



JASON THRESHER

Age: 35.

Hometown:
Bookham, Surrey, UK.

Occupation:
IT manager; owner of
Reef Culture.

Marine experience:
18 years.

Tank size:
24g D-D Nano Cube.

Favourite
fish: gobies and blennies.
coral: zoanths
and polythoa.
other: Pistol Shrimp.

Specialist areas:
Coral propagation.

FRAGGING DUNCANS

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Duncanopsammia axifuga*

COMMON NAME: DUNCAN, WHISKER CORAL

This month I will be demonstrating how to frag Duncan corals, and it's the first LPS in the fragging tutorials. Duncan corals make a great addition to the marine aquarium. They are peaceful and relatively hardy, so will do well in most marine setups. They are a good LPS coral for beginners and intermediate reefkeepers to try, and will adapt to a variety of conditions. You will, however, find conflicting information in care guides, but I recommend medium flow and moderate lighting for long-term success.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

SPS CUTTERS: The 8ins SPS cutters will cope with most LPS corals, but if you are following the tutorials in each issue, start looking for a Dremel if you don't already own one. Although it is a little expensive (ranging between about £50 and £100), it is a very handy bit of kit when working with some of the more robust corals. It also has a myriad of uses around the house, which is reason enough to invest in one.

CYANOACRYLATE GEL: It is better to use a gel for fragging LPS corals, as the thicker consistency holds the frag well in position while it cures.

EPO PUTTY: This can be used as an alternative to the cyanoacrylate gel.

FRAG STONE AND PLUG: I will be using standard Reef Culture frag plugs and the new small frag station rocks. This new product works very well because it provides a solid base for attachment, allowing you to work with much larger frags.

FRAG STATION: The frag station holds the plugs while I work, and supports the frag while the glue cures.

CONTAINERS: Containers house the frags while working.

HOW TO FRAG A DUNCAN

The name of the game when working with Duncans is slime! If you have worked on these corals before you will be familiar with the huge amounts of slime they produce. If you have not handled or fragged a Duncan before, I would recommend using gloves, as well as working over a soft surface. These corals can easily slip from your hands, so having something soft to protect it if it slips is a must. A towel folded a few times works perfectly, and provides a falling Duncan coral the protection that a tile floor or hard table would not.

As with the Birdsnest coral, I find aesthetics an important consideration when fragging Duncans. Make sure you will be happy with the result when choosing a branch to frag, as once it's gone, it's gone. (Well at least gone for many months!) Once you've decided on which branch to frag, take the SPS cutters and remove it under the fleshy polyps. It is worth trying to cut the branch off nice and straight, as it will give a flat

surface that allows the gel to form a strong bond between the frag and the plug. Place the frags in the container until you are ready to mount them. While a Duncan coral should be fine if exposed to the air for longer periods of time, it is better to err on the side of caution and dip it every couple of minutes while you are working with it.

MOUNTING THE FRAGS

Which adhesive you use determines the technique used to mount the frag. Epo putty cures slower than the gel, so if you are using it make sure your Duncan frags are protected from any high flow areas when returned to the aquarium. Larger frags are prone to being washed off the frag plugs before the putty cures; however, once it does cure it is very strong. My preference for mounting Duncan frags is to use the gel, and consists of a quick two-stage process.

STEP 1: Place a generous amount of gel on the frag plug, then hold the Duncan branch against it for about 30 seconds.

STEP 2: Place the Duncan frag UPSIDE DOWN in the container or tank. The saltwater cures the gel faster, and by placing the Duncan on its head (or heads, for that matter!) it removes the weight from the join between the frag and the plug. Leave the coral like this for 5-10 minutes to create a strong bond (this will vary with the amount of gel used). Once the gel has cured, place the frag back into the tank, and avoid the temptation of wiggling it to test the bond, as the gel may still be in the process of curing.

POST-FRAGGING CARE

Duncan corals are hardy and respond well to fragging. There are also a couple of steps you can take to maximise your success rate. Keep the calcium levels around the 450ppm mark for optimal growth and feed the frags a few times a week. The Duncan frags will grow much faster if you spot feed them. The post-fragging care should include a daily frag check, and any unhealthy frags should be removed from the system.

FINAL THOUGHTS

If you have any Duncans in your tank, I encourage you to propagate them and share the frags with friends. Duncans and many other corals in the Dendrophylliidae family are considered threatened due to reef destruction and unsustainable collecting practices. It is critical for the long-term viability of the marine aquarium trade that responsible hobbyists and retailers get involved in aquaculture. It would be very short-sighted of us not to see the hugely positive environmental impacts that this industry can have. **JT**

JASON'S STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO... FRAGGING DUNCANS



STEP 1
Here you can see all the equipment I will be using for the tutorial.



STEP 2
Remember to make the cut under the flesh. It is not absolutely critical, but it does result in less slime and a faster recovery.



STEP 3
Remember to make the cut under the flesh. It is not absolutely critical, but it does result in less slime and a faster recovery.



STEP 4
If you are using cyanoacrylate gel, you need to be generous on a large frag. Remember though, the more glue you use, the longer it takes to cure. This is when I place the frags upside down to cure.



STEP 5
Here is the new Duncan frag slotted into the frag station rock, ready to be returned to the tank.



STEP 6
The Duncan should recover quickly, and if you have good tank parameters and a healthy feeding regime, the new heads will soon start to grow.

We would like to thank John and Tania at Living Reef Aquatics for providing the Duncan used in this article.