

Goldfish Bowls: Art at What Cost?

Despite its history and quaint sense of charm, the goldfish bowl is not a home but a common cause of early death in goldfish. Fish bowl marketers turn a tidy profit pairing the classic, age-old goldfish with the picturesque, ornamental glass bowl. However, this iconic image of a childhood pet thrives with the little regard to the thousands of goldfish suffocated by fish bowls each year (Tippit and Tippit). Goldfish bowls are inappropriate homes for goldfish as they force their inhabitants to continuously circle a polluted, low-oxygen environment which often stunts their growth, causes organ defects and hampers freedom of movement. As commented by Hugo Mulertt, author of The Goldfish and its Culture, "The old-fashioned fish globe is about the worst vessel that can be selected for the keeping of goldfish as pets." (Tippit and Tippit)

Popular media paints the goldfish as a cheap, commonplace, disposable pet, which frequently leads to lack of proper care for goldfish, particularly in the use of the goldfish bowl. Goldfish bowls drastically lower the life-expectancy of a goldfish ("Goldfish"). Myths aroused by inadequate care assert the life-span of a goldfish to be a mere 2-3 years, while their actual lifespan in proper conditions should span 15-25 years ("Memory like a Goldfish?"). Aquaria experts readily recognize the abhorrence entailed in employing a goldfish bowl, including robbing goldfish of oxygen, room for growth, and a clean environment. Regrettably however, as numerous pet owners are unaware of a fish bowl's lethal effects on goldfish, they remain a highly popular and, worse, highly accepted form of animal abuse.

The majority of experts dissuade the use of goldfish bowls as they do not provide an adequate supply of oxygen, particularly as goldfish are a high oxygen-consumption species ("Memory like a Goldfish?"). The surface area of fish bowls is too small to allow ample oxygen to diffuse through to the water. The general rule is 144 in. ² for every inch of adult fish length, thus the largest of readily available goldfish bowls, at a surface area of 100 inches², barely support 1 inch of fish ("Further Introduction on

Goldfish."). Evidently, these bowls are suffocating to goldfish, which should grow to 6-14 inches in healthy conditions (goldfish.). Lack of oxygen forces goldfish to constantly swim at the surface, gulping for air, draining their life away by slow suffocation ("Memory like a Goldfish?"). This constant oxygen deprivation is the cruel perpetrator of early deaths in many a home worldwide.

Another major repercussion of goldfish bowls is that they imprison their residents in a home too small and growth-stunting ("Goldfish"). Basic aquarium rule is adamant that every inch of adult fish length should warrant one gallon of water, to allow for comfortable growth and swimming space (Alderton 30). The largest readily available bowls hold up to 3 gallons of water, made for at maximum a 3 inch fish, while goldfish, given enough room, often exceed 6 inches in size and live considerably longer ("Further Introduction on Goldfish.", Murray). The reason that goldfish have a reputation for growing to only 2-3 inches in size is because in reaction to small spaces, they excrete a growth-stunting hormone which tapers their growth early on. However, this leads either to organ compression, when a fish's frame becomes too cramped for organs, or the underdevelopment of organs, in which the development of organs are ceased prematurely, both of which are lethal ("Memory like a Goldfish?").

Because bowls lack filters, they confine their powerless inhabitants to a growing landfill for wastes and toxins (White). Animal-care specialists claim that 2 in 5 fish-keepers are guilty of causing fish early death by lack of proper filtration (Clarke, "Pets At Home Starts Fish Tank Amnesty."). Filters are crucial as they prevent toxins in the water from building up and afflicting fish with a myriad of gill, fin and skin diseases (Murray). Goldfish, contrary to myth, are not an easy-clean species, producing 33% of their body weight in waste daily as they have no stomach with which to digest proteins. Left unfiltered, the water becomes poisonously contaminated with their vast waste production, the upshot of which is death by ammonia poisoning ("Further Introduction on Goldfish"). Moreover, goldfish have insatiable appetites, often eating more than they can take in and polluting the water with their constant bottom

foraging, coupling excess waste production with regurgitated food (Hui). This surplus of waste and food particles means goldfish bowls, without a filter to process wastes, require daily attention for sanitation, which, even if performed, causes goldfish stress. ("Memory like a Goldfish?")

