

- Live Rock
- Live Sand
- Reef Grunge
- Wild Corals
- Aquacultured Corals
- Wild Fish
- Captive Bred Fish
- Clean Up Crews
- Plants
- Zooplankton
- Copepods
- Etc

Let's go through these in a little more detail.

Live Rock

Live rock is a fantastic natural filtration method, a method which more and more reef keepers and fish keepers are using as the primary biological filtration method for their aquarium. There is also a great variety of live rock which can be purchased.

Live rock is normally old pieces of coral which have been knocked off from the reef face during thunder storms etc. These pieces then naturally get washed closer to shore where they become colonised by marine life – corals, sponges and millions upon millions of bacteria. This rock is then harvested and made available for the marine aquarist to purchase. The better ones to purchase in my opinion albeit more expensive is the live rock which has been manufactured. This is where rock (either man made or some other type of material) is placed back into the ocean and left.

Months and months later if not years this same rock is removed from the ocean and made available for purchase.

I personally like to mix live rock and man made rock in my tanks. I put enough live rock into the system to cope with the biological filtration of the system and then either make my own live rock or use a product called reef bones. Details as to how to make your own live rock can be found at <http://www.garf.org> . I can highly recommend this website as both a great reference point and also a great place to get ideas from.

I also like to combine various filtration methods into my tanks as well as various aspects of nutrient removal; therefore in my aquariums I attempt to create diversity via filtration by having filtration methods like mud beds, cryptic zones, deep sand beds etc. This is of course not something we will be covering in this guide but it is something I hope that you are also interested in.

When looking to purchase live rock online you should attempt to check with the retailer how this rock is harvested. It should be harvested from the ocean floor and not directly from the reef face.

Live rock is sold by retailers both cured and un-cured. The curing process is performed whereby the live rock is added to a suitable container and covered in salt water, a heater, protein skimmer and water circulation is added. The curing process is normally completed in near darkness so that algae blooms do not occur.

Regular water changes are performed and rock removed in between water changes so that they can be scrubbed to remove dead material. The water is continuously tested and once the ammonia readings are zero then the curing process is complete

The reason that a curing process is required is that when the rocks are harvested from the ocean there is an amount of die off from the marine plants and marine life which inhabited the rock – especially sponges which die as soon as they are removed from water. This is also the same when the rock is shipped to you – due to the reason that the rock is shipped damp there will be some more die off. Don't worry though the die off will not leave you with just some bare rock – this die off provides a very good space for other marine life to take hold and flourish on. Also remember the reason as to why you are buying live rock in the first place – it is for its immense filtration capabilities – any life which survives and flourishes is a bonus and a nice bonus at that.

Most online and offline retailers primarily offer cured live rock for sale, however there are retailers around the world who also offer un-cured live rock.

Marine keepers are interested in un-cured live rock as you get more live rock for your money plus you can have more potential to get more variety of organisms on the rock – unfortunately in some instances bad as well as good. If you follow a proper curing process and are prepared to take the time then you will get a lot more rock than if you purchase cured.

If you decide to purchase un-cured live rock then you can either cure your live rock directly in the tank it is destined for or in some other type of container.

If you decide to purchase cured live rock then there will still be an aspect of curing to do once you receive it. As said above this is due to the die off that will occur when the live rock is transported to your home.

The die off on the rock will cause ammonia to be released into the aquarium. A lot of life does survive on the rocks though – the majority of the denitrifying bacteria will survive as they are inside all the nooks and crevices – some of the corals and invertebrates will survive as they will be in the nooks and crannies and will re-appear over time.

When you add the live rock to your aquarium when you are setting it up you must wait for all readings of ammonia and nitrite to be at zero before slowly stocking your tank.

If you are adding live rock to an existing aquarium where you have existing livestock you have two possibilities. The first one is to add it very slowly so that any die back will not affect the current inhabitants of your tank. The second is to place the rock into a secondary tank or container and not add it to your display tank until all traces of ammonia are gone.

