

DIY BETTA PROJECTS

20 Fun Tank Upgrades Using Stuff You Already Have at Home

— — —

By Muntaseer Rahman (Owner of AcuarioPets.com)

Zero cost. Maximum betta personality.

DIY Betta Projects

20 Fun Tank Upgrades Using Stuff You Already Have at Home

© 2026 AcuárioPets. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced without written permission.

acuariopets.com

Table of Contents

Introduction

Before You Start: Safety Basics

Quick Reference: All 20 Projects at a Glance

Project 1: The Upside-Down Bottle Cave

Project 2: Floating Ping Pong Ball Game

Project 3: Tunnel from a Toilet Paper Roll

Project 4: Hanging Leaf Hammock (DIY Style)

Project 5: Reflective Toy (Mirror Exercise)

Project 6: Terracotta Pot Hideout

Project 7: Moss Ball Play Zone

Project 8: Floating Cork Log

Project 9: Feeding Ring from Airline Tubing

Project 10: Spoon Target Training

Project 11: Bead Maze Obstacle Course

Project 12: Sand Digging Patch

Project 13: Live Plant Jungle Gym

Project 14: Straw Maze

Project 15: Color Target Training

Project 16: Bubble Nest Station

Project 17: Coconut Shell Hut

Project 18: Laser Pointer Chase

Project 19: Almond Leaf Hideout

Project 20: The Blanket Test (Curiosity Game)

Final Thoughts

Introduction

Let me be honest with you. My betta was bored out of his mind.

He'd just float there, staring at the glass like he was contemplating the meaning of life. No movement. No personality. Just vibes—and not the good kind.

His name is Sheldon. And for a while, I thought he was just a lazy fish. Turns out, he was an under-stimulated fish. Big difference.

So I started messing around. Grabbed random stuff from around the house—bottles, toilet rolls, ping pong balls, leaves from a fake plant my mom doesn't know is missing—and turned his tank into something worth living in.

This book is 20 of those projects. None of them cost me anything. Most took under 10 minutes. And every single one made Sheldon act like a completely different fish.

You don't need to be crafty. You don't need tools. You just need a betta who deserves better than staring at the same rock all day.

One thing before we start—always make sure anything you put in the tank is clean, chemical-free, and doesn't have sharp edges. Bettas have delicate fins and fragile egos. Handle both with care.

Each project includes what you need, step-by-step instructions, and my honest experience with Sheldon. Some worked instantly. Some took a few days. One made him angry. You'll see.

A few universal rules to keep in mind: never use soap or chemicals to clean anything that goes in the tank. Always rinse with hot water. Avoid painted or coated materials—if paint chips off into the water, that's toxic. And if your betta looks stressed by any project, remove it immediately. These are supposed to be fun, not therapy sessions for traumatized fish.

Also—and this is important—don't do all 20 at once. That's not enrichment, that's chaos. Pick one or two, try them for a week, then rotate. Variety is the key. Not overload. Let's get into it.

Before You Start: Safety Basics

Before we jump into the projects, let's talk about keeping your betta safe. These are simple rules, but they matter. A fun project that hurts your fish isn't fun at all.

Materials to Avoid

Never put anything metallic in the tank. Metal rusts, leaches chemicals, and can poison your water faster than you'd think. This includes wire, paper clips, staples, and anything with a metallic coating.

Avoid anything painted, varnished, or coated unless it's specifically labeled aquarium-safe. Regular house paint, spray paint, nail polish—none of these belong in a fish tank. If you wouldn't put it in your mouth, don't put it in your betta's home.

Stay away from sharp or brittle plastics. If a material cracks easily or has rough seams, it can cut delicate betta fins. Always do the pantyhose test—drag a piece of nylon stocking across the surface. If it snags, your betta's fins will too.

How to Clean Items Before Adding Them

Hot water is your best friend. Rinse everything in hot tap water—no soap, no detergent, no vinegar unless you rinse extremely well afterward. Soap residue is invisible and can wreck your water chemistry.

For porous materials like wood, terracotta, or coconut shell, boiling is the gold standard. Ten to twenty minutes in boiling water kills bacteria, removes dust, and prepares the item for aquarium life.

For plastics, a thorough hot water rinse and a visual inspection for rough edges is usually enough. If it smells like chemicals, don't use it.

Signs Your Betta Is Stressed

If your betta clamps his fins tight against his body, that's stress. If he hides and won't come out for food, that's stress. If he darts around frantically or starts losing color, something is wrong.

Remove the new item immediately if you see any of these signs. Give him a day to recover. Then try again with something different. Not every betta likes every project. Sheldon hated the straw maze the first time. Loved it the second time. Fish are weird like that.

The Golden Rule

When in doubt, take it out. It's always better to remove something and try again later than to leave it in and hope for the best. Your betta can't tell you something is wrong—you have to watch for it.

Okay. Safety lecture over. Now the fun part.

Quick Reference: All 20 Projects at a Glance

Here's a quick cheat sheet so you can pick a project based on what you have lying around and how much time you've got.

Project 1: Upside-Down Bottle Cave — Empty soda bottle, scissors, pebbles. Time: 10 minutes. A permanent hideout your betta will claim as his own.

Project 2: Floating Ping Pong Ball — Clean ping pong ball. Time: 1 minute. A surface toy that triggers chasing and flaring behavior.

Project 3: Toilet Paper Roll Tunnel — Empty roll, scissors. Time: 10 minutes. A temporary tunnel that lasts a few days of betta joy.

Project 4: Hanging Leaf Hammock — Fake silk leaf, suction cup, glue. Time: 5 minutes. A resting spot near the surface for lazy afternoons.

Project 5: Mirror Exercise — Small hand mirror. Time: 2 minutes per session. A daily flaring workout that builds confidence.

Project 6: Terracotta Pot Hideout — Small terracotta pot. Time: 5 minutes plus overnight soak. A sturdy, natural-looking cave.

Project 7: Moss Ball Play Zone — Marimo moss ball. Time: 30 seconds. A pushable, rollable, rest-on-able enrichment ball.

Project 8: Floating Cork Log — Natural wine cork. Time: 15 minutes including boiling. A floating shelter near the surface.

Project 9: Feeding Ring — Airline tubing. Time: 2 minutes. Keeps food in one spot for cleaner feeding.

Project 10: Spoon Target Training — Plastic spoon. Time: 2 minutes daily for a week. Teaches your betta to follow a target.

