CHOOSING TROPICAL FISH

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[Assignment: Select a definite, sensibly limited topic. Write an essay either 1) explaining how a process works or 2) directing the reader how to perform a process. Construct a topic sentence that embodies the essential principle of the process. Then explain in distinct steps how that process is carried out or is to be carried out, keeping in mind that main principle.]

(1) Owning tropical fish is one of the most popular hobbies in the United States today. As a beginning aquarist, you will need to decide which fish to buy. When choosing fish, you should take into account the personality, the needs, the availability, the appeal, the ability for peaceful coexistence with other fish, and the health of the individual fish. These are all important considerations if you are going to enjoy your aquarium.

(2) First of all, you must recognize that fish have personalities. In this respect, selecting fish is similar to buying a dog. Although the personality of a fish is, admittedly, less of a factor than the temperament of a dog, it should, nevertheless, be considered. Each species of fish has general tendencies and propensities of which you should be aware. You may be able to find some information in the library, but the best place to go is a tropical fish store. If the proprietor there cannot answer your questions, he will probably have books on the desired topic. Also like dogs, individual fish of the same species will vary in temperament. For example, kribensis will sometimes make amicable members of a fish community; other kribs, however, may bully their docile companions. You are usually safe, though, if you use the general tendencies of a species as a guide.

(3) The next step in choosing fish is knowing the living requirements of individual species. Some fish, like the common goldfish, require little maintenance, while others, like all saltwater fish, demand a strictly regulated environment. Time and money are the two major concerns: will you have the time necessary to care for the fish, and are you willing to spend the money? Another factor to consider is the kind of food a fish needs. Piranhas and oscars require live fish for food, and this requirement makes some people queasy. Arowanas, for example, need tremendous quantities of food, which adds another expense. Finally, make sure that your aquarium is large enough for the fish to grow to their full size, and that territorial fish like cichlids have sufficient room to stake a claim. If a fish is too cramped, it will not be completely healthy, and it may become aggressive.

(4) After you have determined which fish you are able
to provide for, you need to find out which species are available. Will the local pet store have the ones you want, or do you have to order from Florida or South America. Most species are fairly easy to obtain, but sometimes, as with Apistogramma ramirezi (rams), only one sex (the male) is generally available. In the case of discus, only young fish can usually be found, and full-grown specimens are both rare and valuable. You will also want to be aware of prices. The fish and all the aquarium paraphernalia can easily cost a small fortune.

(5) The most important criterion for selecting tropical fish is the measure of their appeal to you. You must like your fish if you are going to enjoy them. You should buy fish that have a temperament suitable to your desires. Do you want aggressive, hostile fish, like cichlids, or do you prefer playful, friendly fish, like platies? Will shy fish, like elephant-noses, frustrate you, or would you enjoy passive, easy-going fish? Do you want complex, intelligent fish, like cichlids, or simple, dumb fish, like goldfish? Must your fish be flashy and beautiful, like veil-tail guppies, or can you tolerate plain fish, like black tetras? If you do not choose fish whose characteristics you find intriguing, you will not get maximum enjoyment from your aquarium.

(6) Since different types of fish have different needs and personalities, you cannot just carelessly mix species of fish. Most aquarists want to have several types of fish in the same tank. Combinations of species usually pose no problem, as approximately seventy percent of all tropical fish are considered "community fish." Community fish can generally be mixed without worry, although problems still sometimes arise. However, you must avoid mixing incompatible species, since some fish, like barbs or cichlids, are more aggressive than others. Breeding often causes uncharacteristic aggression among peaceful fish communities, but this effect can be reduced if preferred breeding environments are provided, along with ample space. For example, if a pair of kribensis is given their own rock cave in a large tank, other fish will just avoid the area, and undue aggression need not occur. Remember to check, before you buy, whether the fish you select can coexist peacefully.

(7) When you actually purchase fish, examine them closely. Try to avoid fish that are sluggish, blemished, or ragged. If at all possible, new fish should be isolated for several days, in case they are diseased, before they are added to an existing community. Fish are delicately balanced organisms, and you can usually tell on sight whether they are healthy.

(8) If you are going to start an aquarium, you should consider all of the preceding factors when selecting fish. In order to derive maximum pleasure from your fish, you must, in addition to providing them with a healthy environment, like them. If your fish do not fit your personality, your budget, and your lifestyle, and
they are not thriving in their home, your aquarium will be a chore rather than a delight.