

Got Fish and Aquatic Plants? Get Habitattitude™.

Patrice Charlebois and Kristin TePas

Good Deed Gone Bad

Some aquarium hobbyists and water gardeners release their aquatic animals and plants into the natural environment out of kindness to these organisms. Release of pets and plants, however, is not always humane. Organisms discharged into the environment often die from starvation, are eaten by predators, or succumb to parasites and diseases.

Many aquarium and water garden organisms *do* thrive when released, however, and can cause significant environmental and economic harm. Those species most likely to cause harm are called “invasive.” When introduced into a new environment, these species prosper at the expense of the native ones. The ultimate result is that the pond, lake or stream changes, usually in an undesirable and irreversible way.

What is Habitattitude™?

Habitattitude™ is a national public education campaign to raise awareness of the potentially harmful effects associated with releasing aquatic organisms into the natural environment, and to encourage responsible hobbyist behavior, particularly the use of release alternatives (see sidebar). This campaign is a cooperative effort of Sea Grant, the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Look for the Habitattitude™ fishbowl logo and accompanying prevention message—“protect our environment, do not release fish and aquatic plants”—to start popping up at your local pet stores.



Habitattitude™

PROTECT OUR ENVIRONMENT
DO NOT RELEASE FISH AND AQUATIC PLANTS

PIJAC • U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE • NOAA'S SEA GRANT

www.Habitattitude.net

Alternatives to Release

Do you have unwanted pets or plants?

Use these options:

- Contact retailers for proper handling advice or possible returns.
- Give to or trade with another aquarist, pond owner or water gardener.
- Donate to a local aquarium society, school or aquatic business.
- Seal aquatic plants in plastic bags and dispose in trash.
- Contact veterinarian or pet retailer for guidance on humane disposal of animals.
- Know your state regulations regarding these alternatives.

What Can You Do?

First and foremost, you can tend aquaria and water gardens responsibly by choosing alternatives to release. You can also learn more about the invasive species issue and share your knowledge with fellow hobbyists. Finally, you can encourage your aquarium or water gardening clubs, pet retailers, nurseries and local governing agencies to help promote the “don’t release” message. By taking these steps, you play a vital role in helping protect our natural resources from aquatic invasive species.

Be a responsible hobbyist. Get Habitattitude™!

To learn more about Habitattitude™, visit Habitattitude.net. For more information on invasive species contact Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant at 847-872-8677 or visit www.sgnis.org.

Patrice Charlebois and Kristin TePas are aquatic invasive specialists with Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant and the Illinois Natural History Survey, and are based out of the Lake Michigan Biological Station in Zion, IL.