Project 11: Bead Maze — Large plastic beads, fishing line, suction cups. Time: 5 minutes. A weaving obstacle course.

Project 12: Sand Digging Patch — Small dish, aquarium sand. Time: 5 minutes plus rinsing. A foraging station for natural behavior.

Project 13: Live Plant Jungle Gym — Aquarium plants. Time: 15 minutes to arrange. A layered swimming playground.

Project 14: Straw Maze — Plastic straws. Time: 3 minutes. A navigable obstacle course with a food reward.

Project 15: Color Target Training — Toothpick, bright bead. Time: 2 minutes daily for a week. Advanced trick training.

Project 16: Bubble Nest Station — Small plastic lid. Time: 1 minute. A dedicated nest-building zone.

Project 17: Coconut Shell Hut — Half coconut shell. Time: 30 minutes including boiling and carving. A luxury natural hideout.

Project 18: Laser Pointer Chase — Laser pointer. Time: 2 minutes per session. A predator-prey chase game.

Project 19: Clothespin Perch — Wooden clothespin. Time: 15 minutes including boiling. An ugly but beloved resting ledge.

Project 20: Blanket Test — Dark cloth or towel. Time: 5 minutes. A curiosity game that exercises your betta's brain.

Project 1: The Upside-Down Bottle Cave



I was sipping soda one day, staring at my betta just floating there like he'd given up on life. I looked at the empty bottle in my hand and thought—"Bro, you need a cave."

Bettas are naturally territorial. In the wild, they claim little pockets of space near plants, rocks, and submerged debris. A cave gives them that—a private little zone where they feel safe and in control.

Here's what I did.

Step 1: Grab a small plastic bottle

One of those 250 ml soda bottles is perfect. Don't go for anything huge—this is a cave, not a garage. You want your betta to feel snug, not lost.

Step 2: Cut the bottom off

Use scissors or a cutter. Cut it clean about 2–3 inches from the base. You'll now have a cup-shaped cave. Don't worry about making it perfect—Sheldon doesn't care about aesthetics.

⚠ Don't leave sharp edges. We're making a hangout, not a betta trap. Run your finger along every edge before it goes anywhere near the tank.

Step 3: Smooth the edges

I used a nail file like some weird fish dad. You can also use sandpaper. Just make sure it's smooth enough that your betta won't snag his fins. Even a tiny rough spot can tear those flowing tails.

Step 4: Make it sink

Bottles float. Bettas don't need a flying saucer. So I hot glued a couple of small pebbles to the top (which becomes the base when flipped). You can also wedge some aquarium-safe rocks inside. Just make sure nothing is loose enough to fall on your fish.

Step 5: Place it in a chill corner of the tank

Pick a quiet area near plants or driftwood. Somewhere your fish can sneak into when he's in introvert mode. Away from the filter current, if possible.

The Result?

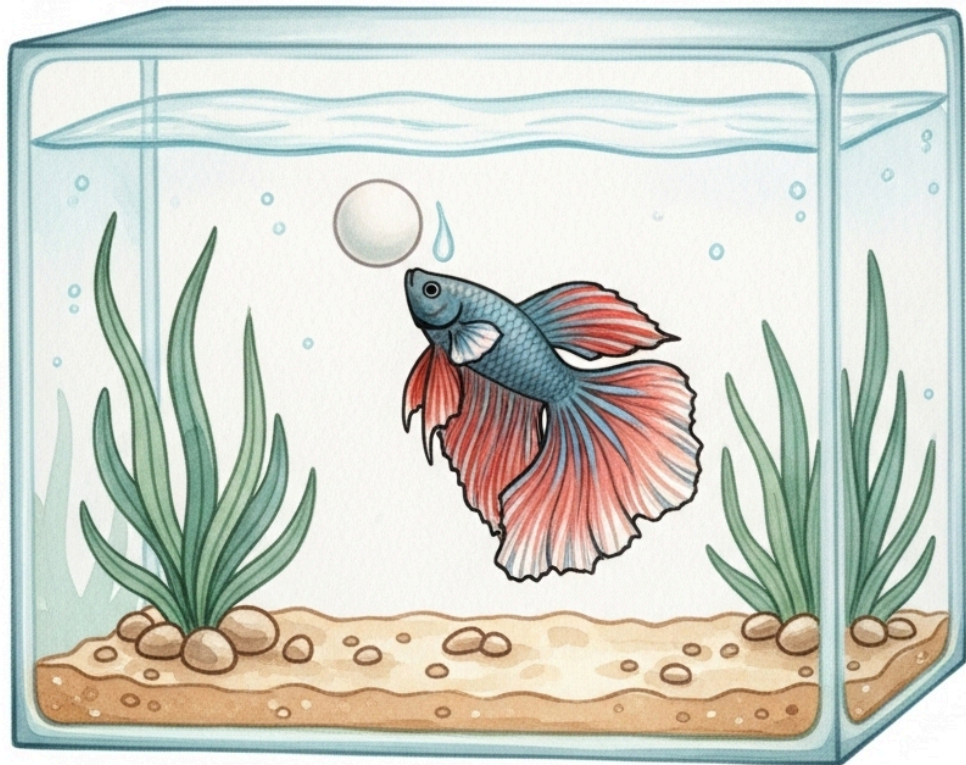
My betta went in. Then peeked out like a villain in a spy movie. Now it's his go-to nap spot. And it cost me exactly zero bucks.

He sometimes sits in there for half an hour, just chilling. I respect the energy.

Pro Tip

If you want to make the cave more natural-looking, glue a small piece of java moss or an aquarium plant onto the outside. After a few weeks, the plant grows over it and it looks like a real cave instead of a chopped-up soda bottle. Sheldon doesn't care either way. But guests might.

Project 2: Floating Ping Pong Ball Game



One day I noticed my betta just staring at the glass like he was waiting for Netflix to load. Total boredom.

Bettas are curious fish. They notice new things in their environment immediately. So anything that moves on the water surface is basically prime entertainment for them.

So I grabbed a ping pong ball. Clean one. No logos, no gunk—just a plain, smooth, white ball. I floated it on the water.

At first, he gave it the side-eye. Then he flared. Then he started chasing it like it owed him money.

Step 1: Rinse the ball

Took a new ping pong ball. Rinsed it well in hot water. Didn't use soap—just hot water and a cloth. Bettas don't need bubbles unless they make them. Soap residue can mess with the water chemistry, so skip it entirely.

