

Don't Release Non-native Species!



Aquarium Hobbyists

Non-native plants and animals are those found outside the boundaries of their natural range. Most aquarium plants and animals available for sale in pet shops are non-natives that are imported predominantly from Central and South America, Africa and southeast Asia.

Unfortunately, a number of non-native aquarium pets and plants are released into the wild each year by hobbyists who discard them for a variety of reasons. As a result, in the Gulf Coast states, nine non-native plants and 88 non-native fishes have been found in local lakes, reservoirs, rivers and streams. Of these, all nine of the plants and over 20 of the fish species are now established in these waters. Although you may think you are doing them a favor, releasing aquarium plants or animals into local waters is not a good idea.

It Isn't Good for Your Pet - Non-native species often die soon after release because they are not able to function in their new environment. They commonly die due to predation, starvation, temperature extremes or parasites and diseases.

It Isn't Good for Us or the Environment - Once established, non-native species are difficult, if not impossible, to control or eradicate. These species compete with native species for habitat and food, transmit parasites or diseases, and have been known to hybridize with native species.

Some non-native species pose a physical or public health threat. Piranhas and freshwater stingrays are hazardous to swimmers. Cuban tree frogs commonly cut off electricity to homes and businesses by shorting out electrical wires. The caiman, an alligator-like reptile, can be dangerous to people and pets.

Hydrilla, parrot-feather, Brazilian waterweed and hygrophila are common aquarium plants that create ecological problems when released. Once established, these plants can decrease native plant diversity and degrade water quality. Dense plant growth interferes with the withdrawal of surface water used for power generation and agriculture, and inhibits recreational activities such as swimming and boating.

Alternatives to Release - There are alternative means for disposing of unwanted aquarium animals and plants.

- Return them to a local pet shop for resale or trade.
- Give them to another hobbyist, an aquarium in a professional office, a museum, or to a public aquarium or zoological park.
- Donate them to a public institution, such as a school, nursing home, hospital, or prison.
- Advertise to give them away for free. Many newspapers will run “free” ads at no charge.

If these options are not available, a veterinarian or fishery biologist can euthanize it (put it to sleep) with an anesthetic. You can also do this at home by placing the pet (including amphibians and reptiles) in a container of water and putting it into the freezer. Because cold temperatures are a natural anesthetic, this is considered a very humane method of euthanasia.

- Dispose of aquarium plants simply by leaving them in the sun to dry and then using in the yard as mulch or compost.

If you must give up your aquarium pets and plants, please consider their well-being as well as the potential impact on the environment. Please do not release any aquarium pet or plant.

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