

A Visit to Sillykillies

Paul and Debbie Heidrich moved to the town of Maricopa in about 2007 and decided to breed killifish. They advertise on AquaBid as Sillykillies and list lots of different killies. Paul, who is retired, handles the fishes and shipping while Debbie takes care of the business aspects of their hobby.

On July 25, 2009, I drove Maricopa to visit to Paul and Debbie. The reason for the trip was simple – a trade. Paul had mates available for a few lonely hearts that I had and he was interested in obtaining several of my killies. The trip to Maricopa took almost an hour from north Phoenix. It was an easy ride with either freeways or 4-lane highways for most of the way.



Paul in his fish room – the view from the door, the wall is on the left

Upon arriving at their home, I was enthusiastically greeted by their 5-month old Mastiff puppy. Paul and Debbie also warmly welcomed me. Then Paul blew me away with a tour of his fish room. The accompanying photos don't fully do it justice.



Looking down the second row, middle row to the left, wall to the right

Paul's fish room is laid out to maximize the available space and still provide easy access. There are two main aisles that each form a U-shape. Most of the shelves contain 10-gallon tanks, though many of the 10-gallon tanks have siliconged dividers that convert single tanks into ones with two or three separate compartments. Each 10-gallon tank has a custom-made cover which is a wood-framed screen. The tanks utilize sponge filters. Breeding tanks have one or more spawning mops in each. Paul also likes to add some peat moss as a thin substrate in his tanks. One reason is that he believes peat on the bottom of a tank makes the fish more comfortable.



As a terrific way to create a work area for checking mops, or feeding or catching fish, Paul has built in a sliding shelf in the middle row. The shelf can be moved to either aisle as it is needed. When not needed, it can be easily slid out of the way.





Besides using 10-gallon tanks, Paul also utilizes a large number of plastic storage boxes to house fry. As the fry grow, they are moved progressively into larger containers. Paul uses a folding ladder to reach the upper tanks and containers.



A typical 10-gallon tank for raising juvenile killies



A partitioned 10-gallon tank containing three breeding compartments

Paul usually feeds the fish several times each day. He uses California black worms (aka tubifex) and newly-hatched baby brine shrimp.

Paul breeds both annual killies and plant-spawners, although primarily the latter. For the plant-spawners, he likes to pick eggs from the mops. This gives him an idea of how productive his fish are and he keeps records of the results. After picking eggs, they are stored in labeled small plastic containers which are kept in cabinets in the laundry room.





The laundry room is also where Paul keeps his brine shrimp hatcheries.

The trip to Maricopa was enjoyable. While most of us do not have the time to manage a set up like Paul's, the pictures may provide you with ideas on how to maximize your available space.