

DECORATIVE AQUARIA

A beautiful underwater landscape is the foundation of any aquarium. With the right planting strategy and a few tips on care, anyone can do it. Experts from the specialist retail chain Maxi Zoo have compiled a few of these for you.

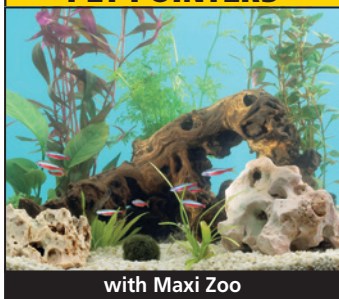
Whether you want to work on a somewhat Spartan style of planting, more of a thicket or a combination of roots, stones and plants – a methodical design for the underwater landscape makes

it more interesting in each case. If you're not exactly planning a pure jungle, you should arrange the various plant species in separately defined groups. Leave a little space between them or fill these in with stones or some attractive roots. A landscape is at its most impressive when you have some depth: either stagger the plants with the low ones in the foreground and the taller ones in the background or to the sides or – an old trick employed by painters and photographers – use diagonal lines leading into the picture to create a three dimensional effect. A backdrop landscape photograph could, for instance, be a river snaking into the distance... In the aquarium you could put roots or oblong stone slabs in the appropriate places. Using low growing vegetation, you could even blend in a little path of plants from the front to the back.

CREATE CONTRASTS

There are other possibilities for texture and composition to be had from planting... greenery doesn't have to be green! There are many nuances and different coloured plants you can use to create contrasts. Usually it's enough to use different varieties of plants such as feathery, round and long-leaved types. For healthy vegetation, you need the right ground. Mix gravel together with special fertiliser and place this mixture at the very bottom of the aquarium.

PET POINTERS



with Maxi Zoo

Then cover this with a layer of pure gravel several centimetres thick. Aquarium gravel is more suitable than sand as good aeration and water circulation is easier to achieve in loose gravel.

Additional floor heating can be provided for optimum water circulation. The rising warmth ensures the perfect distribution of nutrients. Because the nutrients are not only absorbed through the roots but also through the leaves,

you should also ensure adequate provision for this. Most important is the supply of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Plants produce sugar from this – and this further results in the production of oxygen which the fish need to be able to breath. If your aquarium water contains too little carbon dioxide, you can deploy a CO₂ plant. With regular feeding the products of digestion and decomposition from the fish serve as nutrients for the plants. In conjunction with a nutrient rich substrate and a CO₂ plant you need only use a little additional fertiliser.

IDEAL LIGHTING CONDITIONS

Even lighting offers some potential for influencing plant growth. Decisive factors are light intensity and the configuration and duration of the lighting. Whilst the intensity is mainly predetermined by the existing aquarium lighting (e.g. a fixture for two fluorescent tubes), the type of lamp itself can be key. Ideally this would be a "plant growth lamp", for instance, and a further lamp with a broad light spectrum. A twelve hour lighting period is a good average whereby you can even allow a two hour midday pause. The advantage: you can let the light burn longer in the evening which will give you the time to marvel over your aquarium.



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