

Duncan corals have only been around in the marine hobby for a few years, but have gained a great deal of popularity because they are considered hardy and good for beginners. This coral is also inexpensive, especially when bought as a “frag” with either a single head (or two) which will grow rapidly as long as the calcium levels in the tank are in the 420 to 450 ppm range (maximum 480 ppm).

Several color variations are offered for sale in the trade, but unless the right kind of lighting is used over the tank, they may revert to a brownish creamy color. This cream color can also have some green in it when it is not fully open. Purple with blue is another common coloration (Photo 1).

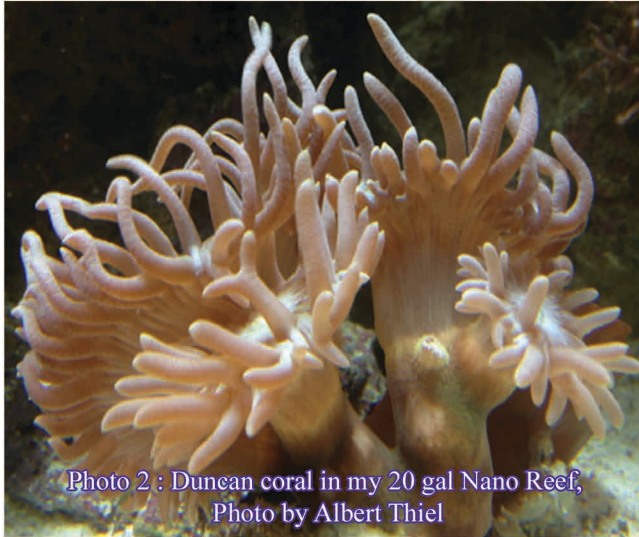


Photo 2 : Duncan coral in my 20 gal Nano Reef,
Photo by Albert Thiel

Duncan corals also come with variations in tentacle length, although it is not certain that these are different species. The length and thickness of the tentacles may have to do with water flow and lighting. In my tank, I have observed my corals change from short and thick in the morning, to far more elongated and thinner in the evening.

Duncan corals develop new heads rather fast, and the colony grows more and more dense, with short corallites. Some develop longer ones and grow in a more open manner. In my experience, the exact reasons for this have not yet been identified, due to the lack of information available from scientific studies.

Fragging for reproduction is easy as the corallites can be snipped off and glued down on a small piece of clean rock or frag plug. The frag is then placed back in the Nano-Reef, where it grows both in size and development of additional new heads after a relatively short period of time.

They feed by trapping small food particles in the water, but can also be fed with small pieces of meaty foods. During manual feeding, Duncan polyps will turn into a ball-like shape. Each head has a mouth and each mouth needs to be fed, making spot feeding the best method for this coral.

Duncanopsammia axifuga

DUNCAN CORAL

Photo 1 : Purple Duncan Coral © Quality Marine

Duncan corals do best in medium to medium-strong light, with moderate to a little stronger flow. The best placement appears to be on the substrate or close to it, and not close to other corals that can sting it, especially since it will expand in size. Enough space should be allocated around the coral, in case expansion does occur. Some reefers have placed their Duncan corals higher up in their Nano-Reefs and were still successful.

Note that Duncan corals may close up or only show very short tentacles for several days. There is no reason for alarm, as this appears to be one of its usual behaviors. Duncan corals are sensitive to high temperatures and should be kept at around 78-79° F. Anything higher than that will have negative effects on the coral which may cause it to remain totally closed, preventing it from feeding, and may lead to its demise.

pH should be kept around 7.9 ~ 8.2. Suggested S.G. is 1.023 ~ 1.025 and a pH of around 8.0 ~ 8.1 seems best. Duncan corals also appear to be sensitive to other life forms touching them, especially shrimp that crawl on and pick at them. When adding top-off freshwater, aiming the stream directly at the coral will cause it to close up for some time. Estimating how long these cautionary reactions of closing up will last is difficult.

Make sure algae does not grow on the coral as they will cause tissue recession and possibly necrosis, which will, in many cases, lead to bacterial infections.

Duncan corals are perhaps one of the best corals for beginners. As long as tank conditions are up to par, they will grow new heads fairly quickly and grow rapidly, lending themselves well to fragging. These can then be traded with other hobbyists or even sold on forums. Prices can vary, and of course, the more heads the coral already has, the pricier it will be.

Photo 2 shows the Duncan in my own 20 gallon Nano-Reef. This started as a two-head Duncan and has now grown to five (one head is covered in the photo). If you are looking for a hardy coral for your Nano-Reef, this certainly is one to consider. ♦

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