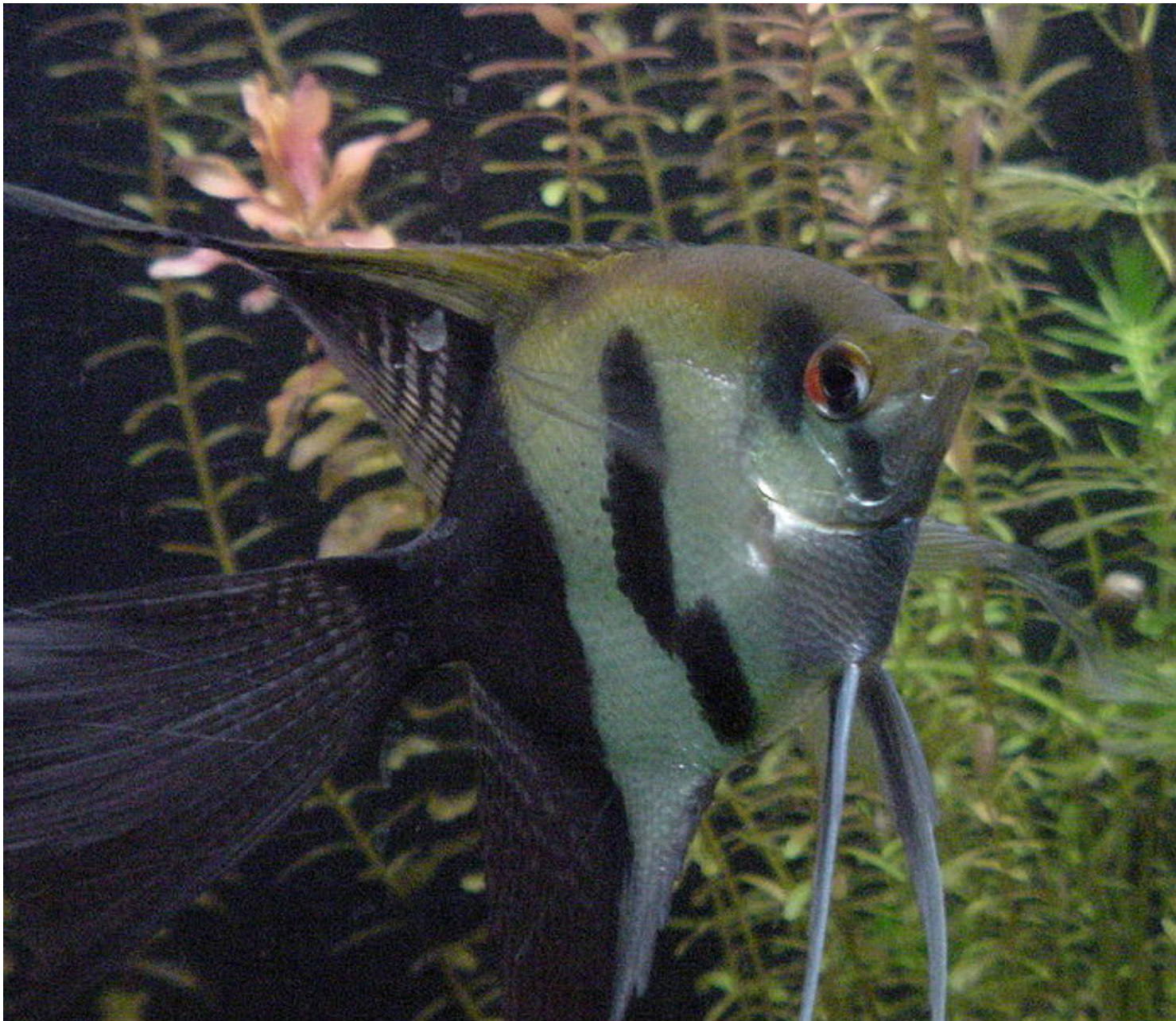


Keeping Angelfish (*Pterophyllum scalare*)

Written by Kmuda



Aka: Lace Angel, Marble Angel, Blush Angel, Silver Angel, Black Veil Angle, Golden Angel, Koi Angels, and a variety mix of all of the above.

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Max Size: 6 inches

Minimum recommended tank size: 20 gallons. Tall tanks are better than long/breeder tanks.

pH range: 6.0 – 7.5

Water Hardness (dH): 5-18 (from soft to medium).

