

YOUR FREE READER'S COMPANION

The Betta Setup Pack

A companion to The Betta Fish Care Bible · by Nora Aldridge

Thanks for picking up the book. This is the companion you tape to the wall beside the tank and the one you carry to the fish store before you bring anything home: the tank-and-equipment chooser so you buy the right gear once, the nitrogen-cycle quick reference that keeps your fish out of poison, a water-parameter and water-change schedule you can actually follow, a feeding plan with safe foods, a disease first-response chart for the three emergencies, and a printable weekly card with the myths that kill bettas. Print it, tape it up, keep it where you'll see it.

Bettas that die young almost never die of disease. They died of the setup - a bowl with no heater, a tank that was never cycled, water that quietly turned to poison. Get the water right and almost everything else takes care of itself. Healthy water makes a healthy betta - everything else is detail. — Nora

1. The Tank & Equipment Chooser

Before a single fish comes home, you make one decision that shapes everything after: the tank, and the gear that keeps the water in it warm, clean, and safe. Get this right and betta keeping is genuinely easy. Get it wrong - a tiny "betta kit," no heater, no filter - and you'll be fighting the setup for the life of the fish. The number that matters most is 5 gallons (19 L) minimum, longer-and-lower beats tall-and-narrow, and the tank needs a lid because bettas jump.

Tank size - bigger water is steadier water

Tank size	Verdict	Why
Cup / bowl (under 1 gal / 4 L)	Never	No room for a heater or filter; ammonia and temperature swing violently. Survival only.
2.5 gal (9.5 L)	Too small	Often sold as a "betta tank." Still swings fast, hard to keep stable. Avoid even though it's marketed for bettas.
5 gal (19 L)	Minimum, good	The realistic floor. Fits a heater and gentle filter, holds temperature and chemistry steady.
10 gal (38 L)	Better	More forgiving still. Very stable water, room to plant. A great long-term choice.
20 gal (76 L)	Excellent	Rock-solid stability, lots of swim space. The easiest of all to keep healthy.

A small tank is harder, not easier - everything goes wrong faster in less water. If your budget and shelf allow a 10-gallon over a 5, take it every time.

The gear that actually keeps a betta alive

A betta does not need an automatic feeder or a wave maker. He needs warm water that stays clean. That's it.

Item	What to get	Why it matters
Heater (non-negotiable)	Adjustable, sized to tank (~5 watts/gal): 25-50W for 5 gal, 50-75W for 10 gal	Bettas are tropical; they need a steady 78-80 F (25.5-26.5 C), not room temperature
Thermometer	Separate from the heater (glass or digital probe)	Heater dials drift and lie. Trust the thermometer, not the dial.
Gentle filter	Sponge filter, or a hang-on-back baffled to a soft flow	Cleans water and houses the beneficial bacteria - softly. Bettas hate strong current.
Light	Built-in LED or a clip-on, on a timer (~8-10 hrs/day)	A steady day-night rhythm; strong color and real rest
Liquid test kit	Liquid drops, not paper strips	Your only window into invisible water chemistry. Strips are unreliable.

Dechlorinator Any quality water conditioner

Neutralizes the chlorine/chloramine in tap water
that burns gills

Three honest rules: never cut the corner on the heater, the filter, or the conditioner - those three keep the water warm, clean, and safe. There's no good "budget" test kit (the cheap option is strips, and you shouldn't buy those). And get all of this running before the fish comes home, because the tank needs time to cycle first.

2. The Nitrogen Cycle - Quick Reference

This is the chapter beginners skip and the fish pay for. A new tank has no system to handle waste, so ammonia climbs until it harms the fish. Cycling means growing two colonies of beneficial bacteria that turn that poison into something harmless - before your betta is depending on them. Plan on four to six weeks. There is no bottle that does it in a day.

The chain you're growing

Ammonia (from waste and rotting food) is toxic - target zero. Bacteria turn it into nitrite, which is also toxic - target zero. A second bacteria turns nitrite into nitrate, the mild end-product you keep under 20 ppm with water changes. The chain runs: ammonia nitrite nitrate. Toxic, toxic, then mostly harmless.