One thing to note is that if you do decide to cure your own live rock then you must ensure that you maintain a high level of aeration and a proper temperature in the curing vat – failure

to do so will mean that the nitrifying bacteria will die which will reduce the effectiveness of the rock – probably the sole reason for the rocks purpose.

[n]Live Sand[/b]

Live sand is sand which is collected directly from the ocean or is coral sand which has been cultured in order to make it 'live'.

Basically live sand is full of beneficial bacteria and various other organisms that live in or upon it.

Live sand can be utilised as either a primary (with live rock) or secondary source of biological filtration in the home aquarium due to the bacteria.

The organisms which live within the sand help to consume any organic matter which may exist in the sand bed.

Another benefit of live sand is that the organisms which inhabit the sand can also provide a valuable source of nutrition for the other inhabitants of your tank.

There are various different types of live sand currently available. This guide does not cover the different types of sand available.

Reef Grunge

Reef grunge is normally used to 'seed' a new sand bed or to give a new breath of life to an existing one.

Basically reef grunge is sold by retailers all over the world and actually given away by a lot of retailers as it helps them as much as it helps the marine keeper.

Grunge is taken from the bottom of the curing vats which retailers use and is sold on to hobbyists so that they can seed their sand beds. This is useful for sand beds as this grunge is absolutely packed with various organisms which live in or on the sand bed or have come from the live rock itself. This is of huge benefit to the sand bed as digging organisms are required in the sand bed to turn over the sand. Over time these organisms will reproduce and you will have countless numbers of organisms in your sand bed. If you are using a sand bed then this will help with the denitrifying capabilities.

When reef grunge is shipped it is normally shipped double/triple bagged in salt water filled with pure oxygen and sealed, however heat/cool packs are not normally added to the packaging as any die off which is experienced is very quickly reproduced as soon as it is added to the sand bed.

If you do not wish to purchase reef grunge on line and are actively looking to seed your sand bed then you can always ask a fellow hobbyist if you can have a cupful of their sand bed or ask at your local fish shop.

The majority of hobbyists and fish shops are more than willing to help out with this.

Wild Corals

Wild corals are sold by online retailers all over the world as well as home aquarists who are

selling 'frags' they have taken and cultured and there are some exceptionally rare ones to be found on the internet.

Wild corals are farmed direct from the reefs and distributed to retailers.

Wild corals are the same corals therefore as can be found in local retailers. There are some retailers who only sell offline, some that sell both offline and online and there are some retailers who only sell online.

Aquacultured Corals

Aquacultured corals and frags are both something which I am exceptionally passionate about as I am a firm believer of leaving our reefs alone (You have probably gathered that by now!).

Aquacultured corals/frags are cuttings taken of a mother colony which are then attached to a suitable base and allowed to grow in its own time until it is of a suitable size for resale.

If you are looking to increase the stock in your aquarium or introduce something new or rare then I highly recommend that you investigate aquacultured or fragged corals. They are highly beneficial to you the marine reef keeper and the reefs around the world which we all love, admire and attempt to replicate.

Why not have a go at 'fragging' your own corals. It really is not that hard and you can sell your frags to your local fish shop / fellow aquarists or exchange for other corals. Again this is not something we will cover in this guide but is something that I am hoping to write about in the future.

Wild Fish

Wild fish as in wild corals are fish which are caught directly from the reefs. Purchasing a wild fish online is similar to purchasing a fish from your local fish shop.

The only differences with purchasing online is that you cannot physically watch the fish swimming around prior to purchase, check the packaging and the transportation of the fish.

Captive Bred Fish

Captive bred fish are again something which I am passionate about and I am so exceptionally pleased to see there are so many new captive bred fish available. The more captive bred fish that people around the world can successfully breed means the more fish which are left on the reefs.

As with aquacultured corals I again recommend that you check if any captive bred fish are available when looking to purchase fish online.

