

Never Say Die “Hydnophora”

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pronunciation: hide-ni-for-uh

common name: horn coral, branch coral

background: the lighting needs as well as water flow for this coral are medium too strong. The aggressiveness is low, and the difficulty of care is medium too difficult. The genus has about seven species distributed from the red sea to the south pacific.



For the most part this coral, with respect to other sps is not as difficult to keep. Sometimes its acclimation period can be difficult and even misleading. I currently have two species in my care, one of the more common rigida and the other (I believe to be) pilosa. Both specimens I know have been imported from two totally different areas however had suffered the same fate in my aquarium. My system is somewhat large consisting of about 600 gallons and has been running now for about 4 years. I have more difficult specimens than this such as mycedium that has seemed to have been far less trouble, thus the intent of the article. Subsequent to these two specimens I have had a similar experience with one piece of rigida in this same system. Unbeknownst to me at the time was the art of propagation and fragmentation. When an sps like hydnhophora starts to go, it will happen fast. In fact so fast you may lose a colony in just 24 to 36 hours. This is exactly what happened to me with a 5 inch colony. It was heartbreaking to say the least watching this piece die a bit more each day. I remember going in a cleaning off the dead tissue every 12 or so hours, but to no prevail the end was near. In years since I have read a bit on this species and have learned it's sometimes more than challenging during acclimation. I have always wondered technically how long is this actual period.

Years ago when that first specimen died I remember seeing the common flailing tissue coming off the skeletal structure and the infectious ring just spread downward to the base slowly and surely. Well interestingly enough I have just went through this twice in the past 10 months but have had a totally different outcome. My tank has not changed physically, technically, or chemically (although one can argue) and today I am keeping far more advanced specimens. What has changed however is knowledge and adversity to risk. Back then I was intimidated by the specimens and afraid to handle the, ironically that is exactly what needed to be done. The two photos I have submitted illustrate the benefits in taking risk. When that first piece started dying years back one thing I had done was attempt to remove the dying tissue with a soft bristled tooth brush. The objective was to remove it all so the healthy tissue does not carry the infection forward and destroy the colony. At that time I was more afraid of breaking the specimen than it dying from the infected tissue. Looking back I wonder why I really had nothing to lose. The facts are for me that this coral definitely has a break in period, and I like others have been fooled after not seeing any failure in the first week. I have had the same experience with 5 total pieces of this covering 3 different species, a time period of years, two tanks, multiple stores and different collection site. Weather is be something I have created in this micro environment or something indicative to the

acclimation period of this genus I have one way of handling the challenge

When you see decay anywhere the first suggestion is do not be afraid to act fast, things will not get better just by watching (the coral needs help). Two methods I have used are both similar but differ slightly in the mechanical process. With respect to rigida I handled the crisis much as I would if I were propagating the piece through fragmentation. With my most recent colony about 5 inches in height I immediately broke the specimen into about six to seven individual branches outside the tank. You can use a myriad of tools to break the coral from your hand to needle nose pliers. Try to make your breaks well into the healthy tissue and near the base or main structure if possible. Remember this coral is already stressed so do this quickly and accurately. Once you have your separate pieces work with them in two separate buckets of salt water from your tank, don't do this in your main tank. Keep each piece out on a towel for now, take one piece at a time and a soft bristled tooth brush and carefully remove the dying tissue in one direction (away from the healthy tissue) next shake the excess tissue off in one of the buckets. Next inspect the piece closely and look for a point to break into the healthy tissue so you completely remove the exposed skeleton. It's important you break totally into the healthy tissue with a nice clean break. Afterwards put the piece in the other bucket (this one has not been touched by contaminated decaying tissue) repeat the steps for the remainder of the branches. Next give these pieces a bath in a fresh iodine mixture. I use lugos strong iodine that you can obtain from a pharmacist and salt water from your tank. I have used about a thirty to one ratio but many concentrations have been reported to work. Let the pieces sit for about 30 minutes, and repeat the process each day for two or three days or until you see the recession stop

The other method I have utilized was much the same in all steps however instead of fracturing the coral I was forced to cut channels in it with a dremmel. Pilosa and excessa are both encrusting forms of hydno-phora and would be rather difficult to break up. In fact the colony in the photos the one that went through this procedure. This colony is about seven inches long and three inches wide. Nine months ago this colony was all but wiped out, reduced to a small one by two patches of struggling growth. Originally this colony was smaller if you could imagine its middle section without the plating growth. The top right hand side had started to decay and spread across the top and down the left hand side of the coral in a short time. Removing this coral from the tank I used a dremmel to score into the healthily tissue a scrub off the dying tissue outwards, being careful not to spray the decay back onto the healthily section. I then took a pipette of tap water and slowly covered the sections I wanted to die off leaving a small square patch in the middle of the coral. After three concurrent days of iodine baths and one more dremmel session the decaying tissue stopped, and I returned the specimen to the exact same place in the tank. Now approximately eight to nine months later the colony not only stabilized but exceeded its original mass.

Since these photographs I have removed this piece from the tank and moved it to my holding tank. This is where I prepare my specimens for propagation. I plan to remove the lower three plating lobes of this coral and attach them to tonga rock with underwater marine epoxy. That propagation's will truly be tank raised since the growth area has completely grown in captivity. IM curious to see where these props will be one year from now. What I have learned from this experience and I hope you have learned from this article, is do not give up! Don't be afraid to take the risk and save or propagate one of the species from the genus hydno-phora or any sps for that matter.