

Telling Tail Tales

A Fish-Raising Experience

By Jiajun Xu



A Fish-Raising Experience



Five years ago, when our family went on a trip, we saw many families happily traveling with a pet. However, we didn't have one. While looking at the families playing with the pets and giggling at the campsite, we realized that a pet would bring much happiness to our family.

Then my parents started a discussion about the pet we should raise. "For the love of God!" my mom exclaimed, "We should really have a dog—a dog can help protect our house!" However, my dad opposed this idea. "The dog could run rampant and make our house dirty! What if there are guests at our house and that the dog ruins the party? I don't see this as a long-term plan." "How about a cat? Maybe it can catch mice and chase butterflies," I murmured. "Cats shed, can have lice and parasites, can scratch the floor, and are noisy every spring." That's how Mom rejected my suggestion.

It was one in the afternoon, and the lodge where we were staying went dark very quickly. I could even hear the birds chirping. My mom wandered around the room like a zombie moving in for the kill. But we were still awake and thinking. Suddenly, the view outside the lodge caught Mom's eyes. "Lake... water creatures... Maybe we should buy a fish or a turtle, honey." When my eyes met my dad's, it was at that very moment that I knew that her plan had worked. My dad's eyes lit up as he exclaimed, "Exactly what I was thinking! Let's go for it! A beautiful fish will help improve the Feng Shui* of our house."

We traveled to the lakeside. By the lake there is a huge fish market. When we arrived, I immediately noticed how busy the fish market was. The sound of voices filled the market—"Make way!" "Excuse me!" That market was full of people; at one point, I nearly lost sight of my parents. We walked for

quite a distance before one shop caught our eye.

"Goldfish," my mom's eyes widened. "Look how cute they look!"

"How much is one fish? How many should we have?" Dad approached the fisherman and asked.

"Why do you want to have a fish for a pet? Who will take care of them?" He stared at us.

"Me, of course!" I replied. "I want to have one pet. My parents would like to see me caring for pets and becoming more responsible and reliable."

"Do you have time to care for a fish? They are fragile and vulnerable. You need to change their water and feed them every day, even if you are sick, boy. Can you promise to do that?"

"I will try to protect them just like I would protect a baby, and I promise."

"Great, keep your word, young man. Five dollars for each."

We immediately agreed on the price. "Eight, please."

"With pleasure," he added with a grin. "You need to be careful with the goldfish and their tank. If they become inactive and seem to be out of oxygen, you need to change the water ASAP. One lapse of judgment, and the goldfish could die. If you will be away from home, ask your friends or neighbors to take care of them. They cannot talk but they always need your love and care."

"Deal!" Nothing can stop the sheer glee of my parents as they carried the jar of goldfish back to the car.

Back home, we began to care for the goldfish. For starters, we began to build a home for the goldfish. Even as small as they are, goldfish need living space, which requires a large area. The backyard once was our "fun space"—we used to play badminton and table tennis there. However, once the goldfish arrived, the backyard became their living space, due to the accessibility of sunlight and its large area. The weather is perfect in northern California, as well. Even though we no longer have the same fun playing badminton and table tennis, watching the beautiful goldfish swimming in their outdoor tank is very intriguing. We had a picnic on the grass, chatting and laughing beside the fish. We had a lot of fun together, and our family bond remained as strong as ever.

One day, we began to feel tired of caring for the goldfish. We started wondering about the goldfish's needs, starting with feeding them. Buying food for the goldfish at the pet shop is a must; during the afternoon, my mom drives to the local pet shop to get food for them. We also added variety, by feeding the food both flakes and granules. Soon, I realized that there is good news and there is bad news. The good news is that goldfish only need to be fed once daily; the bad news is that they will be inactive and slow to react if we don't control the amount we feed the goldfish.