Temperature: 75-84 (F).

Aggression: Peaceful by cichlid standards. Monstrously aggressive if you're a guppy.

Sexing Angelfish:

While difficult, it is sometimes possible to sex Angelfish as the males can develop a small nuchal hump. But the best method remains to observe them breeding (the one laying the eggs is female).

Angelfish Lifespan:

This is a fish that should live 10+ years.

Angelfish Overview:

There are actually multiple species of Angelfish. What we normally purchase in stores are selectively breed color and fin varieties of *Pterophyllum scalare*. Other species of Angelfish are *Pterophyllum Altum*, which are sometimes available, and *Pterophyllum leopoldi*, which are rarely available. To complicate matters, the species are also known to interbreed.

Below are side by side comparisons of the three species. Left - A Marble Angel (*P. scalare*):
Middle - *P. Altum*: Right - *P. Leopoldi*

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All species of Angelfish originate from the Amazon River basin in South America. Once considered the "King of Aquariums", they have been a favorite of aquarists for over 100 years and remain the most popular cichlid sold.

Angelfish Diet:

Omnivore – While this fish is an avid consumer of all things meaty, its diet should contain a subset of vegetable material. Fortunately, most quality flakes (or crumb size pellets) will contain enough spirulina algae and vegetable products to support this need.

An optimal diet for Angelfish should consist primarily of a crumb sized floating pellet. Several NLS options are available as is Hikari Discus Bio-Gold. I use both. Freeze dried bloodworms, frozen bloodworms, and frozen brine shrimp are recommended as supplemental foods a few times per week. My Angelfish also receive infrequent treats of freeze dried Tubifex cubes (pressed against the glass).

I maintain a small guppy population in my Angelfish tank. Whenever my livebearer tank becomes a bit over populated I will remove a couple of males and a group of females, placing them in the Angelfish tank. This results in a reoccurring source of live food (guppy fry) for the Angelfish. I find that spawning activities increases dramatically whenever live food is available.

Breeding Angelfish:

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Angelfish are one of the easier Cichlids to breed but amongst the most difficult to raise. I am an opponent of the artificial rearing of fry but this seems to be about the only method to get Angelfish fry beyond the wiggler stage. Angelfish have been artificially raised for so many generations that the genetics of being a good parent have basically been eliminated from captive bred specimens. If you choose, as I do, to allow the parents to be parents, the fry will be eaten as soon as they become wigglers, if not before.

That aside, it is very easy to determine when a "pair" has formed and spawning is about to commence. A "pair" of Angelfish will select a vertical surface of the aquarium (always a dark surface), performing an amazing job of cleaning it. I've had them remove a decades worth of algae growth from a filter intake tube, rendering the tube almost as clean as the day it was removed from the box. For some reason, they always select a filter intake tube in my tanks, despite being provided with vertical pieces of slate, live plants, and all of the other options the Angelfish gurus suggest.

Spawning aggression begins at this point as well. The moment they start cleaning the selected area all other fish in the tank better stay away or face the Angelfish wrath. While nowhere near as aggressive as some other spawning cichlids, they are cichlids, and the defense of their spawning area is impressive. These regal fish can really move with authority when they want to. An Angelfish wiggle, on the attack, darting across the tank with surprising speed is something to be seen. These fish can spin quicker, in a shorter turning radius than any fish I've owned. But to allow any chance of the "parents being parents", the pair should be housed in their own tank with no tank mates.

Once the spawning site has been cleaned and all other fish have been cowered into a corner, spawning will commence. The female will move slowly up the vertical surface, laying eggs (pectoral fins waving rapidly) and the male will follow behind, fertilizing the eggs. This process will continue for well over an hour. Actually, it is difficult to determine when the actual egg laying

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ends because they will continue a very similar process long after the eggs have been laid and fertilized, fanning the eggs to prevent fungus.

At this point, if you really want to raise Angelfish fry, it is best to remove the eggs for artificial raising. Since I do not condone this practice, I will not cover it in detail (feel free to Google it). It basically involves moving the object containing the eggs to a separate tank (5-10 gallons), running a fine bubble mist from under the eggs, and dosing the tank with Methalyne Blue.

