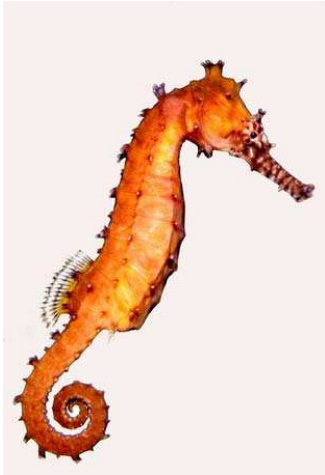


## Nutrition

We recommend you purchase captive-bred seahorse species that have been trained to eat frozen foods. This makes feeding a simple task. Offer the frozen food, pre-thawed and rinsed, once or twice daily. Frozen foods can be supplemented with fish vitamins, carotenoids and HUFAs (highly unsaturated fatty acids, such as Selcon or Zoecon). An exception to this recommendation is if you use Piscine Energetics brand frozen mysis, which does not require HUFA supplementation. Live foods can be offered once per week for nutritional variety. Live food should be gut-loaded with nutritious and vitamin-supplemented foods prior to feeding. You can find information about sources of foods on [www.seahorse.org](http://www.seahorse.org)

## Know your species



Any information claiming that temperate or subtropical species can be kept at tropical temperatures is false and will most likely cause the death of these species within a few weeks. Do not buy from breeders or suppliers that claim otherwise. These seahorses may appear to do well, but are susceptible to disease due to the stress of being kept at temperatures beyond their natural tolerances. Of the medium and large seahorses, we recommend captive-bred *H. erectus* as the hardiest "beginner" seahorse species. Dwarf seahorses (*H. zosterae*) are one of the hardier species, even as wild-caught, but will require live food daily and have other special requirements. They merit a care sheet of their own. Refer to the Library and Dwarf Seahorses Discussion Forum on [www.seahorse.org](http://www.seahorse.org) for more information.

## Identification

If you are not certain of the scientific name of your seahorse, you can identify your individual(s) at the photo gallery at [gallery.seahorse.org](http://gallery.seahorse.org). If you are still unsure, you can upload a photo of your seahorse to the Seahorse.org website, and members will assist in the identification. Make sure you research the specific needs of the species you intend to purchase.

**Website:** <http://www.seahorse.org>

**Gallery:** <http://gallery.seahorse.org>

**Discussion:** <http://forum.seahorse.org>

**Library:** <http://www.seahorse.org/library.shtml>

*This care sheet was created for new seahorse hobbyists by Seahorse Dot Org, a non-profit organization committed to education about and ethical treatment of seahorses in captivity.*



## CARE SHEET FOR CAPTIVE BRED SEAHORSES

This care sheet provides guidelines for maintenance of captive-bred seahorses for seahorse keepers. Wild-caught seahorses bring with them a host of challenging husbandry issues and often they do not survive for long. Captive-bred seahorses, properly cared for, live for several years in the aquarium. Wild-caught seahorses appear to be cheaper, but cost more to maintain. We recommend all keepers purchase captive-bred seahorses only.

### Selecting healthy seahorses

If you are buying from your local fish store, observe the seahorses carefully before you purchase. If buying from an e-tailer, make sure they have a good reputation and live guarantee. Confirm the seahorses are captive-bred. It is important to observe/ask:

- Is the seahorse eating?
- What food is it eating and how often is it being fed?
- Is the body well rounded with no signs of abdominal concavity?

Do not buy a seahorse that is not eating. You should be able to observe captive-bred seahorses eating frozen mysis shrimp, krill or plankton. If a captive-bred seahorse is not eating frozen food, it may not truly be captive-bred, or it may not be healthy. The dwarf seahorse, *H. zosterae*, is an exception, whether captive-bred or wild-caught; they require live food, generally enriched brine shrimp nauplii.

### Potential problems

Do not buy a seahorse if you see:

Signs of skin sloughing or discoloration, inflammation, odd swimming behaviour, not using a hold-fast, lying on substrate or hitching upside down, minimal eye movement, protruding eyes, blisters, inflamed gill slits, eroded snout, body or tail lesions or continuous heavy respiration. If you observe any of the above signs, play it safe and pass on the purchase. Do not try to "rescue" an obviously malnourished or sick seahorse.



## Acclimation and Quarantine

It is good standard practice to keep seahorses in a quarantine tank for six weeks before introducing them to a tank with other seahorses. Observe new purchases carefully for any odd behaviour or external lesions, spots or other anomalies. Usually the first sign of illness is cessation of appetite. If illness is suspected, refer to the disease guide and treatment recommendations on [www.seahorse.org](http://www.seahorse.org). Alternately, you can post on the discussion board in the Emergency Forum. Several expert keepers will be available to help you. Do not treat a seahorse without knowing what is affecting it. Only use recommended treatments.

