



Knife Livebearer (*Alfaro cultratus*)

Order: Cyprinodontiformes - Family: Poeciliidae - Genus: Alfaro



Also known as: Knife-edged Livebearer

Type: Tropical/ Brackish Water- Livebearer

Origin: Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama.

Description: The Knife livebearer (*Alfaro cultratus*), is an exceptionally hardy and adaptable species. It's not an especially common fish in stores, but is quite widely available in hobbyist circles. The common name arises from the row of modified, paired scales that form a keel running from the base of the anal fin to the caudal fin.

Physical Characteristics: Knife Livebearer is a hardy and adaptable species. This fish occupies the upper level of the aquarium, adapted to feeding on insects from the surface. Their body is yellowish, with a blue iridescence on the flanks. Their flattened bodies allow them to swim through strong water currents with less friction. The fish is very sensitive to bacteria. The ventral side of this fish has a knife-like keel. This keel is formed by two closely stacked rows of scales at the posterior end of the body.

The male has a gonopodium and extended ventral fins which serve to stimulate the head region of the female during pairing rituals. Females are larger and plumper. Breeding is easy. Every 3-4 weeks the female can produce 20-40 fry in a single brood. Fry should be removed to a separate tank, and fed with small live foods or powdered flake. The fry are elongated, transparent, and barely visible, with a length of about 6mm. About 6 months of age, the animals become sexually mature.

Size:

- **Maximum Size:** 2.5 inches / 6 cm
- **Maximum Standard Length:** 3" (7.5cm).

Color Form:

Sexual Dimorphism: The male possesses a gonopodium and extended ventral fins, while the female is larger and plumper.

Lifespan: 3-5 years

Behavior: Can be aggressive with conspecifics, so it is best to keep them in an aquarium with their own species.

Habitat: Is found in rivers, streams, ditches and backwaters in areas of both slow and moderate flow

Diet: Carnivore; flake, live, and frozen food. Their wild diet consists mostly of insects. In captivity *Alfaro cultratus* is unfussy and will eat most food offered. Their diet should include some fresh protein such as live or frozen food.

Breeding: An easily-bred live bearer. If conditions are to their liking young will be produced regularly. Fry should be removed to a separate tank as you notice them and fed on microworm or powdered flake. Between 20-100 fry may be produced in a single brood. Females give birth to about 20-30 every month. The fry can be fed with baby brine shrimp and crushed flake food. Females give birth to between 10 to 30 live fry which are quite long at 1 to 1.5 cms at birth but are very slender. If breeding is intended then the female should be placed in a separate well planted tank on her own until she gives birth and then removed in order to prevent her from eating the fry. *Alfaro cultratus* might be sensitive to worsening conditions which will result in poor health.

Aquarium Setup: Best kept in a well planted tank with good circulation. It's most at home in a planted aquarium. Provide areas of dense vegetation, along with some open areas for swimming. Other decor can consist of twisted roots and smooth rocks. Some floating vegetation will also be appreciated by this surface dweller.

Minimum Tank Size: 24" x 12" x 12" (60cm x 30cm x 30cm) - 57 litres.

Care Level:

Water Conditions:

- **Temperature:** 75-82°F (24-28°C)
- **pH:** 6-8
- **Hardness:** 5 to 12

Swimming Level: Upper levels and surface.

Compatibility / Temperament: Semi aggressive; species tank. Best kept in a species tank or with robust fish of a similar size.

