



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: zoanthids and polythoa.
other: Pistol Shrimp.

Specialist areas:
Coral propagation.

FRAGGING LEATHERS

SCIENTIFIC NAMES: *Sarcophyton*; *Lobophyton*; *Sinularia*
COMMON NAME: TOADSTOOL; MUSHROOM; FINGER; COLT

Is your Finger Leather ready for a prune? In this issue, **Jason Thresher** gets his scissors out for the common Finger Leather. He describes some tried, tested and successful techniques, and provides the care guides you'll need to create your own little frags.

This month I will be demonstrating how to frag leather corals. While there are many different types of leather corals, the same technique can be used to frag them all.

Leather corals are so-called for a reason; they are probably the toughest, hardest and most forgiving coral available to the hobby. They thrive in virtually every marine aquarium and tolerate a wide range of less than perfect water conditions. Having said that, it is no excuse to forgo the water changes or usual tank maintenance! Good husbandry is absolutely key to succeeding in this hobby. A dirty tank also means more bad bacteria, and that increases the chance of infections of the mother colony post fragging, and the new frags you have created.

Out of every coral I have covered so far in the tutorials, the leather coral is probably the easiest to frag, and I will show you two different techniques you can use to attach the coral to its base.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Cutting blade: Personally I prefer slim-bladed scissors, but anything sharp will do. If the mother colony is really large, you will need something more robust to make the cuts. A Stanley knife with a new blade works perfectly. I have been known to sneak into the kitchen to use the stainless steel carving knife, but do so at your own risk!

Frag plugs or coral rubble: The frags are mounted onto these. I will be showing you two ways of mounting the coral, so you will also need:

Toothpicks, mesh and elastic bands: Leather corals become very slimy after being cut, and cyanoacrylate will not work well if used for attaching the coral to the mount.

Containers: As always, it is useful to have a couple of containers to house the corals before and after fragging.

HOW TO FRAG LEATHER CORALS

Essentially, all you need do is take cuttings of the coral and they will grow into new colonies. It is as easy as that! When fragging the coral, it depends what type of leather you have, as they roughly show two different growth patterns:

- A finger growth pattern.
- A mushroom growth pattern.

Leathers that fall into these rough categories require different techniques, but are equally easy to frag. The shape does, however, influence how to mount the coral at the end. When working with finger leathers, you simply need to take a cutting and snip off the finger. I prefer to leave a little stump behind (like with the Xenia tutorial), because it promotes

growth to continue at that point. A flush cut more often than not heals flat. Depending on how many frags you want determines how to frag the mushroom leathers. If you only want a few frags, you can just cut a few good pieces from the mother colony. For more frags, cut about a 5cm incision toward the centre of the coral, then turn the scissors perpendicular to the first cut and follow it parallel to the outside rim until you have enough. Remove the strip of leather coral with another 5cm incision towards the centre of the coral. (Imagine you are trying to cut a strip of paper and you get the idea)

You can cut the strips as large or as small as you like. I like roughly 5cm x 5cm sections because this gives a nice manageable piece to work with when mounting the coral.

MOUNTING THE FRAGS

Once you have removed the frags, you need to decide how to mount them to the frag plugs. My preferred method is to use a toothpick for the finger leathers, and mesh for the flatter mushroom leathers.

- If working with a finger leather, push a toothpick through the coral about 2cm above the cut where you removed it from the mother colony. If the coral is a little slimy, use foam as a base, as I demonstrated in the Xenia tutorial. Place the coral with the cut section against the plug and use the rubber band to secure it. Don't make it too tight because this could potentially damage the new frag.
- If working with a mushroom leather, place the leather onto the frag plug and put the mesh around it. Secure the mesh to the plug with a rubber band. It is helpful if the frag is smaller than the actual frag plug because it makes securing the mesh easier.
- If you are less keen to use the above hands-on approach, fill a container with small bits of rubble and place the frags in the container. The next step is simply to cover the container with the mesh. The frags should attach to the substrate within about a month, and then you can use cyanoacrylate glue or epoxy to attach the rubble to the plug. For those of you who have been following the series, it is the technique used with the mushroom corals.

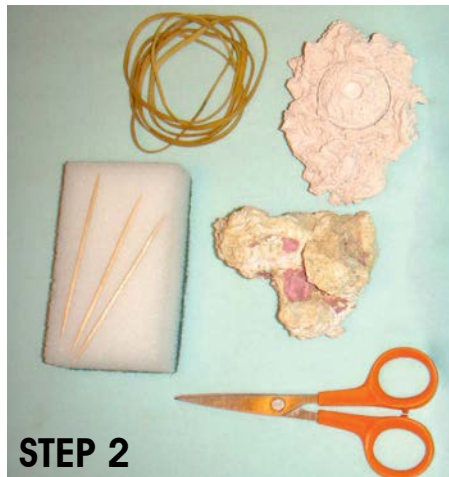
POST FRAGGING CARE

The mother colony and the new frags will both benefit from good water flow; this removes slime or debris build-up, which can result in bacterial infections. With good water conditions and flow, the frags and the mother colony should recover quickly. As always, keep an eye on the frags, and if any of them start deteriorating, remove them from the tank. It is better to lose a frag or two in the short term to avoid infecting the entire tank long term! **JT**

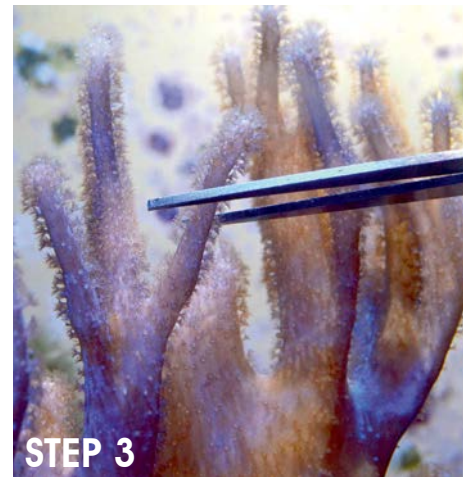
JASON'S STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO... FRAGGING LEATHERS



STEP 1 Make sure the mother colony is healthy and ready to be fragged. This may stress the coral, so please ensure the leather is ready for the experience.



STEP 2 Here are all the tools needed to successfully frag a finger leather coral. Make sure you have everything to hand for quick execution.



STEP 3 Take the scissors and cut a few centimetres above the chosen finger, and place it into a cup of tank water. The coral will soon shrink after the first snip, so snip quickly.



STEP 4 Pierce the bottom of the frag with the toothpick and secure down on a coral plug or rock using the elastic bands.



STEP 5 Place the coral in good flow to allow it to quickly heal. Within a few months you coral should start to grow.