Fishless cycling, step by step (the kind way)

1. Set the whole tank up. Heater on at 78-80 F (25.5-26.5 C), filter running, water dechlorinated. Warm water grows bacteria faster. Just no fish.
2. Add an ammonia source. Dose bottled pure ammonia (no additives) to bring the tank to about 2-4 ppm, checking with your test kit.
3. Test and wait. After one to two weeks, ammonia starts to fall and nitrite appears and climbs. That's progress.
4. Wait for the second colony. After another week or two, nitrite drops and nitrate appears. Keep dosing a little ammonia so the bacteria don't starve.
5. The finish line. The tank is cycled when a dose of ammonia reads 0 ammonia and 0 nitrite 24 hours later, with some nitrate present. Do a water change to get nitrate under 20 ppm, then - only now - bring your betta home.

What a cycle looks like, week to week

Day	Ammonia	Nitrite	Nitrate	What's happening
1	3 ppm	0	0	Dosed ammonia; nothing eating it yet
7	3 ppm	0	0	Still waiting - this part tests your patience
12	1 ppm	0.5 ppm	0	First colony awake - ammonia falling, nitrite appearing
18	0 ppm	4 ppm	5 ppm	Ammonia handled; nitrite spiking; nitrate starting
26	0 ppm	1 ppm	15 ppm	Second colony catching up; nitrite dropping
32	0 ppm	0 ppm	20 ppm	Both zero in 24 hrs - cycled! Water change, then add fish

Already have a fish in an uncycled tank? Don't panic and don't feel ashamed. Do a fish-in cycle: test every single day, and whenever ammonia or nitrite reads above about 0.25 ppm, do a 25-50% dechlorinated, temperature-matched water change to dilute it. Feed lightly. It takes the same few weeks and ends the

same way - ammonia and nitrite holding at zero on their own.

3. Water Parameters & The Weekly Routine

Poor water quality is the number one killer of pet bettas - not disease, not bad luck. It's also the most preventable. These are the numbers to hit and the rhythm that holds them.

The target parameters

Parameter	Target	Notes
Temperature	78-80 F (25.5-26.5 C), steady	Steady matters as much as the number; cold or swinging water stresses the fish
pH	6.5-7.5	Stability beats perfection. Don't chase it with chemicals.
Ammonia	0 ppm	Toxic; anything above zero is harming your betta
Nitrite	0 ppm	Also toxic; must read zero
Nitrate	Under 20 ppm	The mild end-product; kept low by water changes

No new tap water ever touches your fish without dechlorinator in it first - every fill, every water change, every top-off. And never rinse filter media in tap water; the chlorine kills your bacteria. Rinse it in old tank water only.

The maintenance schedule at a glance

Frequency	Task
Daily	30-second look: active and alert? fins open? eating? any spots, fuzz, or bloat? thermometer at 78-80 F? water clear? Then feed per the plan below.
Weekly	~25% water change (about 1.25 gal / 4.75 L for a 5-gallon). Dechlorinate and temperature-match the new water. Gravel-vacuum a section. Wipe inside glass. Test (temp, ammonia 0, nitrite 0, nitrate under 20).
Monthly	Check filter flow and intake. Rinse media in old tank water only if clogged. Check heater/thermometer accuracy. Trim live plants.
As needed	Top off evaporation with treated, temperature-matched water. Restock dechlorinator and test reagents before they run out.

The weekly water change, in short: wash hands (no soap residue), unplug the heater, prepare and dechlorinate the new water, match the temperature, siphon out about 25% while gravel-vacuuming, pour the new water back gently, plug the heater back in. If a test ever shows ammonia or nitrite above zero, do an extra partial change and check again tomorrow - don't tear the tank apart.

4. Feeding - Schedule & Safe Foods

A betta's stomach is about the size of his eye. Look at the fish's eye - that's one meal. The begging at the glass is not hunger; it's a little opportunist who will act starving forever. Overfeeding is the quiet killer: it bloats the fish and fouls the water.

The rule: 2 to 3 betta pellets, twice a day. It looks like nothing. Feed it anyway and stop. Many pellets swell in water, so keep the count low and scoop out anything uneaten after a few minutes.

A weekly feeding schedule

Day	Morning	Evening
Monday	2-3 pellets	2-3 pellets
Tuesday	2-3 pellets	Frozen bloodworms (small treat)
Wednesday	2-3 pellets	2-3 pellets
Thursday	2-3 pellets	Frozen daphnia or brine shrimp (treat)
Friday	2-3 pellets	2-3 pellets
Saturday	2-3 pellets	2-3 pellets
Sunday	Fasting day - no food	Fasting day - no food

That fasting day is on purpose, not a typo. A weekly fast lets the gut clear and prevents the constipation and bloating that overfeeding causes. He won't starve.