Step 2: Drop it in

Dropped it gently onto the surface of the tank. It floated, obviously, because physics. The key is to let it sit there without forcing interaction. Let the betta come to it.

Step 3: Tap and teach

Tapped the ball lightly with my finger each day. My betta, being nosy, swam over to check. After a couple of days, he was following it like a dog chasing a treat. He'd nudge it with his nose and then dart away like he'd done something brave.

Step 4: Reward time

I gave him a tiny food reward when he interacted with it. Positive vibes. This reinforces the behavior and makes him associate the ball with good things.

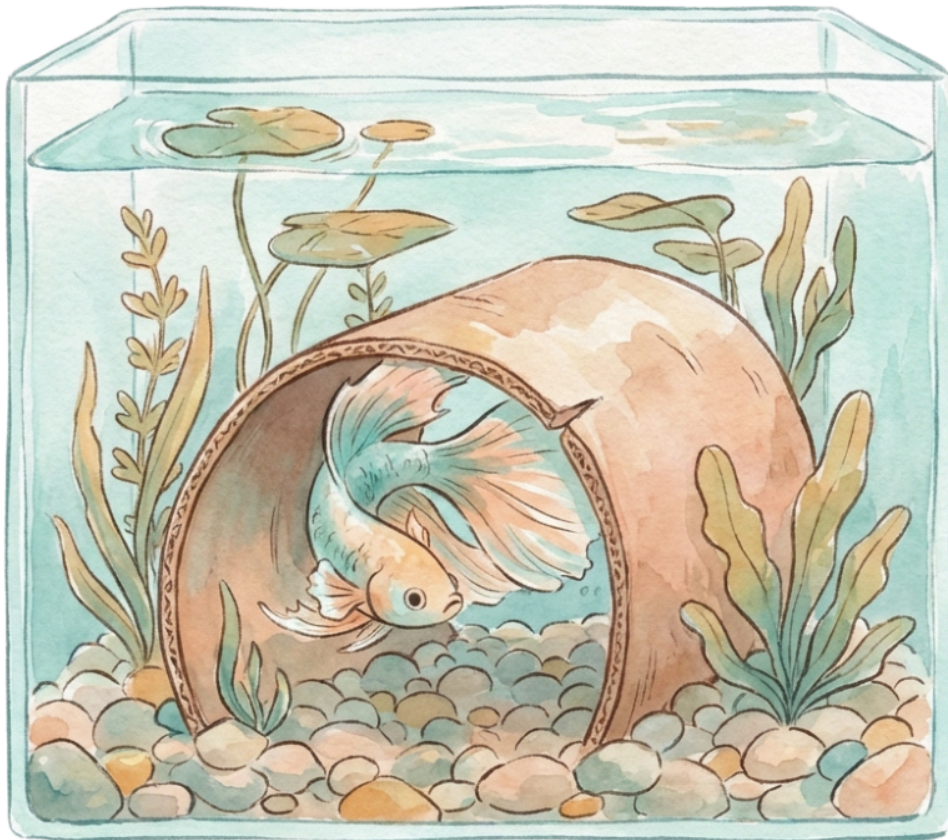
Now it's part of his routine. It's silly, it's cheap, and it works. Just don't leave it in 24/7—some bettas get stressed if there's a constant foreign object on the surface. I leave it in for an hour or two, then take it out.

Mine treats it like his morning workout. Better than a gym membership.

Pro Tip

If your betta completely ignores the ball, try a colored one instead of white. Some bettas respond better to yellow or orange. You can also try a slightly smaller ball—table tennis practice balls come in different sizes. The novelty factor is what gets them interested, so experiment.

Project 3: Tunnel from a Toilet Paper Roll



This one's so simple, I almost didn't try it. But boredom hit, and there it was—a lonely toilet paper roll staring at me from the bin.

I figured, "Why not?" Turns out, it became Sheldon's favorite hideout for a whole week. He treated it like his personal VIP lounge.

Step 1: Steal a roll before someone throws it out

I grabbed the last bit of a toilet paper roll before my wife could toss it. She gave me that look. I said, “It’s for Sheldon.” That somehow made it okay.

Step 2: Slice it

Cut the roll in half lengthwise. You’ll get two little taco-shaped shells. That’s the base of your tunnel. No need for perfect lines—bettas don’t care about craftsmanship.

Step 3: Shape it with water

Soak it in warm water for 2–3 minutes. It gets floppy fast. Gently bend it into a nice curve and let it dry. I placed mine under a fan while watching Netflix. Multi-tasking at its finest.

Step 4: Seal it up (or don’t)

If you want to be fancy, add a thin layer of aquarium-safe silicone inside. If not, just skip it. Mine held up fine for several days without glue. I like low effort, and Sheldon doesn’t judge.

Step 5: Drop it in and watch the drama unfold

Place the tunnel near a plant or driftwood. At first, Sheldon swam by like, “What is this nonsense?” Ten minutes later, he slid in and refused to come out. Instant favorite.

It’s not forever. It’s cardboard. It’ll get soggy and need replacing in a few days. But for that stretch of pure betta joy? Totally worth a toilet roll and 10 minutes of your time.

Pro Tip

Want to make it last longer? Coat the outside with a thin layer of aquarium-safe silicone sealant and let it cure completely before putting it in the tank. This waterproofs the cardboard and can extend its life from a few days to a couple of weeks. Still not permanent, but way better than raw cardboard disintegrating in your water.

Project 4: Hanging Leaf Hammock (DIY Style)



I always thought those leaf hammocks online were just a marketing gimmick. Like, who buys a fake leaf for their fish? But one lazy afternoon, I thought—what if I just made one myself?

One fake leaf, a suction cup, and bam—Sheldon now lounges like a king near the surface. I think he genuinely believes he owns the tank now.

Bettas are surface breathers. They go up to gulp air regularly. Having a resting spot near the top means they don't have to work as hard. It's basically an energy-saving device.

Step 1: Find a fake leaf

Look for a smooth, soft, non-plastic-feeling leaf. Silk plant leaves work best. I cut one from an old fake vine my mom used in a flower pot. Don't tell her. She still hasn't noticed.

Step 2: Wash it

Soak it in hot water, then rinse well. I even gave it a tiny scrub with my fingers. Just to be sure no weird stuff goes into the tank. Dyes, dust, mystery coatings—wash it all off.

