

So began the second month. We'd already learned that tanks have to be cycled. And we had already gone through 4 fish. Fish keeping might very well be the hardest thing since finals week in college. We contemplated giving up the hobby, but my personalty wouldn't let me give in so easily.

We decide to wait a week without fish, to give the tank a chance to "heal", whatever that means. A week passes, and so back to the pet store we go. I pick a mostly black dalmation molly and Meredith picks a sunburst platy. We decide to start small, we'll get just two fish.

Two weeks go by, the fish are doing well, we decided to add a couple more. This time I go alone. I pick a mostly white dalmation molly, a silver (white) molly, and an all-black molly. I was afraid to mix it up too much since I didn't know much about fish compatibility.

Our ten gallon tank is up and running, algae is forming on the glass, and according to "the google" that means it has successfully cycled. Woo hoo! Nothing to worry about now. Everything remains status quo for the next few weeks, until one day we come home from work. The day was July 4th (yes we both worked on July 4th. It's a long story). Anyway, when we got home from work and what do we see in the tank but a bunch of little tiny tadpoles, some yellowish-orange ones and a bunch of little grayish clear ones. Wait! Those aren't tadpoles, they're babies!

Oh, I can't begin to describe Meredith's excitement. I didn't know fish would reproduce in captivity. How is this possible? Google becomes my best friend for the next two hours. I learn all kinds of interesting things, like the type of fish we have are called "livebearers" they don't lay eggs, and you can tell the males from the females by looking for the gonadopodium, and you need a breeder box or a breeder's net to take care of babies and ensure they don't get eaten.

The next day we rush off to the pet store to buy a breeder box. Rush right home, get out the net and start fishing for fry. Those little buggars are quick! We determine the only way we're going to get them out is if we remove the ornaments. I rush to the garage, get a bucket, and rush back in as if I were a kid running down the stairs to get my presents from Santa on Christmas. First the rocks then the plants, then we pluck the babies and put them in their new home. All told, 4 yellowish-orange ones and 12 grayish-white ones.

I read online that if you take some flake food and crush it into a fine powder, you can feed it to with the tip of a pencil or a toothpick. Like a proud papa, I keep watch, feeding them daily, being sure to take care of the little ones.

Lessons Learned:

- 1) Fish can have babies in captivity, they're called "fry".
- 2) Some fish "give birth", they're called "livebearers".
- 3) Fry are fast!
- 4) Fry can be fed crushed flake food.
- 5) Fry need a safe place so they don't get eaten.
- 6) Livebearers can be sexed by examining them for gonadopodium. Livebearers with more of a fan-shaped anal fin are females, those with a more pointy anal fin are males.