You never know you might have a successful breeding in your own system – if you do - let me know.

Clean Up Crews

Clean up crews are a requirement in any reef tank and are normally snails, hermit crabs etc.

A clean up crew is useful to keep the rock face clean (as well as the tank face). Keeping the rock face clean in a reef aquarium filtered by live rock is essential as it keeps all the little holes open allowing the water to enter.

All the detritus which falls from the water column and lands on the live rock is also cleaned up.

As well as the rock face the sand in your tank (unless you run a bare bottom tank) is kept clean by filter cleaning crews.

The packaging of a clean up crew depends upon what you are ordering.

There are various packaging techniques used around the world, however I am a firm believer that everything that comes from the ocean should be at least packaged in seawater. I have had a few occasions where snails and hermit crabs have been shipped to me in moist paper. I have also received snails and hermit crabs packaged in seawater. All of these animals in both packaging solutions did survive, however as said I believe that they should have been delivered in seawater.

The likes of star fish and shrimps for example must be delivered in seawater and should never be exposed to the air.

As with the packaging of corals and fish, clean up crews should be packaged following the same techniques.

Plants

There are various types of marine plant life which is available on the internet.

If you have a fish only tank for example which has tangs in it then there is a requirement to feed them plant life. There are various types of plant life you can use which are not available online which are beneficial for your fishy inhabitants, however if you want to add some growing plant life to your aquarium there is a vast amount available.

Other uses for marine plant life are for example if you utilise a mud bed filtration system which can also use marine algae for the removal of nitrate from the water column. When creating a mud bed it is best to attempt to introduce as many varieties of plant life as you can source. If you only introduce one variety and it does not take hold and root you will have to start the planting process again which disturbs the mud bed. If you plant multiple varieties and a few do not take root then you will have some which have – plus different types of plant life remove different amounts of pollutants from the water.

There are of course people, like me, who like the look of marine algae and are looking for colourful varieties online to add to their tank.

Zooplankton, Phyto, Copepods etc

These are sold online either as pre-cultured and available for instant use or for people to culture their own stock. These are beneficial to your tank as they feed the corals and more in your tank and provide them with the nutrients which they require.

Dependant upon what you order will depend upon the packaging.

There are some culture packs which can be dry shipped, however there are others which must remain frozen and therefore need to get from the retailers to yourself in a short amount of time. As always – if in doubt give them a ring.

Choosing Where To Purchase From.

When you are ready and feel comfortable enough to purchase online the next thing you will need to do is locate an online retailer to purchase from.

This guide does not detail the best places online to purchase from, however it does detail what to look for in an online retailer.

Go online and locate as many sites as possible which sell online and deliver to your area. Once you have located these sites make a note of them. Visit each site in turn and find information about them:

- Pricing
- Shipping costs
- Availability
- What are the pictures/descriptions like
- About the company
- Testimonials
- Guarantee
- Does the site look professional
- Where does their livestock come from
- Packaging methods
- Transportation
- Is the site secure and verified

Let's go through each of these in turn and go a little bit deeper.

Price is something which is close to everyone's heart. Locate a product on the site which you know the price of already – either from a competitor's site or from your local fish shop. Check these prices to see if they are competitive. Checking the price of a damsel, clown fish etc will give you a very good idea as to their pricing strategy. If the price of an oscellaris clown for example is more expensive than your local fish shop then probably other livestock for sale will be more expensive as well.

Shipping costs are something which you have to pay close attention to online. Even though the prices online for livestock are normally cheaper than those of an offline fish shop shipping costs seriously have to be considered. You will not be able to compare the prices of shipping from the online retailer to your local fish shop for obvious reasons, however you can compare the shipping costs from one online retailer to another online retailer. You will be surprised how different they can be. Don't always go for the cheapest one though – just because they are the cheapest does not mean they are the best. There could be a reason as to why they are so cheap.