A discussion pertaining the breeding of Angelfish would not be complete without mentioning an Angelfish's propensity for same sex marriages. While this is not uncommon in many species of fish, I find it occurs more often with Angelfish. A pair of female Angelfish will go through the entire ritual of spawning, with one fish playing the role of the male. I believe the frequency of this occurrence in Angelfish is two fold. First off, I believe it really is an odd trait more prevalent in Angelfish. Secondly, I think there is often confusion with the resulting infertile eggs in that the fish playing the role of the male actually is a male, he's just shooting blanks {another result of over breeding.) It has been my experience that when two females "pair up", they will take turns playing the role of the male (this spawning occurrence, one will be female, next time it will be the other). When it's actually a female and an infertile male, the male always plays the role of the male and the female always plays the role of the female (duh).

Angelfish Tank Mates

The best Angelfish Tank Mates are probably other Angelfish. Much like Discus, I believe these fish do best when kept in colonies of 5 or more. However, unlike Discus, they can successfully be kept solo, in non breeding pairs, or in groups of less than 5. Keep in mind that Angelfish are cichlids so some level of aggression is to be expected. I find that in groups of 4 or more, the chance of serious aggression is much reduced.

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Over the years I have kept Angelfish with about every tetra and livebearer species imaginable. However, some of the more aggressive fin nipping tetras and barbs should not be housed with Angelfish as those long flowing fins are simply too much of a temptation. Although, a fish with a fin nipping reputation that I frequently keep with Angelfish are Serpae Tetras. One fish that absolutely should not be kept with Angelfish are tiger barbs.

It's also not a good ideal to keep fast, nervous fish, such as Giant Danios, with Angelfish.

Many people will vehemently object to the keeping of Neon and Cardinal Tetras with Angelfish, stating these are a natural food source. They may be correct but my experiences do not validate this concept. I have successfully kept both Neons and Cardinal Tetras with my Angelfish and have not experienced the expected carnage. The "trick" is to have the cardinals and neons at full size (if the Angelfish are full size). Lemon Tetras and Black Neon Tetras are other good options as tank mates.

Cory catfish are excellent tank mates for Angelfish. I do not consider an Angelfish tank complete without a school of Cories foraging around the bottom of the tank.

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I do not recommend keeping these fish with Oscars or other large (or even medium) cichlids. By cichlid standards, Angelfish are calm peaceful fish and simply stand no chance against larger, more aggressive tank mates. On the other hand, dwarf cichlids such as Krib's, Rams, and Keyholes, make for excellent Angelfish tank mates.

Keeping Angelfish

In the near 30 years I have been keeping fish; it has been rare that one or more of my tanks has not contained Angelfish. They are a unique fish, regal, almost royal in behavior. Only Discus can out do them in this regard. Their pancaked body shape means they have a small bioload for a fish that can be the size of an outstretched adult male's hand. A pair of Angelfish can be maintained in a 20 gallon tank, along with some cories and a small group of schooling tetras. However, I would highly recommend at least a 30 gallon tank. I currently keep a group of 5 Angels in a 55, along with the "necessary" cories, and a school of 6 Lemon Tetras (as well as the food factory guppies).

Along with their regal behavior, the most appealing aspect of owning Angelfish is that they are a beautiful fish. Not necessarily beautiful in bright coloration as they are generally black, silver, white, or a combination of these colors, but beautiful in shape, with fins that cannot be matched in the freshwater world, and beautiful in attitude. They are also a personable fish with personality.

I think what hurts Angelfish is their popularity and availability. Their popularity resulted in breeders that focused on quantity instead of quality, resulting in a reputation as a fragile and unhealthy fish. When selecting Angelfish, it is best to stay away from the dime sized fry that are commonly available. Rather look for the quarter sized juveniles that can also be found.

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I am comfortable in stating that the Angelfish I have procured in the last several years are well breed, healthy specimens.

Aside from health issues, many advanced cichlid hobbyist do not procure Angelfish because they are so popular/common, instead looking towards rarer fish. In doing so, I am of the opinion they are missing out on the uniqueness of Angelfish. While a "certain" cichlid may be rare, let's face it, its behavior (and appearance) is not that far removed from a common Convict Cichlid. An Angelfish's appearance and behavior is very unique in the world of freshwater aquariums. So don't be discouraged for the wrong reasons. There is a reason fish keepers have been maintaining these fish for over 100 years.