



'The following information is intended only as a guide to Piranha'

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Piranha!! the infamous predator from South America. Typically known as the "Wolf of the Water," these fish are designed to hunt as a perfect pack fish leaving little if any chance of escape for their prey, attacking with short, sharp bursts of speed and armed with a mouthful of razor sharp teeth that can strip meat of a bone in seconds.

Like many at the top of the food chain in their environment, scary, very dramatic and built for the purpose!

The common Piranha fish falls into two main genus (family groups). They are the Serrasalmus and Pygocentrus genus. The Serrasalmus has a longer more pointed face and snout, the Pygocentrus family has the more familiar blunt face that most people associate with Piranha fish and both genus include quite a variety of colours and sizes. There are many different types of Piranha with new variants still being discovered. In the UK there are probably 10 or 11 different Piranha that are commonly imported for the home aquarium, although 'AmazonBasin'.co.uk also stock many of the lesser known varieties when they are available.

The main types that are kept in home aquarium are as follows:

Pygocentrus genus

All Pygocentrus species can be shoaled together.

Nattereri - Commonly known as the "red bellied" Piranha and is found in various locations in the Amazon. Frequently seen in Aquarium shops you will find that this piranha is mostly tank bred.

Ternetzi – This is a lovely looking piranha from Argentina with a yellow belly and similar looks to the Caribe piranha from Venezuela. They shoal nicely with other Pygocentrus when well fed.

Piraya - Known as the "King" of Piranha, this fish is rare and generally quite expensive, coming from the Rio Sao Francisco region of the Amazon, it has a gold streak up the flanks and is probably the most aggressive of the Pygocentrus family. Not to be considered as a beginner's fish.

Caribe - Caribes come from South America (Venezuela) are commonly known as Donkey Skin Piranha. They are very aggressive in the wild and at certain times of the year are known to eat young birds ejected from river nesting sites a fierce fish with similar looks to that of the red belly but have a large black humeral spot behind the gill plate. Growing up to 18".

Serrasalmus genus

This genus will usually shoal with its own species.

Rhombeus - Commonly known as the "Black" Piranha it is famous for its dark markings and evil red eye. These fish can grow to over 18" in length but must not be kept with other Piranha as they are solitary hunters. Specimen fish such as these require a large tank. Some variants include the Diamond back, Peruvian high back, Brazilian black, and Xingu gold.

Brandtii - Well known to be probably the most aggressive of all Piranhas, coming from the same area as the piraya. Growing to a max of 10" and developing a lovely golden-bronze colouring in adulthood. They must be kept away from other Piranha.

Manueli - A very rare Piranha, this fish comes from Xingu river (Rio Negro Venezuela). These fish are said to be one of the biggest of piranhas. They have large red eyes with a dark shoulder spot. These fish are rather nervous in the aquarium and as they grow older they tend not to lose their colour unlike many piranha species. Some specimens can be very aggressive. Large Manueli do not travel well so most imported fish will be in the smaller sizes but can grow size up to 24".

Elongatus - This piranha are amongst the most aggressive piranhas and there are three types and with their slender bodies they stand out from all the other piranha species. Commonly known as the "Pike" Piranha, this is a streamlined fish built for quick attacks from its hiding place behind sunken trees or vegetation. They come with a variety of face and stomach markings depending upon the areas they come from. Growing up to 10"-11" this fish needs to be kept as a solitary fish.

Geryi - An amazing looking Piranha, known as the 'Violet Line Piranha' which has a purple line running the entire length of its body from behind the skull to the tail. It will shoal with other Geryi but is also a 'fin nipper'.

Spilopleura - This fish comes in two main builds, one is known as the "Gold" Spilo and the other known as the "Ruby Red" Spilo. A great fish which can be mixed with some fish of the Pygocentrus family, but is extremely aggressive and a known 'fin nipper'.

The above information gives you some idea of the various piranha background and habits whilst living in the wild, below you will find some general information on keeping Piranhas in a 'home aquarium' :-

Tank

Be aware that some of the fish listed above can grow to quite large sizes and so your tank should be able to accommodate this. A rule of thumb is 15-20 gallons per fish, although say that a large shoal doesn't need so much space. For groups of 3-4 fish, you will need a tank of at least 120x50x50 cm (48x20x20"). Each extra fish would require an additional 6-8" in tank length, with 6 fish or more a tank depth of 60 cm (24") is recommended. Juvenile fish can be temporarily kept in smaller tanks.

Tank Requirements

Plants, rocks or drift wood to provide hiding places, the tank lights should be dimmed. Heavy filtration is required to deal with the large amounts of waste this fish produces. Any decaying/waste matter needs to be removed from the tank and when adding water ensure that it has been de-chlorinated. A powerhead can be added to provide currents. Care is required in handling, extremely dangerous to hands.

Decor

It is important to give them space but also try to replicate the environment from which they have come. The Amazon River is full of tree trunks from which piranhas will dart in and out of along with other general river vegetation. Maybe look around for underwater photo shots of fish from the Amazon to get an idea of how to recreate the most natural environment for your own fish when setting up your tank. Piranha are very territorial and will settle into their own places in a tank, normally the largest being the "Alpha" fish (leader).

Water temperature

Water temperature should be 24-29 degrees Celsius (76-84 degrees Fahrenheit).

Water chemistry

pH should be between 6.0 - 8.0, ideally slightly acidic to neutral water: pH 6.5 - 7.2 . Soft water is preferred.

Diet

Fish (whole, fillet or feeders*), shrimp, cockles, mussels, squid, insects, earth worms, and pellets. Food items such as poultry, mammal meat and organ meat should be fed sparsely once or twice a month at the most. Meat needs to be unseasoned and trimmed of any fat.

*Live fish need to be quarantined first, so they are safe to feed (containing no diseases or parasites). Goldfish, minnows and other members of the Cyprinid family (Carp-like fish) should be avoided, as these fish contain growth-inhibiting hormones (Thiaminase/Vitamine B1 inhibitors) that could negatively affect the fish's health and development.

General awareness

Caution should always be employed when maintaining the tank in which the fish live. They move quickly through the water you should be aware of the fish in the tank and their whereabouts at all times. Your Piranha will usually move to the opposite side of the aquarium whenever your hand/arm enters the tank but caution is the key word here. Usual procedure would be to maintain the tank with one hand whilst using a net in the other to provide a shield between the fish and your hand. Extreme caution should be employed when moving a fish from tank to tank as the fish is capable of eating its way through the net which can result in a fish thrashing around on the floor trying to bite anything that goes near it. Handled with caution Piranha cause no real threat as their environment is the aquarium. It is advisable to keep the tank covered to make it

impossible to open for children, domestic pets and other animals from attempting to enter or play with the aquarium.

This has been a simple beginners' guide and there is more to it but it will certainly do for your first attempt. Should you have questions or problems, please write to piranhas@amazonbasin.co.uk and we will be happy to give advice. Enjoy your piranha!