"What happened?" I gasped, as if I had just seen the apocalypse happen before my eyes. "What am I supposed to do now?" I peered at the goldfish and then I stared into the living room. The tension gradually builds up within my body, and I feel as if I were losing my patience. I was about to throw a tantrum when I remembered: "Persistence is the key to success." I build up the confidence to approach the goldfish. "Here, goldfish," I murmured, while pulling some food from a bag. While I

threw the food into the tank, my eyes widened as the golden fins brightened under the sunlight. “Actually, I’ll call you “Goldie” from now on. Hope you have a nice dinner!” I said playfully, while marching my way back towards the living room. “Mom!” I yelled, excitedly. “I just finished feeding the goldfish!” “Nice!” A smile emerged from my mom’s face. “The goldfish must feel very excited.” “Well, I can’t really feel the goldfish’s emotions, eh?” I grinned. At that time, I felt that I was having the time of my life—nothing could ever stop me, I thought.

Trouble arrives in every lifetime. Two days later, when I was carrying out my normal routine of feeding the goldfish, I realized that it was not moving normally. “What’s up, Goldie?” I whistled, as I casually approached the fish tank. To my absolute horror, I found out a stunning surprise; the goldfish is almost rolling upside-down and is not swimming. “No, no, no... Please don’t...” My emotions swelled up from the bottom of my heart.

“Poor little fish, what happened to you? Let me check and see what caused this.” Mom observed the bad situation. “Calm down, boy. There must be a way to solve the problem.” “Yes, let me see...” I searched Google and Wikipedia: “When fish eat too much, their excretions will pollute the water and cause a lack of lack oxygen.” This must be the root cause! Mom and I changed the water and, by doing so, saved Goldie’s life. Science is the key to improving our lives. I should be more knowledgeable and responsible when dealing with vulnerable and beautiful lives.

Many new pet parents view goldfish as low-maintenance pets with minimal needs. But goldfish require an understanding of the basic care of fish and have specific needs that need to be met in order to thrive. After the first three months of caring for Goldie, I came to understand the following rules about how to raise and care for pet goldfish:

- If housed and cared for properly, a goldfish can live to be 20 years old.
- Many people have heard that “goldfish will grow to fit the size of their enclosure,” but this is a total myth. A goldfish requires an adequate living arrangement, just like any other pet.
- Before you think that a bowl is a suitable home for a pet goldfish, remember that the bowls used centuries ago were not the kinds of bowls that are commonly used today. The older and rather large ceramic basins were considerably roomier than the cramped desktop bowls of today. And, because years ago fish were truly prized and admired, they likely received far more care and attention than the typical carnival prize goldfish of today. If truth be told, fishbowls are not appropriate for any sort of aquatic animal.
- For the most suitable tank for your goldfish, you should start with a 75- to 100-gallon tank. This may seem large, but, depending upon the breed, the *C. auratus* (the species name for goldfish) can reach lengths of well over a foot at their adult size. A larger tank size is also important because goldfish are not known for their cleanliness. And a warning! It seems like no matter how sparingly you feed them, they are ceaseless poopers. You must make sure their environment is clean!

goldfish are not known for their cleanliness. And a warning! It seems like no matter how sparingly you feed them, they are ceaseless poopers. You must make sure their environment is clean!

—Again, goldfish can generate copious amounts of waste, so you will need a powerful aquarium water filter (such as a properly sized canister filter), and you absolutely must be diligent about cleaning their tank. Goldfish like water in which the alkalinity is greater than the acidity, so water with a pH of between 7.0 and 7.4 is best.

—Goldfish require a heater (set to around 68°F) to ensure temperature stability. However, using a larger tank will help to minimize drastic temperature changes due to the large volume.

—Live plants can be used only with caution, as goldfish are known to consume all but the toughest or least palatable types (try Anubias** or java fern).



Anubias



Java Fern

—Goldfish are beyond voracious! They simply don't know how to stop eating and will harm themselves if presented with too much food. Overfeeding can also dirty the water and harm your goldfish. You should only feed your fish what they are able to consume in two to three minutes, once or twice a day.