Availability is something to be considered as you do not really want to purchase something online, pay for it only to find out that they are waiting for a delivery which is due in about 2 weeks time.

There are times of course when you may need to consider this. If you are looking for a rare

item then you may have to wait for it.

Check both the pictures and the descriptions of the livestock which is offered for sale. The retailer should give you a very good description of the livestock, (what it is, requirements, etc.). Some retailers utilise a generic picture of the livestock, personally I prefer to see a picture of the actual item for sale rather than a generic picture. This is quite often seen online in respect of corals but not often when it comes to fish, inverts etc.

Live Rock, live sand, grunge etc will be just generic pictures, however with everything there should be a concise description with each and every product.

It is important to learn about the company, who they are, where they are based etc. Reputable online detailers should give you a lot of history about themselves, contact details etc. If they don't I personally am a bit wary as maybe they have something to hide.

The about page is a page whereby they can build trust with the site visitor. There should always be a contact telephone number.

When purchasing online previous customer testimonials are very important. Hearing about someone else's experience with the company (whether good or bad) is a good read. (Note. The retailer should never ever edit any testimonials apart from spelling mistakes. Edited testimonials are very easy to spot as are made up ones.). If you are unable to locate any testimonials or references on the site consider phoning the company and ask for references. The retailer should do anything and everything they can to soothe the nervous buyer

Locate the guarantee area on the site and find what guarantee(s) they are offering. The minimum that you should accept is a "live on delivery" type of guarantee. The 'alive and stay alive' guarantees are obviously a lot better.

On the webpage have a good look around the site – it will become apparent very quickly if they are professionals or not. It will also become apparent about the care that they show for the animals. If they appear to want to hide something or are not openly disclosing something then this could be a potential risk. If and when you locate a professional dealer this will assist you as they will make a much better job of the selection, packing and delivery process.

Check the site and attempt to locate whereabouts the dealer obtains the livestock from. Not all dealers actively divulge this information directly on the internet, however if this is a requirement which you would like to know then give them a ring and ask them.

It is important to know how the dealer packages and transports the livestock to you. On their site have a look to see if you can find any information articles about this. The majority of dealers online divulge the exact methods they use to pack and the carrier which is used to transport the livestock. Again if this information is not clear on the site and it is important to you then why not give them a call and ask them?

As with any site which is on the internet you need to ensure that the payment processing (shopping cart) facility which they use is both secure and certified. Using a site which is both secure and certified ensures that your payment information is protected. If a site is not secure then your card details can be read by third parties and you are open to credit card fraud.

I am in the process of creating an area which will hopefully detail as many marine websites which sell livestock online as I can locate. I am hoping for this to be based upon location first, then region then by what they stock, guarantee levels, contact information etc. Hopefully this will be complete by the time this guide is complete, however as I am sure you

can appreciate this is a time consuming and never ending task.

I will keep you posted on the progress...

What To Expect From The Seller.

The first thing to expect from any online retailer is a professional looking site with as much detail as possible about who they are etc. Normally a site will have a page titled 'about us' or something similar. There should also be a page on their site which details how you can contact them. If the dealer does not want to divulge the information as to who they are, where they are and how to contact them then do you really want to do business with them?

Another thing to expect is that this is a business relationship and that they must be courteous, prompt and professional at all times. If you have a concern, question etc then they should respond in a timely manner.

You will probably be ordering an item from the company based upon a picture, a description or both. The dealer will pick the item from their display/holding tanks for shipping to you. They should never select an item which is not in perfect health. They should select the healthiest item that they have available and not one which has not been eating etc. The item they deliver should look like the item you have ordered. This may sound obvious but there are times when dealers do not have an item in stock so will therefore send an alternative.

With you potentially purchasing a live animal from this company then at the very least the retailer needs to and must offer some aspect of a guarantee.