Step 3: Stick it to a suction cup

Grab a clean suction cup. Preferably the kind with a little hook or hole. Use aquarium-safe glue to attach the bottom of the leaf to it. I pressed it in with a toothpick like a surgeon. Steady hands.

Step 4: Place it near the surface

Stick it near the top of the tank, just below the surface. Not too close that the leaf pokes out of the water, not too far down that it defeats the purpose. Think comfy recliner level.

Step 5: Wait for the magic

Sheldon swam past it a few times with major suspicion. Then one day, I caught him just floating there, chin on the leaf like he was sunbathing. Zero shame. Maximum comfort.

It's simple, cheap, and actually useful. And if your betta ignores it? Just act like you meant it as décor. Nobody has to know.

Pro Tip

Place the hammock about half an inch below the waterline. Too deep and it's not a resting spot—it's just a random leaf in the middle of the tank. Too high and the leaf

sticks out of the water, which is useless. The sweet spot is close enough to the surface that your betta can rest on it and breathe without swimming up.

Project 5: Reflective Toy (Mirror Exercise)



The first time I held up a mirror near my betta's tank, he flared so hard I thought he was about to throw fins. It was like watching a soap opera showdown.

But here's the thing—it's actually good for them in short bursts. Flaring exercises their gill muscles, gets blood flowing, and provides mental stimulation. Think of it as betta yoga.

Step 1: Find a small mirror

A small hand mirror works. I used the one my wife uses for threading. She didn't know. I returned it. No fish slime involved. Promise.

Step 2: Hold it outside the tank

Don't put it in the tank. Just hold it next to the glass so your betta sees his reflection. He'll instantly think it's another fish invading his space. The drama begins immediately.

Step 3: Set a timer

One to two minutes is enough. I use my phone. Any longer, and they might stress out instead of strutting around like a boss. This is exercise, not punishment.

Step 4: Watch the ego grow

Flaring, darting, circling—he puts on a full show. Then it ends. Mirror disappears. He wins the battle. Every time. Confidence level: through the roof.

Step 5: Once a day, max

This isn't Netflix. Don't binge it. It's a short, daily burst of action. Like a morning coffee for your betta's soul. Skip a day here and there—it's not a gym membership.

It's fun, it's free, and it turns your betta into a mini gladiator. But like all battles, it should be rare. Too much and you'll end up with a stressed-out drama king.

Pro Tip

If your betta seems more stressed than stimulated—clamped fins, hiding after the mirror is removed, or refusing food—skip this one entirely. Not every betta enjoys the mirror game. Some are fighters, some are lovers. Sheldon is firmly in the fighter category, but yours might not be. Read the fish, not the instructions.

Project 6: Terracotta Pot Hideout



I had a small terracotta pot sitting on my balcony doing nothing. Just collecting dust and looking sad. It was meant for a plant that died three months ago. We don't talk about that plant.

Sheldon was also doing nothing and looking sad. So I introduced them. Best match I ever made.

Terracotta is one of the safest materials you can put in a fish tank. It's natural, inert, and doesn't leach chemicals. Plus, the reddish-brown color looks great against green plants.

Step 1: Grab a small terracotta pot

The little ones—like 2 to 3 inches—are perfect. If it looks like something a fairy would garden in, you've got the right size. Anything bigger and your betta might feel exposed inside it, which defeats the purpose.

Step 2: Check for sharp edges

Run your finger along the rim and the drain hole. If anything feels rough, sand it down with fine sandpaper. Bettas have delicate fins and zero respect for danger. They'll swim into anything.

Step 3: Soak it overnight

Terracotta is porous. Soak it in dechlorinated water overnight to leach out any dust or residue. I dropped it in a bucket and forgot about it until morning. Worked perfectly. Some people boil it for extra safety—also fine.

Step 4: Lay it on its side

Don't stand it upright—that's a trap, not a hideout. Lay it sideways so the opening faces out. Now your betta has a cozy little cave to swim into and out of freely.

Step 5: Nestle it into the substrate

Push it gently into the gravel so it doesn't roll around. Sheldon inspected it for about thirty seconds, swam a full circle around it, then parked himself inside like he'd been living there for years. Didn't even look back.

It's sturdy, natural-looking, and your betta will act like he just signed a lease.

Pro Tip

If the drain hole at the bottom of the pot is too small for your betta to swim through, you can widen it with a file or just plug it with a small piece of filter sponge. Some people

also stack two pots to create a multi-level hideout. Sheldon doesn't need a mansion, but your betta might have higher standards.

Project 7: Moss Ball Play Zone



If you've got a marimo moss ball lying around—or even a fake one—this is the laziest enrichment project you'll ever do.

Drop it in. That's basically the whole project. But let me tell you how Sheldon turned it into a full-on sport.

Step 1: Get a moss ball (real or fake)

Real marimo balls are great because they're soft, safe, and naturally round. They also help with water quality by absorbing small amounts of nitrates. Fake ones work too—just make sure they're aquarium-safe and not shedding fibers like a cheap sweater.

Step 2: Rinse it

Even if it's been in water before, give it a good rinse in dechlorinated water. Just squeeze it gently a few times like a sponge. Don't wring it out aggressively—it's a moss ball, not a dishcloth.

Step 3: Drop it on the tank floor

No placement strategy needed. Just toss it in. It'll sink and sit there looking round and unbothered. Kind of like Sheldon on his lazy days.

Step 4: Watch your betta discover physics

Sheldon nudged it with his nose. It rolled. He froze. Nudged it again. It rolled again. I could see his tiny brain processing this breakthrough in real time.

Now he pushes it around the tank like a soccer player on a slow day. Sometimes he rests on top of it. Sometimes he flares at it like it said something rude. It's a whole relationship.

Zero effort. Maximum entertainment. For both of you.

Pro Tip

If you're using a real marimo moss ball, rotate it every few days so all sides get light. They're slow growers and can develop brown spots if one side always faces the substrate. Also, give it a gentle squeeze during water changes to flush out any trapped debris. Think of it as giving it a spa day. Sheldon watches this process with deep suspicion every time.

Project 8: Floating Cork Log



I was opening a bottle one evening and the cork popped off. I almost tossed it. Then I looked at the tank and thought—“What if?”

Turns out, bettas love a good floating log. And a natural cork is basically a free version of those overpriced betta logs you see online for way too much money.