Safe foods

- Quality betta pellets - the base. A carnivore food with fish or shrimp meal listed first, not wheat or grain. One small tub lasts most of a year.
- Frozen bloodworms - the classic treat, a couple of times a week. Rich, so don't overdo it. Thaw first.
- Frozen daphnia - lighter, with a mild laxative effect that keeps digestion moving.
- Frozen or live brine shrimp - protein-rich, a real hunting workout for him.
- A blanched, deshelled pea (tiny piece) - not a food, a fix for constipation: fast 2-3 days, then offer one.

Skip generic plant-heavy flakes (wrong for a carnivore and messy) and go easy on freeze-dried, which swells in the gut. On a treat day, the treat replaces that meal's pellets - swap, don't stack.

5. Disease Quick-Reference - Signs & First Response

Fix the water first. Most betta disease traces back to water, and a huge share of illness clears up - or never starts - when ammonia is 0, nitrite is 0, nitrate is under 20, and the temperature is a steady 78-80 F. Medication is the second move, almost never the first. When something looks wrong, test the water before you reach for a bottle.

Symptom	Likely illness	Root cause	First response
Ragged, dissolving fin edges; darkened/reddened margins	Fin rot	Poor water quality (ammonia/nitrite, dirty water)	Test and fix water, extra changes, hold 78-80 F, aquarium salt for mild cases. Meds only if it keeps spreading in clean water.
Salt-grain white spots; darting and rubbing ("flashing")	Ich (white spot)	Temperature drop, stress; contagious	Slowly raise to 82-84 F (28-29 C) over a day or two, aquarium salt, ich med if it persists. Treat past the last spot.
Pinecone look - belly swollen, scales standing out (from above)	Dropsy	Internal organ failure / deep infection	Clean warm water, Epsom salt; prognosis is guarded. Try, keep him comfortable, forgive yourself if he doesn't make it.
Floating, sinking, tilting, tumbling sideways	Swim bladder / constipation	Overfeeding, dry pellets that swell	Fast 2-3 days, then one blanched, skinned pea. Usually resolves in a few days. The easiest to fix.

Keep a small first-aid kit ready before you need it: a liquid test kit, dechlorinator, aquarium salt (mild bacterial/parasitic issues), Epsom salt (bloating, dropsy, popeye), a betta-safe antibacterial med, an ich/anti-parasite med, and a small spare heater. A keeper who tests, changes water on schedule, feeds carefully, and holds the temperature steady will rarely open it.

Weekly Maintenance Card (print and tape near the tank)

Every day (30 seconds): active & alert? · fins open & flowing? · eating with interest? · no spots, fuzz, or bloat? · thermometer 78-80 F? · water clear, surface clean? · feed 2-3 pellets (skip Sundays).

Every week (~20 min): 25% water change · dechlorinate + temperature-match new water · gravel-vacuum a section · wipe inside glass · test: ammonia 0, nitrite 0, nitrate under 20 ppm.

Every month: check filter flow · rinse media in old tank water only · check heater/thermometer accuracy · trim plants.

Myths That Kill Bettas

- "A bowl or cup is fine." No. Minimum 5 gallons (19 L). Small water swings to toxic and cold too fast to survive long.
 - "They don't need a heater." Wrong - they're tropical and need a steady 78-80 F. Room temperature is too cold and swings.
 - "You don't need to cycle - just add the fish." This is what kills the most fish. Cycle the tank first (4-6 weeks), or do a careful fish-in cycle with daily testing.
 - "Plant-vase tanks are self-cleaning and bettas eat the roots." Deadly myth. Bettas are carnivores and the roots don't clean anything. They starve and sit in poison.
 - "Let the tap water sit out overnight to make it safe." Doesn't work - most water is treated with chloramine, which doesn't gas off. Always use dechlorinator.
 - "He begs, so he's hungry - feed more." Overfeeding bloats the fish and fouls the water. 2-3 pellets twice a day, fasting day weekly.
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That's the pack. Your first job, before any fish: set up the 5-gallon (19 L) tank with a heater and a gentle filter, then cycle it for those few weeks until ammonia and nitrite hold at zero. Do that and you've done the hardest part of betta keeping before the fish ever arrives. When you've got a calm, vibrant betta cruising a tank you cycled yourself, I'd love to hear about it - and in a couple of emails I'll tell you how a quick word from you helps this book reach the next nervous new owner standing at the store with a fish in a cup.

Healthy water makes a healthy betta,

Nora Aldridge