Quite a few of the retailers online which offer livestock offer an 'arrive alive' guarantee, however many more nowadays are also offering an 'arrive alive and stay alive for 14 days' guarantee. Obviously the latter guarantee is better. Either way you are protected and if the item does not survive you will be able to get a credit/replacement.

If you decide to order from a company which does not offer a guarantee then all the risk is taken by yourself and if for whatever reason the livestock dies then you will not have the ability to reclaim any money spent.

I would not recommend utilising a retailer who does not offer a guarantee. Any retailer worth their salt should be proud of the work they do, their shipping techniques etc.

When You Receive Your Livestock.

Either at the time of the order or shortly after you should either be informed of or have agreed upon a date for delivery. You need to ensure that either you or someone you know is available at the property where the item is to be delivered to accept the delivery. If it is to be someone else that is accepting the delivery it is best if it is someone who is interested in or keeps a marine aquarium themselves so that they can start the acclimatisation process on your behalf.

Your item(s) should (dependant upon your purchase but fish in this example) be packed in a box and clearly marked as livestock or live animals. When you receive your package before you sign for it thoroughly check the box and check for damage.

Once you have accepted your delivery you will need to start acclimatising your new livestock as soon as possible. Naturally due to the time and money that you have invested on the creation of your own aquatic habitat you will want to do this properly.

The purpose of acclimatisation is simple; the water that the fish is packaged in may have different temperature, pH and salinity parameters than that of your aquarium. Aquatic life (especially corals and invertebrates) are very sensitive to minor changes in water parameters therefore a successful acclimatisation is a requirement for success.

There are 2 realistic ways which are recommended to acclimatise your fish to your aquarium. Neither of these should be rushed and should both be performed with the lights off on the aquarium. The lights should also remain off for a further 3 to 4 hours after the fish has been introduced to the quarantine tank or the main display tank whichever method you are using.

It is recommended that a quarantine tank be used – for further information on this see the quarantine section located under the ‘Things to consider prior to purchasing online’.

Floating Bag Method

Before you commence with this method ensure that the lights on your aquarium are turned off. Also ensure that the lights in the room where you will be unpacking the fish are also turned down to a minimum. Bright lights will cause excessive stress to the fish.

After you have opened the package remove the bag and float the bag whilst it is still sealed in the aquarium for a minimum of 15 minutes. Do not open the bag at this stage. This allows the water in the bag to slowly adjust to the temperature of your aquarium.

The reason for not opening the bag at this time is that the parameters of the seawater in the bag will probably be different or very different from the parameters of the aquarium.

Once a minimum of 15 minutes has passed open the bag as near to the top as possible and either attach this to the side of the aquarium or create an air pocket in the top of the bag so that the bag will float on top of the water.

Once the bag is open add half an egg cup of your aquarium water to the bag and wait 5 – 10 minutes.

After 5 – 10 minutes perform the process of adding half an egg cup of your aquarium water to the bag and wait another 5 – 10 minutes.

Continue with this process until the bag is full.

Once the bag is full remove the bag from the water and discard at least half of the water from the bag.

Re-float the bag in the water and perform the steps of adding half an egg cup of your aquarium water to the bag again until the bag is full (remember to wait 5 – 10 minutes between each water addition).

Once the bag is full capture the fish using a proper aquatic net and release into the aquarium.

Discard the water in the shipping bag – Never introduce the water from the shipping bag into your aquarium.

Leave the aquarium lights off for at least 2-4 hours after the introduction.

Drip Method

The drip method of acclimatisation is normally used for more sensitive inhabitants, however more and more fish keepers are now utilising this method.

Before you commence with this method ensure that the lights on your aquarium are turned off. Also ensure that the lights in the room where you will be unpacking the fish are also turned down to a minimum. Bright lights will cause excessive stress to the fish.

After you have opened the package remove the bag and float the bag whilst it is still sealed in the aquarium for a minimum of 15 minutes. Do not open the bag at this stage. This allows the water temperature in the bag to slowly adjust to that of your aquarium.

