

FRESHWATER AQUARIUM CYCLING CARE SHEET

Goal: Grow beneficial bacteria that convert toxic fish waste into safer compounds **before** adding fish.

Step 1: Gather Essentials

- Aquarium, filter, heater, and dechlorinated water
- Water test kit (ammonia, nitrite, nitrate, pH): e.g API Freshwater Master Test Kit
- Ammonia source (pure ammonia without additives or fish food)

Step 2: Start the Cycle

1. Set up the tank with filter, heater (24–26 °C / 75–79 °F), and dechlorinated water.
2. Add ammonia to reach 2–3 ppm (test kit will confirm).
    - If using fish food: add a small pinch daily until ammonia reads 2–3 ppm.

Step 3: Monitor Progress

- Test water every 2–3 days:
    - Phase 1: Ammonia rises, then begins to fall.
    - Phase 2: Nitrite rises as ammonia drops, then eventually falls.
    - Phase 3: Nitrate appears and steadily increases.

Step 4: Maintain Bacteria

- Keep ammonia between 2–3 ppm by topping up as needed until nitrites start to rise.
- Keep the filter running and wet at all times.
- Maintain a stable temperature.

- Patience is key. Cycling is slow, but rushing it will harm fish.
- Never add fish until the cycle is complete.

Step 5: Confirm Completion

- The tank is fully cycled when:
    - Ammonia = 0 ppm
    - Nitrite = 0 ppm
    - Nitrate = 20–40 ppm

Reaching this stage typically takes 4–6 weeks (sometimes longer).

Step 6: Before Adding Fish

- Perform a 50% water change to lower nitrates.
- Double-check heater, filter, and water parameters are stable.

Step 7: Stock Fish Safely

- Add only a few fish at a time (not all at once as overcrowding can increase ammonia).
- Continue weekly testing to ensure ammonia and nitrite stay at 0.

A single ammonia spike can undo months of care and hundreds of dollars in fish, equipment, and time. Let's build a stable, thriving aquarium together before that happens. Book your personalized tank review today through the and protect what you've worked so hard to create: https://calendly.com/contact-exoaquavet/45min