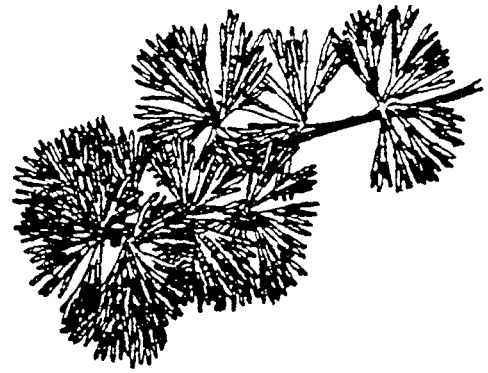


NATIVE

AQUARIUM

PLANTS



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Jim DeBernardo

Before I proceed with a discussion of this month's plant topic, I'd like to take a moment to outline the purpose and scope of this new column in American Currents. Too often, when we're out collecting the beautiful fish that are abundant in our North American waters, we literally don't look at what's at are feet and almost always fail to notice or take the beautiful aquatic plants that are so much a part of our native fishes' aquascape. Did you know that most aquarium plants commonly found in tropical fish stores are really native to North America? Plants like Anarcharis, Ludwigia, Sagittaria, Myriophyllum and, the topic of this month's column, Cabomba, are all native to North America. Indeed, after you've found the right spot, it's possible to go out and collect these favorite aquarium plants by the handful, even in winter. I would therefore like to make use of this column, which I hope you, the NANFA member, will want as a regular feature of American Currents, to survey some of the more popular and common native aquatic plants with suggestions on where to collect them and tips on how to keep them alive and growing in your home aquariums.

I can't even begin to calculate how many bunches of Cabomba (C. caroliniana) I've purchased since I started keeping fish some 25 years ago. You can therefore imagine how shocked I was to find, during a collecting trip to a local pond, acres upon acres of this plant growing wild! Subsequent trips revealed more Cabomba (and other

aquatic plants) in such abundance that I was truly startled. I've collected Cabomba in virtually every habitat imaginable, from stagnant, almost polluted ponds to clear, fast flowing, acid streams. In fact, one December my brother Bob and I actually collected about a half bushel of Cabomba from a frozen-over pond! To therefore state that C. caroliniana is a hardy, adaptable plant is, at best, an understatement! I have noticed, however, that Cabomba does not do very well in warm (i.e. over 75\* F.) water and grows more luxuriantly in slightly acid (pH 6.7 to 6.8) water.

To grow C. caroliniana in the home aquarium, provide the plant with a rather tall (at least 16 inches) aquarium. Lay in as a substrate at least 3 inches of coarse sand (sterilized builder's sand works well), and light the tank with cool white fluorescent tubes at the rate of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  watts per gallon of water. That is, a standard 20 gallon tank would require 30 watts of fluorescent illumination. Stock the tank with native fish (killies!) and provide as much of the water your collected plant was growing in as possible (try to adjust your tap water to conform to your collected water to make up the difference) and then stand back and watch the fun! I once collected some Cabomba and planted it (as per above) in a 30 inch high tank. In less than a month, my C. caroliniana had grown from 6 inches to the top of the tank!