The reason for not opening the bag at this time is that the parameters of the seawater in the bag will probably be different or very different from the parameters of the aquarium. Next move the bag from the aquarium and very carefully empty the contents of the bag into a marine safe bucket or equivalent (Do not use too big an item). Ensure that the fish is fully submerged.

You will need to use some airline so that you can setup a drip line from your main aquarium to the bucket.

In your aquarium secure the airline tubing so that it cannot fall out. On the other end (the end which is in the bucket) add an airline control valve (this will allow you to regulate the flow of water).

With the tubing in your aquarium submerged and the other end in the bucket start the syphon by gently sucking on the airline tube. This will start the syphon and water will start to pass from your main aquarium to the bucket. As soon as water begins to flow adjust the valve so that you are getting between 2 to 5 drops per second.

Now wait until the water in the bucket doubles the initial amount, pause the syphon using the control valve, discard half of the water from the bucket and start the syphon again using the control valve.

Wait until the water doubles again and then stop or break the syphon. You are now ready to introduce your fish to the aquarium.

Capture the fish using a proper aquatic net and release into the aquarium.

Discard the water from the bucket – Never introduce the water from the bucket into your aquarium.

Leave the aquarium lights off for at least 2-4 hours after the introduction.

Remember that it is imperative to be patient – the acclimatisation period should take around one hour.

Even if your new arrival appears to be dead still follow this procedure.

Even though a fish may look dead on arrival there is a chance that it might not be. Some fish enter a death like pose when under stress but quickly revive during the acclimatisation period.

Never ever be tempted to add an air stone to the bag during the acclimatisation process. Although you feel this may make sense all this will do is increase the pH levels of the water and possibly expose your new fish to lethal levels of ammonia.

Fish Introduction Techniques

The introduction of new fish into your aquarium is exceptionally important – not only for the health of your new fish but also for the existing fish in your system as well.

Ensure that all fish in your aquarium are compatible with each other PRIOR to purchase.

In your aquarium attempt to create as many hiding places as possible for both your new arrival and existing livestock. This will reduce aggression and stress levels in your aquarium

Maintaining excellent water conditions at all times in a marine aquarium is a must, however this is more so when a new fish has been introduced.

When introducing fish attempt if possible to introduce more than one at a time. This will reduce the chances of any one individual being targeted by your existing fish.

Reduce any aggression in your aquarium by feeding the existing inhabitants prior to the introduction of any new fish.

Try to distract existing fish by re-arranging the decorations, plant life etc. This will also change any territories which have been defined. Any new fish added at this time will be in the same situation as the existing fish as new territories will be defined by all fish in the tank both new and existing.

If you are unable to introduce more than one fish into the tank at one go then place a small mirror on the outside of the tank with the mirror surface facing inwards. The reflections of

current and new fish will reduce chances of aggression.

Corals, clean up crew and plants obviously do not need to be added to a quarantine tank – they may be added straight to the display tank, that is of course unless you wish to do so, however it is recommended that you closely inspect each one including the item the coral is attached to prior to introducing them to your display tank.

Live rock is normally shipped damp wrapped in paper inside a cardboard box. Cured live rock can be added straight to any tank, it is quite normal for a small spike to occur upon introduction. Un-Cured live rock will require curing and is normally used to cycle a tank and should not be added to a tank which already contains livestock. If you are adding live rock to an existing tank do not put in too much in one go, add it slowly to minimise any spike which may occur.

What If Something Goes Wrong.

If something goes wrong and either an animal arrives dead or dies shortly after introduction you will need to contact the retailer as soon as possible and follow their guarantee guidelines. Some retailers offer an instant credit to your account or replace the animal. Others require a sample of your water to be sent prior to refund so that they can validate the parameters of your aquarium water.

As long as you have done your research on the retailer prior to purchase you should be ok in this area.