Step 1: Find a natural wine cork

Has to be real cork. Not the plastic kind—those are imposters and your betta will know. Natural cork is porous, lightweight, and completely safe for aquarium use.

Step 2: Boil it

Drop it in boiling water for about 10 minutes. This kills any bacteria and helps it absorb water so it floats just below the surface instead of sitting on top like a buoy. You want it waterlogged just enough to be useful.

Step 3: Carve a tiny channel (optional)

If you're feeling ambitious, use a knife to carve a small groove along the bottom of the cork. This gives your betta a little nook to rest under. I carved mine while watching a cooking show. Multi-talented, clearly.

Step 4: Float it

Just place it on the surface. It should bob slightly below the waterline—just enough for Sheldon to swim under and feel like he's got a roof over his head. He uses it as a resting spot, a hiding spot, and once I swear he was using it as a pillow.

Don't judge him. He's had a long day of doing nothing.

Pro Tip

Natural cork releases tannins into the water over time, which can turn the water slightly amber. This is actually beneficial—tannins have mild antibacterial and antifungal properties, and bettas in the wild live in tannin-rich waters. If you don't like the color though, pre-soak the cork for a few days in a separate container and change the water daily until it stops leaching.

Project 9: Feeding Ring from Airline Tubing



If your betta's food ends up everywhere except where he can find it, this one's for you.

Pellets drift. Flakes scatter. And your betta ends up doing laps around the tank trying to find dinner. It's inefficient and kind of sad. So I made a floating feeding ring.

Step 1: Cut a piece of airline tubing

About 4–5 inches is enough. Standard aquarium airline tubing works—the clear, flexible kind you probably already have lying in a drawer somewhere. Cut it with scissors.

Step 2: Make a circle

Bend the tubing into a loop and push one end into the other. If it won't stay, use a tiny dab of aquarium-safe silicone or a small connector piece. I just jammed the ends together and it held. Elegance is overrated.

Step 3: Float it in a corner

Place the ring on the water surface near one side of the tank. That's your betta's new dining area. Away from the filter output so the food doesn't get blown out.

Step 4: Drop food inside the ring

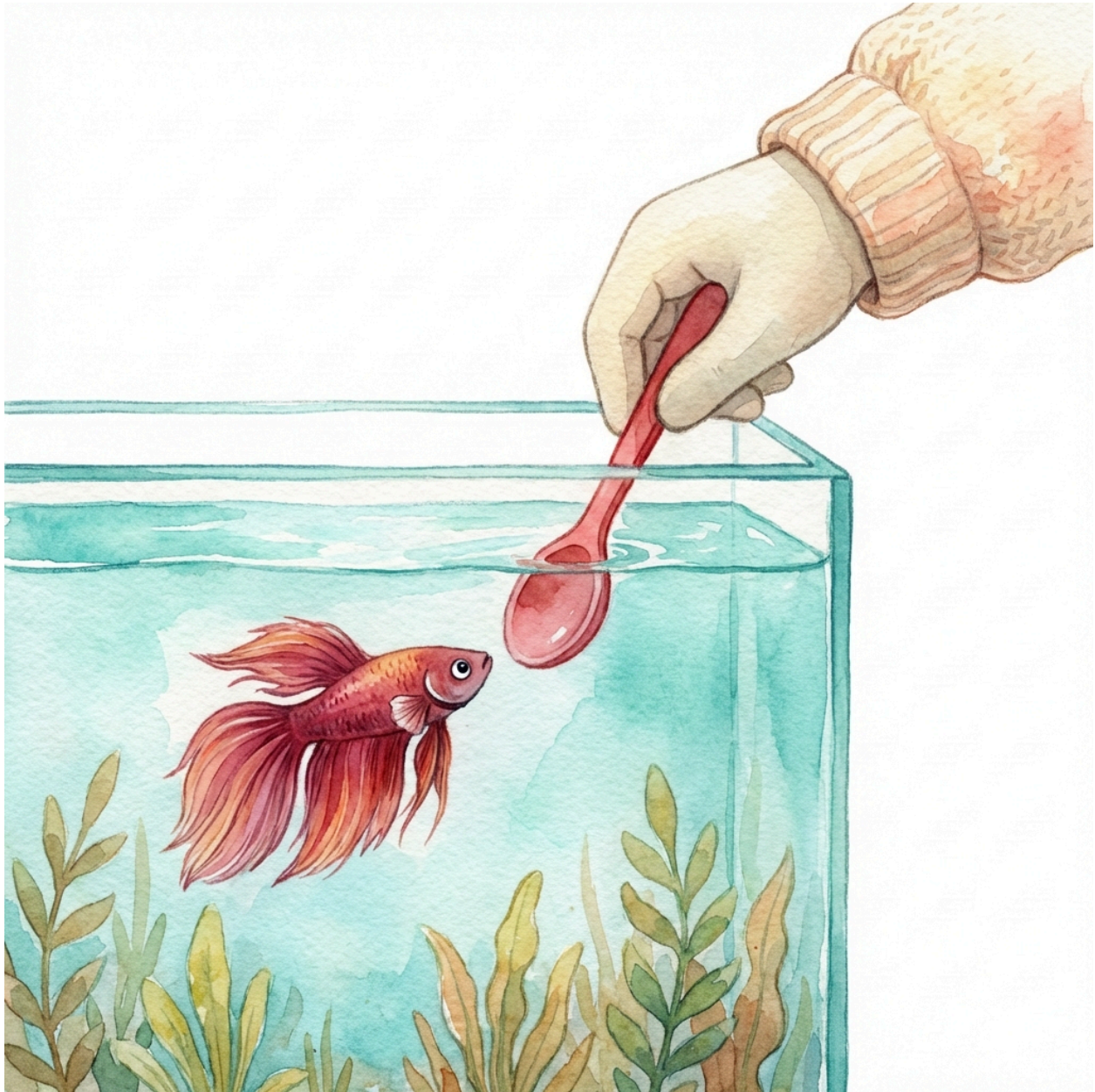
Pellets stay in the ring instead of drifting around the tank. Sheldon figured this out in about two feedings. Now he swims straight to the ring every time I walk up. Pavlov would be proud.

It keeps the tank cleaner, makes feeding easier, and honestly—it looks kinda cute watching him eat in his designated zone like a gentleman.