Goldfish bowls were evidently not made with the livelihood of the goldfish in mind. That goldfish only have a three-second memory and thus do not object to re-circling the same bowl for the duration of its life has been disproven by multiple studies (Kruszelnicki). Fancy goldfish, if kept in goldfish bowls, are additionally particularly prone to constipation, slow digestion and failure of their delicate swim bladders ("Memory like a Goldfish?"). Meanwhile, the curved glass shape of these bowls is reputed cause goldfish blindness (Tippit and Tippit).

"The long-term problem is that customers think fish are easy and indestructible. They are often considered to be disposable but actually have been proven to feel pain," comments Steve Fairburn, Pets At Home aquatics expert (Murray). There is less attention focused on the suffering of goldfish largely because since they are unable to express their discontent; they are seen as simple animals, unable to feel the way we do. In reality, fish have a pain system almost the same as our own ("Fish Feel Pain."), but that we are unable to observe suffering in fish as we express it, is no justification for causing them anguish.

There are a myriad of reasonable alternatives to goldfish bowls. BiOrbs, from Future Pets, have built in filters but retain the pretty glass shapes that have so popularized glass fish bowls ("Fish Bowls."). Certain aquariums can be found for cheaper and, with a filter, require less maintenance work than the fish bowl (Clarke, "Rome bans bowls and fairground goldfish."). In reality, with a basic filter added, smaller, cleaner fish such as white clouds, guppies, and bettas are much more compatible with a fish bowl (" Fish Bowls.").

It is also vital for individuals work towards ceasing this form of animal maltreatment in their communities. Local pet stores should be encouraged to cease the sale of goldfish bowls and notify customers of their damaging effects, such as has been done by Pets at Home, the UK's largest pet retailer, who began a "Fish Tank Amnesty" program to better the lives of filter-less fish (Clarke, "Pets At Home Starts Fish Tank Amnesty."). Working with local governments, individuals can work to ban the sale of goldfish bowls, as has been done in Rome, Italy (Clarke, "Rome bans bowls and fairground goldfish."). Anywhere goldfish are sold or given out, simply informing new owners of proper goldfish care is a fundamental act open to any individual. Posters, pamphlets, websites and letters to magazines and newspapers encouraging them to cover the negative effects of goldfish bowls are vital to filling the deficiency in awareness. Meanwhile letters to goldfish bowl promoters, particularly TV shows, emphasizing the importance of not presenting the image of a goldfish in a bowl would contribute to dispelling their public acceptance. This widespread form of animal mistreatment must no longer be permitted to endure and one of the most crucial steps is dispelling the idea of the goldfish bowl and the goldfish coexisting hand in hand.

Several years ago, a piece of innovative sculpture exhibited at the Modern Art Oxford entitled 'Fishbowl' gave the three dimensional portrayal of a chipped, white soup bowl filled plainly with water, its simplicity cut sharply by the garish kitchen knife protruding from the center and, complimenting the light, dullish colors of their environment, the two live goldfish circling the bowl. Jannis Kounellis' 'Fishbowl' was rocket fuel for the complaints of appalled animal sympathizers ("Row Over Use of Fish in Artwork."). However, the majority failed to recognize the work's strong resemblance to the plight of goldfish in pet owner homes worldwide. In the mid-1800's a frighteningly similar work of art became a popular home for goldfish, the goldfish bowl (White). Although, lovely, inexpensive and a pretty living room compliment, goldfish bowls have long used artist appeal to disguise the lethal aftermaths of their use and the deadly tolls they take on goldfish.

Pet owners must be made aware that goldfish bowls were not designed to accommodate goldfish, but for consumer enticement. Created merely to display the goldfish in an appealing form to the human eye, the glass fish bowl deprives fish of oxygen, adequate space for growth and a filter for wastes. Goldfish bowls are a form of cruel and inhumane treatment that has gone unrecognized for too long.

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