

Cloudy Aquarium Water

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We often hear confusion and concerns on the forums about cloudy water. Cloudy water is an eyesore to be sure and an indicator that something is wrong and/or out of balance. Although it's usually harmless to the fish, in some cases, cloudy water may also signal an ammonia spike and this can be serious and result in fish loss.



Causes of cloudy water:

- **New Setup with insufficient bacteria** – A new setup will often have cloudy water after a day or two until bacteria establish a balance relative to organic waste. (See [bacteria bloom](#) below). This may disappear in a day or two.
- **Dirty substrate** – Sometimes cloudy water is the result of new substrate that wasn't rinsed well enough and there are fines (dust like particles of 'dirt') suspended in the water column. Also if the substrate is 'dirty' (uneaten fish food, fish/plant waste) and is disturbed.
- **Dirty glass** – If the glass is dirty from biofilm or algae, it may seem like the water is cloudy.
- **Over stocked** – Too many fish results in excess food and waste.
- **Algae** – Too much nutrients or light can cause algae to grow on the glass or create free floating algae (green water) that can cause the water to appear cloudy,
- **Tannins** – Wood makes for a very interesting part of an aquascape. However, wood can create a tea staining of tannins in the water that appears somewhat cloudy.
- **Insufficient filtration** – Perhaps there's not enough filtration or the mechanical media is not fine enough to trap small particles.
- **Old tank syndrome** – If a tank is neglected such that routine partial water changes have not been done along with not servicing the filter and/or not gravel vacuuming, poor water quality including cloudy water can result.

- **Bacteria bloom** – Most often cloudy water is the result of a bacterial bloom (See [Bacteria in the Freshwater Aquarium](#)). This can happen when there's a sudden increase in organics in the water so there's a population explosion of bacteria. This could be due to overfeeding or feeding lower quality fish food!

So what can be done? The first thing is a root cause analysis is to figure out what action, if any, triggered the event. New tank/substrate, new food, overfeeding, substrate disturbed, neglected tank maintenance?

The 'knee jerk' reaction is to perform a partial water change. In some cases this may help, but not always as sometimes there are sufficient organic compounds in the tap (or well) water to 'feed' the bloom.

Some may take the advice to use a chemical clarifier to make the water clear. These products typically cause smaller particles in the water to bind together so they may be more easily collected/trapped by the aquarium filter. But these products don't work if the problem is bacterial and they are tough on fish gills and NOT recommended by most experienced fishkeepers.

If it's algae, you might increase the volume/frequency of partial water changes to reduce excess nutrients. You might reduce the photo period or even do a blackout for a day or two.

If it's a bacteria bloom, **the simple answer is patience**. Although it may look bad, the cloudy water typically isn't harmful to the fish. In time, the water will clear on it's own as bacterial populations settle down and a balance returns in the tank eco system.

One last note is that in some cases, finer mechanical filtration may be necessary to remove fine particulates from the water. In addition, we always need to stay on top of gravel vacuuming as/if required AND routine filter maintenance to get detritus out of the system.

Here are some tips from [Youtube](#) about cloudy aquarium water:

How to fix Cloudy Fish Tank Water. [Live Stream]





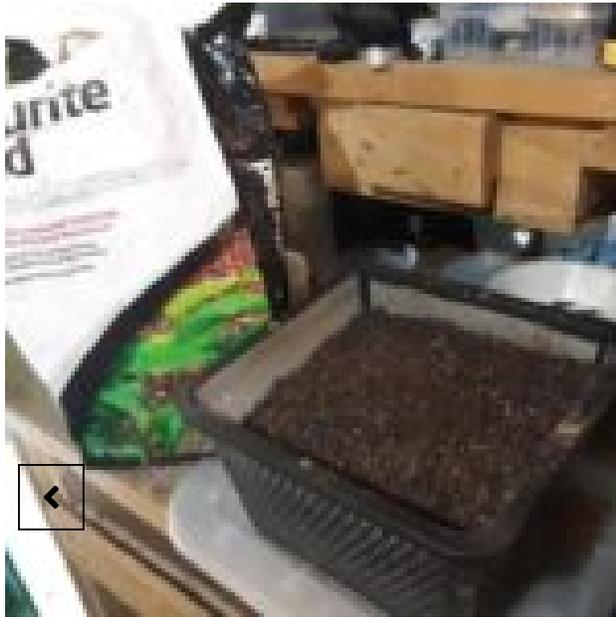
The secret to clear aquarium water!

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Cloudy Water in a Fish Tank and What to do About It!

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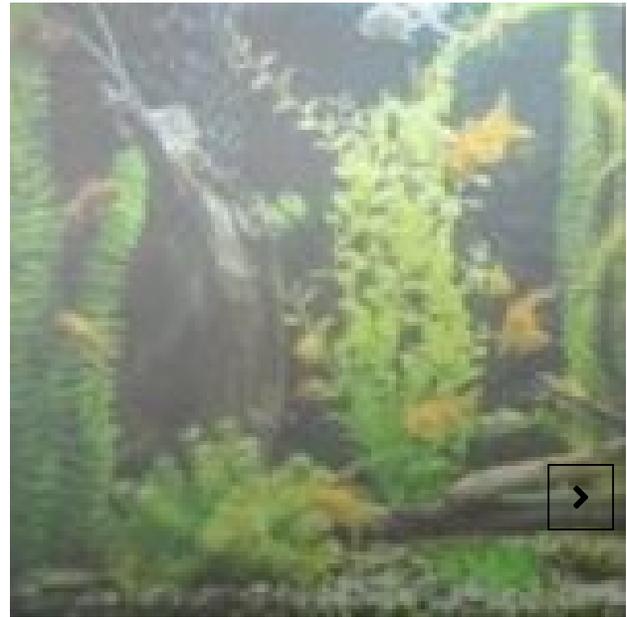
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