Final Words And Acknowledgements

I hope that you have enjoyed this guide, I certainly enjoyed writing it.

Hopefully this guide will shed some insight into purchasing marine livestock online and remove or reduce any worries or concerns you may have.

I have purchased various items on the internet over the years and have had both good experiences and bad experiences. I can honestly say that none of the bad ones has put me off purchasing items online or via mail order. This is an area which is getting better with time. As stated the main problem is with the transportation of the livestock, however that said dealers are starting to get stricter with the people whom they entrust to deliver the items and the transportation companies are listening.

Purchasing online does not have to be a bad experience. In fact as long as you protect yourself then it can be a very convenient method to purchasing things online. In fact it can help you to purchase things which otherwise you would not have been able to purchase in your local area.

Simply put when on the internet when you are shopping – use your common sense.

Put it another way would you give your credit card to a stranger on the street – no of course you wouldn't.

Hopefully this short guide will provide with the information you need so that you can be both safe and secure on the internet and expand the diversity of life in your aquarium.

With warmest regards,

John Cunningham & Peter Cunningham

Aquarists Online
The Salt Water Aquarium

Resources

The Aquarists Guide To Starting A Saltwater Fish Aquarium

This guide is for aquarists who are interested in keeping a fish only aquarium.

There are some fish which cannot be kept with corals and/or invertebrates. Also in some instances there are aquarists who only want to keep fish - any why not - they are all beautiful.

This guide details everything that you need to know so that you can start your very own fish only saltwater aquarium. From the equipment you need, how it all works, what filtration methods there are available and how to put it all together - everything you need all in one handy guide. As with the reef aquarium guide every aspect is covered so that you can make up your own mind as to what is best for you and your fish. We appreciate that everyones requirements are different which is why we have attempted to cover as many as possible.

[Click Here For Further Information](#)

The Aquarists Guide To Starting A Saltwater Reef Aquarium

This guide was created for potential aquarists who are hoping to keep their very own saltwater mixed reef aquarium.

It is not surprising that so many people are interested in keeping a reef tank. With all the amazing corals that can now be kept in captivity. From soft corals which sway beautifully in the currents, hard corals with the fantastic structures and colours and reef fish going about their daily business on their 'home reef' - a true pleasure to behold.

This guide details everything you need to know about various aspects of reef keeping all the way through to a step-by-step guide as to how to start up. We are firm believers that there are numerous ways to perform anything when it comes to salt water aquariums, therefore we have included as much information as we possibly can so that you can learn everything you need and then make up your own mind as to what it best for both you and your aquarium inhabitants.

[Click Here For Further Information](#)

The Aquarists Guide To Marine Aquarium Care And Maintenance

Starting a saltwater aquarium is only the beginning of this hobby.

Once you have got started and have researched everything you need to know then you are going to have to starting caring for and maintaining your aquarium.

This is an aspect of this hobby which must not be neglected.

With the correct care and maintenance performed on your aquarium then with time your aquarium will grow into a thing of beauty which will be the centerpiece of your home.

This guide details all the aspects which you will need to cover when it comes to this essential aspect of this hobby. This guide has been written in such a way so that you will be able to learn exactly what you need to perform and why you need to do it.

[Click Here For Further Information](#)

Filtration Methods For Use Within The Home Marine Aquarium

At the very heart of each and every aquarium is the filtration system. This filtration system has to be both efficient and effective, if not then the aquarium is destined for failure.

In any aquarium system but especially a saltwater aquarium system there are many ways to perform the required filtration.

It is for this very reason that we compiled this guide. This guide includes information as to numerous ways in which you can filter your aquarium.

Not just the primary filtration but also methods of other filtration which you can apply to your aquarium system so that you have numerous ways to export nutrients from your aquarium.

This guide covers some basic filtration methods but also covers some more advanced methods. This guide is written in such a way that aquarists of any level can understand and implement the filtration method(s) of their choice.

[Click Here For Further Information](#)