Pro Tip

If you feed frozen or live foods, the ring works even better because it prevents bloodworms from sinking into hard-to-reach gravel corners. Less wasted food means less ammonia buildup, which means better water quality. It's not just enrichment—it's actually practical fish keeping. Sheldon gets his food faster, and I clean the tank less. Everybody wins.

Project 10: Spoon Target Training



This is where things get a little wild.

I taught Sheldon to follow a spoon. Yes. A spoon. He's not a dog. But he acts like one now. And honestly, it's one of the most rewarding things I've done with this hobby.

Step 1: Grab a plastic spoon

Not metal—plastic. Something light and colorful if possible. I used a red one from a birthday party leftover stash. Red seems to get bettas' attention, probably because they associate bright colors with other fish.

Step 2: Dip it in the water

Hold it just under the surface near your betta. Don't shove it at him—that's not training, that's bullying. Just let it exist. Be patient. Let him come to you.

Step 3: Wait for curiosity

Sheldon stared at it for a solid minute. Then he slowly swam over and tapped it with his nose. I felt like a proud parent at a school recital. Tiny moment, huge feeling.

Step 4: Move it slowly

Once he's comfortable with the spoon, drag it slowly through the water. If he follows, reward with a tiny pellet. If he doesn't, try again tomorrow. Consistency is more important than speed.

Step 5: Build a routine

After a few days, Sheldon follows the spoon like a loyal sidekick. Left, right, circles—he's all in. Two minutes a day, tops. Any more and he loses interest. Keep it short. Keep it fun.

People think bettas are dumb. They're not. They're just waiting for someone to show up and teach them something.

Pro Tip

Keep training sessions at the same time each day. Bettas learn routine faster than you'd expect. Sheldon knows it's spoon time when I sit down after his morning feeding. He swims to the front of the tank and waits. If you're inconsistent, the training takes longer. Also, always end on a success—even if it's a small one. You want your betta walking away from each session feeling like a champion.

Project 11: Bead Maze Obstacle Course



This one takes about five minutes to set up and looks way more impressive than it should.

I strung some large plastic beads onto fishing line and turned Sheldon's tank into a mini obstacle course. He weaves through it like he's training for something important.

Step 1: Grab some large beads

Big ones. Like the kind toddlers use for craft projects. Smooth, round, no paint that chips off. If it looks like it could survive a kid's mouth, it's probably aquarium-safe. Avoid anything metallic or glittery.

Step 2: Thread them onto fishing line

Use standard monofilament fishing line. Thread 3–4 beads, leaving gaps between them. You want a loose, dangly look—not a tight necklace. The gaps are where your betta swims through.

Step 3: Attach to suction cups

Tie one end of the line to a suction cup and stick it near the top of the tank wall. Let the beaded line dangle loosely downward. You can add a second suction cup at the bottom to create a vertical or diagonal run.

Step 4: Watch the weaving begin

Sheldon swam through the gaps like he was doing agility training. In and out, over and under. Sometimes he'd pause between beads like he was catching his breath. I'm not saying he's athletic, but he's got better coordination than some people I know.

Rearrange the beads every week or two to keep things fresh. Move the suction cups to different spots. Boredom is the enemy—novelty is the cure.

Pro Tip

Use different colored beads to see if your betta has a preference. Sheldon seems more interested in red and yellow beads than blue ones. It's not exactly a scientific study, but it's fun to test. You can also hang multiple lines at different angles to create a web-like obstacle. Just make sure the gaps are wide enough—your betta should be swimming through them, not getting stuck.

Project 12: Sand Digging Patch



Not a lot of people know this, but bettas like to nose around in sand. It's a natural foraging behavior. In the wild, they sift through soft substrates looking for tiny organisms.

So I gave Sheldon a tiny sand patch in his gravel-bottom tank. It's like giving him his own little beach vacation.

Step 1: Get a small container

A shallow ceramic dish, a jar lid, or even a clean bottle cap works. Something that sits flat on the tank floor and won't tip over. Nothing tall—we want a patch, not a bucket.

Step 2: Fill it with fine aquarium sand

Rinse the sand first—like, a lot. Keep rinsing until the water runs clear. Nobody wants a cloudy tank because they were lazy with sand prep. I rinsed mine in a colander for about five minutes. Overkill? Maybe. Clean tank? Definitely.

Step 3: Place it on the tank floor

Nestle the dish into your gravel so it doesn't wobble. You want it stable. Sheldon doesn't need an earthquake while he's on his little beach.

Step 4: Drop a treat on the sand

Place a bloodworm or a pellet right on top of the sand. Your betta will come over, nose around, and start pushing the sand grains around looking for food. It's foraging behavior and it's genuinely entertaining to watch.

Sheldon now checks his sand patch every morning like he's reading the newspaper. Always looking for something new.

Pro Tip

Bury a bloodworm slightly under the sand surface. Your betta will have to dig a little to find it, which is closer to natural foraging behavior. It takes longer, engages their brain more, and makes feeding time an activity instead of just a reflex. Don't bury it too deep though—this is enrichment, not an archaeological dig. Half a centimeter is plenty.

Project 13: Live Plant Jungle Gym



If you've got live plants in your tank—or even a couple of cheap ones from the pet store—you can arrange them into something your betta will actually use.

Most people just shove plants in randomly. Which is fine. But with a little thought, you can turn them into a playground.

Step 1: Pick your plants

Anubias, java fern, or hornwort are great. They're low-maintenance, betta-safe, and grow without drama. If you're using fake plants, go with silk—not hard plastic. Hard plastic can rip betta fins faster than you think.

Step 2: Create layers

Put tall plants at the back, medium ones in the middle, and short ones up front. You're building a layered canopy—not a wall of green. Think forest, not hedge.

Step 3: Leave swimming lanes

Don't cram everything together. Bettas need room to swim through, over, and around the plants. Sheldon loves weaving between stems like he's in an action movie. If there's no room to weave, he just sits there looking annoyed.

Step 4: Add a resting ledge

Place a broad-leafed plant like anubias near the surface. Your betta can rest on it. It's basically a natural version of the leaf hammock from Project 4, except it grows on its own.

A well-planted tank isn't just enrichment. It's a vibe. Sheldon acts calmer, swims more, and honestly—the tank looks ten times better. Win-win.

Pro Tip

Rearrange the plants every month or so. Even small changes—moving one plant from the left to the right, adding a new stem—give your betta something new to explore. It's like rearranging furniture in a studio apartment. Same space, different energy. Sheldon spends the first hour after a rearrangement swimming through every gap like he's mapping the place.