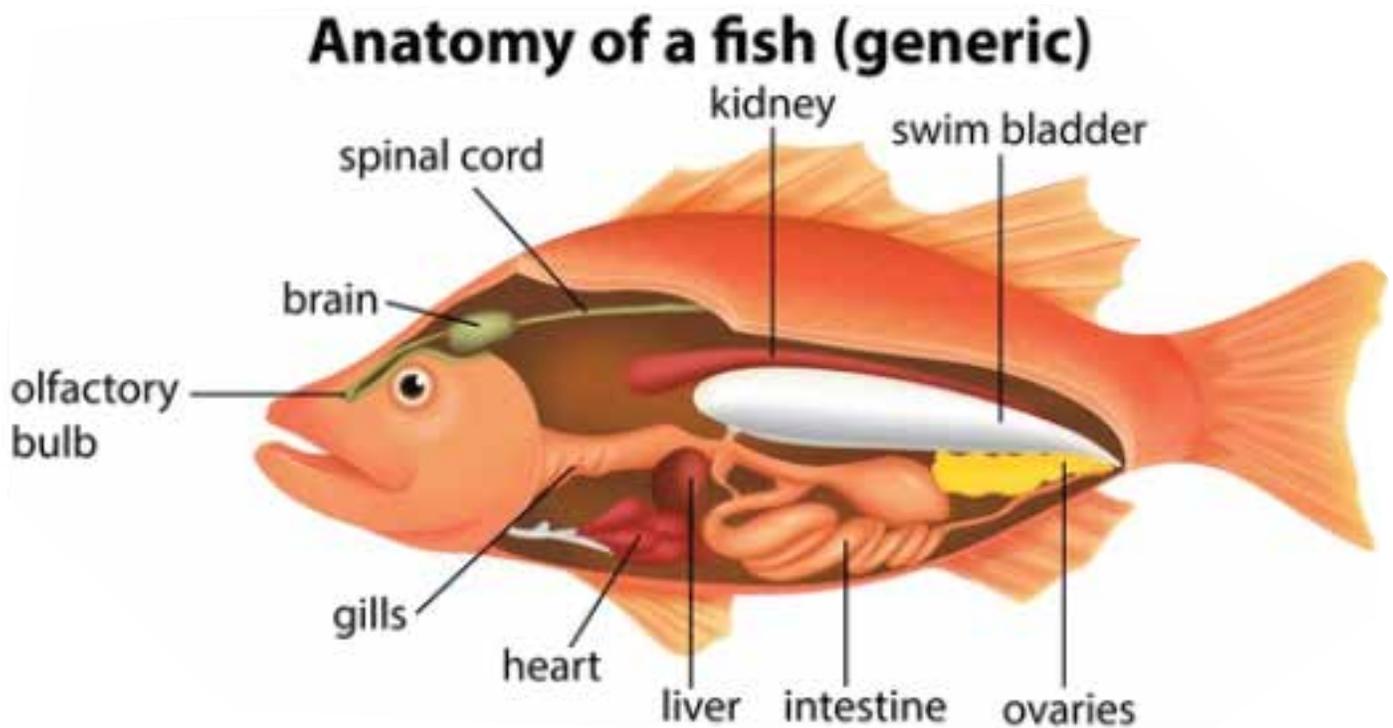
—If you're feeding your goldfish food that consists of flakes, you should pre-soak the food. Goldfish are natural bottom-feeders, so when the flakes remain at the top of the water, they cause your goldfish to gulp. This can upset their swim bladder*** and equilibrium, causing them to float upside down. Fill a cup with water from the tank and swirl around their meal in the water. You can then pour the contents of the cup into the tank.

In summary, goldfish are peaceful fish that tolerate, and even enjoy, each other's company. I learned a lot during the process of caring for them and became a much more reliable pet person. I hope you have learned new information about goldfish too.

*Feng Shui: The philosophy of Feng Shui is a practice of arranging the pieces in living spaces in order to create balance with the natural world. The goal is to harness energy forces and establish harmony between an individual and their environment.

***Anubias* is a genus of aquatic and semi-aquatic flowering plants in the family *Araceae*, native to tropical central and western Africa.

***The *swim bladder*, *gas bladder*, *fish maw*, or *air bladder* is an internal gas-filled organ that contributes to the ability of many bony fish such as goldfish (but not cartilaginous fish) to control their buoyancy and thus, to stay at their current water depth without having to waste energy in swimming.



Information about goldfish from:

Kenneth Wingerter, Advanced Aquarist

"How to Take Care of a Goldfish"

https://www.petmd.com/fish/care/evr_fi_how-to-care-of-goldfish



Palo Alto Humane Society

PO Box 60715

Palo Alto, CA 94306

pahs@paloaltohumane.org

p 650.424.1901

www.paloaltohumane.org