

Acanthastrea

Class Anthozoa, Subclass Hexacorallia, Order Scleractinia, Family Mussidea, Genera *Acanthastrea*



photo by Robert Pacheco

Common names: moon coral, acan

Natural origin: Indo-Pacific

Sensitivity (Level 2): Care difficulty for these corals depends on species, but most are generally tolerant and forgiving when healthy.

Feeding: These corals have strong prey capture ability. In addition to feeding tentacles, these corals are also known to extend their stomachs, mesenterial filament bundles which dissolve and digest their neighbors. They should be fed at night since this is when they usually extend their feeder tentacles and/or mesenterial filaments. If after several weeks your coral is still not extending feeder tentacles, you can try to encourage a feeding response with nighttime target feeding. When doing this, wait one hour after lights go off before feeding. Turn water flow off so that the food can fall and rest onto the coral. Give the coral an hour or two to "grab hold" of the food, then turn water flow back on. Do this regularly until feeder tentacles extend regularly in anticipation of feeding. Once your coral is readily extending feeding tentacles, it will be able to catch food from the current without any assistance.

Lighting (Level 3 to 6): These corals can adapt to a wide range of light intensities. Start by placing the coral lower down in the tank and move up if necessary. As with any coral, bleaching can occur if not properly acclimated to a sudden change in lighting.

Water flow: Moderate water flow is recommended.

Placement: These are very aggressive corals. Their mesenterial filaments can and will dissolve the tissues of other corals within reach, so please give them plenty of space to avoid contact with other corals.

General: Like many corals, they can take some time to "settle in" to a new home. Wait a few weeks to see normal feeding behavior before worrying.

These corals are often confused for corals of the Faviidae family or for their *Blastomussa* and *Micromussa* cousins. *Acanthastrea* have exceptionally large, pointy septa (skeletal "teeth") that help distinguish them from other corals. However, you may never know exactly which kind coral you have without close examination of the coral skeleton.

Lighting Scale (approximations):

Level 0 - no light

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Level 3 - one foot below modest VHO or T5 fluorescent lighting

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Level 5 - two feet below extensive VHO or T5 fluorescent lighting

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Level 6 - one foot below extensive VHO or T5 fluorescent lighting

Level 7 - two feet below 250 watt single ended MH light (or 150-175 watt MH with HQI ballast)

Level 8 - one foot below 250 watt single ended MH light (or 150-175 watt MH with HQI ballast)

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Level 10 - one foot below 400 watt single ended MH (or 250 watt MH with HQI ballast)

Note that this scale is quite crude and only meant to provide a rough idea of the different levels of light intensities. How much (and what kind of) light actually reaches the corals in your tank also depends on the type of reflector in the light fixture, the temperature of the bulbs/lamps, the clarity of your tank water, etc.

It's also important to note that different individual corals, even of the same species, can have very different lighting requirements and ideals. Often times, the same types and species of wild caught corals come from different depths and different water clarities. It's nearly impossible to know what kind or how much light was getting to your coral when it was first taken from the wild. One advantage of aquacultured corals is that you can know what light they were grown under. Beyond health, the color of any given zooxanthellate (photosynthetic) coral will change and adapt in response to the lighting it is placed under. All corals are vulnerable to bleaching if not allowed to acclimate to a change to more intense lighting. If your coral begins to bleach, move it to an area of lower lighting and feed it especially well.

Acclimation:

Please, always take the time to acclimate new corals.

Step 1: Float the bag with the coral in the aquarium water (away from lights!) for about 20 minutes.

Step 2: Open the bag and test the salinity of the bag water.

Step 3: Add about 1/3 to 1/2 cup of tank water to the bag every 10-20 minutes until the bag water and tank water are approximately the same salinity. You can add less water over longer periods of time to acclimate more slowly for more sensitive animals (or when the bag water and tank water have substantially different salinity).

Acclimation can also be done in a bucket (rather than the transport bag). However, the bucket water temperature can get closer to room temperature than tank water temperature (especially for slow acclimations). Insulating the bucket in a Styrofoam box or cooler during acclimation should help. To acclimate to new lighting conditions, first place the coral in a less light intense area of the tank. Every few days, move the coral towards more direct lighting until it is where you want it to be. If it begins to bleach at any point, move it back to a less light intense area. After the coral recovers, commence moving towards more direct light more slowly.

General "Disclaimer"

These care sheets are a brief presentation of the needs and characteristics of a variety of commonly kept aquarium corals. Though there's a lot of science in reef keeping, the hobby itself has always been and continues to be an imperfect science. Much is still unknown and there is often more than one way to do things. Please take what's written here as a starting point, but always keep an active and curious mind.

Sensitivity:

Level 1 - These corals are easy to care for, good for the novice aquarists.

Level 2 - These corals require slightly more attention than level 1 corals, but are generally tolerant and forgiving.

Level 3 - These corals require stable, established aquariums and care by an experienced aquarist.

Level 4 - These corals should only be kept by the most experienced aquarists.

Level 5 - These corals are not known to be able to survive in aquariums even when under the care of the most experienced aquarists

Note that this scale is not set in stone, but based on the numerous experiences and reports of professional and hobby aquarists. The sensitivity and tolerance of any given coral in your tank will depend on species, health when collected/purchased, how long it's been in captivity, and other factors that may or may not be knowable.