Project 14: Straw Maze



Got some plastic straws lying around? Good. We're making a maze.

This one's goofy, takes about three minutes, and Sheldon treated it like an escape room he needed to solve.

Step 1: Grab 4–6 plastic straws

Standard drinking straws. Not paper—those dissolve in water and make a mess. Rinse them well to remove any dust or factory residue.

Step 2: Cut them to different lengths

Make some 2 inches, some 3 inches. You want variety so the maze has turns and dead ends. If they're all the same length, that's a hallway, not a maze.

Step 3: Stick them into the substrate

Push the straws vertically into the gravel in a zigzag pattern. Leave about an inch of space between each one—enough for your betta to weave through but narrow enough to feel like an actual maze.

Step 4: Drop food at the end

Put a pellet or bloodworm at the far end of the maze. Watch your betta navigate his way through like a little explorer. The food is the prize for solving it.

Sheldon got lost once. I could tell by the way he kept bumping into the same straw from the same angle. But he figured it out eventually. Smart fish. Mostly.

Pro Tip

Change the maze layout every few days. Once your betta memorizes the route, it stops being a challenge and starts being a commute. Shift the straws around, add one more, remove one—keep it unpredictable. Also, don't use bendy straws—the ribbed section can trap food debris and gets gross fast. Straight straws only.

Project 15: Color Target Training



Remember the spoon thing from Project 10? This is the advanced version. Graduation level.

I made a color target out of a toothpick and a bead, and now Sheldon taps it on command. Sort of. On good days.

Step 1: Get a toothpick and a bright bead

Red or orange works best—bettas notice warm colors way more than cool ones. Thread the bead onto the top of the toothpick. If it won't stay, a tiny drop of non-toxic glue does the job.

Step 2: Hold the target near your betta

Dip the bead end into the water, near your betta but not touching him. Just let it hang there. No sudden movements. Think of it like fishing—but the fish is the one who decides when to bite.

Step 3: Reward the tap

When he swims up and touches the bead with his nose—even accidentally—give him a pellet immediately. Timing matters. You want him to connect the tap with the treat. If you wait too long, he won't make the connection.

Step 4: Move the target around

Once he's got the idea, start placing the target in different spots. Left side. Right side. Near the bottom. He'll follow it like a little guided missile.

Step 5: Show off

Invite someone over and casually say, "Watch this." Then hold the target in the water and watch Sheldon tap it like a trained dolphin. The look on people's faces is priceless. Nobody expects a fish to do tricks.

It takes patience. Maybe a week of daily sessions. But once it clicks, your betta is basically performing on demand. Respect.

Pro Tip

Once your betta masters the single target, try introducing a second target with a different color bead. Hold both in the water and see if he consistently goes for the trained one. If he does, you've got yourself a fish that can distinguish colors on command. That's not a pet anymore. That's a research subject. Sheldon hasn't mastered two targets yet, but we're working on it. Slowly.

Project 16: Bubble Nest Station



Male bettas build bubble nests. It's their thing. They blow tiny air bubbles at the surface and cluster them together into a raft. It means they're healthy, comfortable, and possibly showing off to nobody in particular.

I gave Sheldon a dedicated spot to build his nests. It's like giving an artist a studio.

Step 1: Find a small plastic lid

A water bottle cap or a small jar lid works. Something that floats and gives a bit of surface coverage. This creates a calm, sheltered area on the water surface.

Step 2: Float it in a calm corner

Put the lid on the water surface in an area with low current. Near a sponge filter output or a quiet end of the tank. If the filter disturbs the surface too much, the bubbles pop before they form a nest. Sheldon prefers the left corner. He's particular.

Step 3: Add a floating plant (optional)

If you've got a bit of duckweed or a small floating plant, tuck it near the lid. It gives extra surface tension and makes the area feel more nest-worthy. Bettas seem to prefer building under something.

Step 4: Wait for construction to begin

Sheldon usually starts blowing bubbles under the lid within a day or two. It's slow, meditative, and honestly kind of relaxing to watch. He takes his architecture very seriously. No one taught him. He just knows.

You can't force a bubble nest. But you can create the perfect conditions for one. Think of yourself as the real estate developer. Sheldon handles the construction.

Pro Tip

Slightly warmer water encourages bubble nest building. If your tank is on the cooler side of the 76–82°F range, bumping it up a degree or two can help. Also, a happy betta builds more nests. So if your fish is building regularly, take it as a compliment. You're doing something right. Sheldon builds about once a week, and I choose to believe it's because he's content and not because he's plotting something.

Project 17: Coconut Shell Hut



If you've got half a coconut shell lying around—maybe from a cooking experiment or a smoothie phase—congratulations. You've got a luxury betta hideout.

Coconut shells are one of the most popular natural aquarium decorations. They're safe, they look great, and bettas absolutely love them.

Step 1: Get a coconut half

Crack a coconut, scoop out the meat, and keep one of the halves. Clean it thoroughly. Scrub out all the flesh with a stiff brush. You want shell only—no coconut meat rotting in your tank.

Step 2: Boil it

Boil the shell for about 15–20 minutes. This kills bacteria, removes oils, and softens any remaining bits inside. Your kitchen will smell like a tropical vacation. Consider it a bonus.

Step 3: Carve a doorway

Use a small saw or a strong knife to cut an opening on one side—big enough for your betta to swim in and out comfortably. Sand the edges smooth. You want a doorway, not a gauntlet.

Step 4: Sink it

Coconut shells are dense enough to sink on their own after boiling and waterlogging. If yours still floats, weigh it down with gravel inside until it stays put. Give it a day.

Step 5: Place and admire

Set it in the tank like you're placing furniture. Sheldon circled it three times before entering. Then he stayed for an hour. I think he was measuring for curtains.

It's natural, chemical-free, and makes the tank look like a tiny tropical island. Bonus points if you grow java moss on top of it. It'll look like a little hobbit house.

Pro Tip

Coconut shells release tannins just like the cork log in Project 8. If you want to avoid the tea-colored water, boil the shell multiple times before adding it. Some people soak it for a full week, changing the water daily. But honestly, tannins are good for bettas—they mimic their natural blackwater habitat and can help prevent infections. Sheldon's water has a slight tint and he's never been healthier.

Project 18: Laser Pointer Chase



Before you say anything—yes, this works. And no, it's not just for cats.

