

Montipora capricornis

The Vase Coral

By John Moyles

The genus *Montipora* includes some of the most beautiful small-polyped stony (SPS) corals available to aquarists. Not only are they found in a multitude of beautiful colors, they also exhibit some truly exquisite growth forms, including plating and vase-like. One of the most recognizable of the “Monty” corals is the vase coral (*Montipora capricornis*, Veron, 1985). The vase coral occurs from the Red Sea and east Africa, east to Fiji. The vase coral is most often found in protected lagoons or sheltered coastal reefs.



Description

Vase corals come in a variety of forms and colors, but this variety is a reddish orange coloration. The growth form is highly dependent on the water flow and lighting in the aquarium. This genus tends to be very lightweight — many plating and whirling species are quite delicate.

Difficulty

The vase coral is considered fairly easy to keep. It is a hermatypic coral that has symbiotic algae that live in its tissue that provide it with much of the nutrition it needs to survive. If not kept under appropriate lighting, the algae will die, and the coral will suffer. The vase coral also consumes small sized plankton and absorb some nutrients from the surrounding water column. For this reason, it is a good idea to feed them some of the readily available coral foods now on the market. One of the greatest concerns of the *Montipora* keeper is the introduction of the aeolid sea slug. It will consume the flesh of the coral until the coral is dead. Usually the first indication of the problem is a section (or sections) of exposed white skeleton. The aeolid sea slugs are nocturnal and may go unnoticed unless you look for them.

Compatibility

Vase coral is not an aggressive coral. It is more likely to be damaged by surrounding large-polyped stony (LPS) corals that have long sweeper tentacles or by soft corals that produce terpenes to impede the growth of competing neighbors. On the other hand, vase coral is fast-growing and has been known to shade corals that were growing at lower levels of the aquarium. It is also likely to be fed upon by butterflyfish, triggerfish, filefish and pufferfish.

Aquarium Conditions

The light level should be of a moderate to high intensity. The color of this species may become dull if light intensity is too low. The more intense the lighting, typically the faster the vase coral will grow. Metal halides, T-5s, VHO, LED, and compact fluorescent bulbs are all suitable light sources. Provide medium to high water flow to carry away deposits of detritus that may accumulate. The vase coral is a fast growing coral that needs room to expand. Water parameters for the should be: calcium 400 to 450 ppm, alkalinity 3.2 to 4.8 meq/L, magnesium levels of 1200 to 1350 ppm and a specific gravity of 1.024 to 1.026. Water temperature of 76 to 84 degrees Fahrenheit should be maintained.

Propagation

The vase coral is easy to propagate as long as the parent colony is healthy. Simply break off a piece of the coral and attach it to a reef plug or a piece of live rock.