## The seahorse tank

Before you buy a seahorse, be sure you understand the basic principles of how to keep seahorses in the home aquarium. The best overall source for this knowledge is [Seahorse.org](http://Seahorse.org). Keeping marine fish of any type requires knowledge of basic marine aquarium keeping and water chemistry. There are many books and other sources of information available. If you prepare adequately and set up an appropriate sized, fully cycled, and stable tank, you will greatly improve your chances of success. Seahorses need “hitching posts”—something to cling to while they are resting. Not having these resting places is stressful for a seahorse. Seahorses should be introduced into a mature, cycled aquarium. Various filtration methods and tank set-ups can result in a healthy, stable aquarium. A seahorse tank must have gentle to moderate currents, with 3–5 times tank volume turned over per hour. A seahorse tank needs to be void of intense currents and requires lower flow areas where a seahorse can retreat and rest. Water parameters should be stable before animals are added:

pH – 8.0 to 8.3

Specific gravity – 1.020 to 1.024

Ammonia – 0

Nitrite – 0

Nitrate – <20 ppm

Optimum temperature is dependent on whether the seahorse species is tropical, subtropical or temperate. Generally, beginners should start with tropical species as heating a tank is much less expensive than cooling one, and it is easier to maintain a stable temperature in a tropical tank. Try to keep to the lower end of the temperature ranges, and let the temperature fluctuate up towards the higher values of the temperature range. Taller tanks are preferred. Seahorses need height (2.5 to 3 times the uncurled length of the animals) in their tanks to court and mate. As a minimum, the internal height of the tank, excluding the substrate, should be at least 2 times the uncurled length of the seahorse you are keeping.

## Temperature and stocking density table for common seahorse species

The recommended minimum tank size per pair of adult seahorses, as well as the ‘additional’ tank space required by each subsequent pair, is listed in the table below. For example, *H. erectus*, allow the first pair 29 gallons then 15 gallons per pair thereafter.

### 1) Tropical, 71-74 degrees F (21-23 degrees C)<sup>^</sup>

<i>H. angustus</i>	1 pair/15 gallons (55 litres); minimum tank size 29 gallons (110 litres)
<i>H. barbouri</i>	1 pair/15 gallons (55 litres); minimum tank size 29 gallons (110 litres)
<i>H. comes</i>	1 pair/15 gallons (55 litres); minimum tank size 29 gallons (110 litres)
<i>H. erectus</i>	1 pair/15 gallons (55 litres); minimum tank size 29 gallons (110 litres)
<i>H. fuscus</i>	1 pair/10 gallons (38 litres); minimum tank size 20 gallons (76 litres)
<i>H. kelloggi</i>	1 pair/15 gallons (55 litres); minimum tank size 29 gallons (110 litres)
<i>H. kuda</i>	1 pair/15 gallons (55 litres); minimum tank size 29 gallons (110 litres)
<i>H. procerus</i>	1 pair/10 gallons (38 litres); minimum tank size 20 gallons (76 litres)
<i>H. reidi</i>	1 pair/15 gallons (55 litres); minimum tank size 29 gallons (110 litres)
<i>H. subelongatus</i>	1 pair/30 gallons (114 litres); minimum tank size 65 gallons (246 litres)
<i>H. zosterae</i> <sup>*</sup>	1 pair/1.5 gallons (6 litres); minimum tank size 5 gallons (20 litres)

<sup>^</sup> 25 degrees C is the maximum temperature for tropical species and should not exceed this temperature.

<sup>\*</sup> Recommended to keep in groups of 3 pairs.

### 2) Subtropical, 67-70 degrees F (19-21 degrees C)

<i>H. ingens</i>	1 pair/30 gallons (114 litres); minimum tank size 65 gallons (246 litres)
<i>H. tuberculatus</i>	1 pair/10 gallons (38 litres); minimum tank size 20 gallons (76 litres)
<i>H. whitei</i>	1 pair/10 gallons (38 litres); minimum tank size 20 gallons (76 litres)

### 3) Temperate, 64–66 degrees F (18-19 degrees C)

<i>H. abdominalis</i>	1 pair/30 gallons (114 litres); minimum tank size 65 gallons (246 litres)
<i>H. breviceps</i>	1 pair/10 gallons (20 litres); minimum tank size 20 gallons (40 litres)
<i>H. capensis</i> <sup>#</sup>	1 pair/10 gallons (20 litres); minimum tank size 20 gallons (40 litres)

<sup>#</sup>*H. capensis* prefer wide tanks for courtship rather than tall tanks

## Choosing safe tank mates

Seahorses are not strong swimmers and are not competitive feeders. They have few defences against aggression. Many keepers recommend seahorse only tanks. This is a partial list of compatible “clean up crew” animals most likely to be safe with small to large seahorses. See the tankmates guide of the [Seahorse.org](http://Seahorse.org) library for a more comprehensive list including fish and corals.

- Fan worms including Feather Dusters (Phylum Annelida)
- Astrea Snail (*Lithopoma [Astraea] spp.*), Turbo Snail (*Turbo spp.*), Nassarius Snail (*Nassarius vibex*), Trochus Snail (*Trochus niloticus*), Cerith Snail (Family Cerithiidae), Nerite Snail (*Nerita spp*)
- Scarlet reef hermits (*Paguristes cadenati*)<sup>\*</sup>
- Peppermint Shrimp (*Lysmata wurdemanni*)<sup>\*</sup>
- Grass Shrimp (*Palaemonetes vulgaris*)<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>Shrimp and most hermit crabs are not considered safe around seahorse fry or *H. zosterae*, (dwarf seahorse).