Sheldon chased a laser dot around the tank for a solid minute the first time I tried this. I almost fell off my chair laughing.

Step 1: Grab a laser pointer

Any basic one works. Red or green—doesn't matter. Just make sure you never point it directly at the fish. Their eyes are sensitive, and we're enriching, not blinding.

Step 2: Dim the room

Turn off the room lights or do this in the evening. The dot shows up way better on the tank floor and walls when it's dim. It also makes the whole thing feel more dramatic.

Step 3: Move the dot slowly

Shine the laser on the outside of the tank glass, low near the substrate. Move it slowly along the bottom. Your betta will track it like a predator stalking prey. Fast movements confuse them—slow and steady is better.

Step 4: Keep it short

One to two minutes. That's it. You don't want to exhaust your fish or frustrate him with something he can never catch. This is a burst of fun, not a marathon.

Sheldon gets genuinely excited for this. He does this little shimmy when he sees me pick up the pointer. I am not making this up.

Pro Tip

End every laser session by dropping a pellet where the dot was last visible. This gives your betta a “catch” at the end of the chase, which prevents frustration. Without a reward, some fish get stressed from chasing something they can never actually get. With the pellet, Sheldon thinks he won. Every single time. Undefeated champion in his own mind.

Project 19: Almond Leaf Hideout



This one isn't just enrichment. It's medicine, shelter, and décor rolled into one dried leaf.

I dropped an Indian almond leaf into Sheldon's tank on a whim. Within an hour, he was hiding under it like it was a blanket.

Within a day, the water had a slight amber tint. Within a week, his fins looked better than ever.

Step 1: Get a dried Indian almond leaf

You can find these online for cheap — they're sold as catappa leaves in most aquarium stores. One or two leaves is enough for a standard betta tank.

Make sure they're dried and untreated. No pesticides, no chemicals. Just a plain, crunchy, brown leaf.

Step 2: Rinse it

Give the leaf a quick rinse under warm water to remove any surface dust or debris. Don't scrub it hard — you want to keep the natural tannins intact. That's the whole point.

Step 3: Drop it in

Just place the leaf on the water surface. It'll float for a day or two, then gradually sink to the bottom as it absorbs water.

Some people pre-soak it in hot water to speed this up. I just toss it in and let nature do its thing.

Step 4: Watch Sheldon discover his new roof

The second the leaf started sinking, Sheldon was under it. He used it as a hiding spot, a resting surface, and at one point I swear he was sleeping on top of it.

The leaf curls slightly as it waterlogs, which creates a little canopy effect. It's like a natural tent.

Step 5: Let it do its thing

As the leaf breaks down over the next few weeks, it releases tannins into the water. The water turns slightly amber — this is normal and actually beneficial. Tannins have mild antibacterial and antifungal properties.

They mimic the blackwater environments bettas come from in the wild. It's like a spa treatment your fish didn't ask for but desperately needed.

Pro Tip

Replace the leaf every 3–4 weeks as it fully decomposes.

You'll notice it getting soft and falling apart — that's your cue. Some people leave the decomposing bits in as extra biofilm for shrimp or snails, but in a betta-only tank, it's cleaner to swap it out.

Sheldon gets a fresh leaf on the first of every month. He doesn't know that. But I like the routine.

Project 20: The Blanket Test (Curiosity Game)



This is the simplest thing in the entire book. And honestly, it might be the most entertaining.

I draped a dark cloth over one side of the tank. That's it. That's the whole project. Sheldon lost his mind.

Step 1: Grab a dark cloth or towel

Anything non-transparent. A dark t-shirt, a towel, a pillowcase—whatever’s nearby. Just make sure it doesn’t shed fibers or drip dye. Keep it on the outside of the tank—nothing goes in the water.

Step 2: Drape it over one side of the tank

Cover just one panel of the glass. Not the whole tank—that’ll stress him out. You want to block one side so your betta sees a sudden dark wall where there used to be light. It’s a visual change, not a blackout.

Step 3: Watch the investigation begin

Sheldon swam up to the covered side, flared at it, backed off, circled around, then came back for another look. He spent a good five minutes trying to figure out what happened to his view. Bettas don’t like unexplained changes. They need answers.

Step 4: Remove it after a few minutes

Take the cloth off. The light comes back. Your betta goes back to normal. But his brain has been working the whole time—processing the change, adapting, exploring.

Step 5: Switch sides next time

Next session, cover a different side. Or the back panel. Mix it up. The mystery is the whole point. If it’s always the same, it stops being enrichment and starts being furniture.

It’s not a toy. It’s not a gadget. It’s literally just a cloth. But to a betta, it’s the most confusing thing that’s ever happened. And confusion, in small doses, is enrichment.

Pro Tip

Try different colors and see how your betta reacts. Sheldon goes absolutely ballistic when I use a dark blue towel, but barely reacts to a white one. It could be the contrast against the tank light, or it could be that he has opinions about interior design. Either way, it’s a fun experiment. You can also try covering the top briefly—this dims the whole tank and creates a different kind of environmental shift. Just keep it very short.

Final Thoughts

Twenty projects. Zero dollars spent. And a betta who went from floating zombie to curious explorer.

None of these are complicated. You don't need special skills, fancy materials, or a degree in fish psychology. Just whatever's lying around your house and 10 minutes of spare time.

The whole point is stimulation. Bettas are smarter than people give them credit for. They notice new things. They remember patterns. They have preferences. Sheldon likes his terracotta pot more than the coconut shell. He prefers the ping pong ball over the moss ball. He has opinions.

If you try even three or four of these, you'll notice a difference. More activity. More personality. More of those little moments where you catch your fish doing something unexpected and you just have to stop and watch.

That's what makes the hobby worth it. Not the gear. Not the water parameters. The moments.

If you tried something from this book and your betta loved it—or hated it—I'd love to hear about it. Every betta is different. Sheldon is a cave-loving, spoon-following, mirror-flaring drama king. Yours might be a chill moss-ball-pusher who ignores the laser pointer entirely. That's fine. The goal isn't to copy my tank. It's to figure out what makes your fish come alive.

And if nothing works at first, don't give up. Sometimes it takes a few days for a betta to warm up to something new. They're suspicious by nature. It's part of their charm.

Try one. Try all. Your betta won't thank you—he's got an attitude—but he'll definitely show it.

• • •

For more betta care tips, tank guides, and DIY projects, visit acuariopets.com.