



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

XENIA

SCIENTIFIC NAMES: *Xenia* sp. **COMMON NAME:** Pom Pom Xenia, Pulsating Xenia, Pulse Coral

In this issue **Jason Thresher** will be sticking the knife into the ever-popular Pulsating Xenia. Join him as he talks you through the basics of fragging xenia and the care needed for a successful frag.

Many people have a love/hate relationship with xenia. For people wanting to keep xenia, it often will not grow, and for people not wanting it, it usually grows like a weed! It really is the Marmite of the coral world but can be an excellent addition to the marine aquarium, adding lots of very visual movement that not all corals have to offer.

Xenia are a little bit of a mystery in the hobby, with many questions about them still awaiting answers. Strangely, even established colonies have been known to deteriorate for no apparent reason, so learning how to frag these corals is worthwhile to ensure longevity in the marine aquarium.

KEEPING XENIA ALIVE

While no one really knows why xenia colonies crash, there are a few things you can do to keep this mesmerising coral healthy in your tank.

- Although xenia are photosynthetic, they seem to do better in nutrient-rich water and grow better in tanks without a skimmer
- You need moderate to high flow in the tank to keep the xenia happy. The water flow induces the pulsating action of the corals
- Lighting is also important. Although xenia can be kept successfully at lower light levels, for long-term survival in the aquarium you want medium to high lighting
- Regular pruning seems to promote good growth and health
- Many people that have success with xenia recommend adding iodine to the tank

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

SCISSORS: We will be using the scissors to cut the branches off the xenia. Please note: slim-bladed scissors work much better than the large-bladed scissors used to cut paper. You can also use a scalpel, but it is a little more difficult.

FRAG PLUG OR LIVE ROCK RUBBLE: The xenia will be attached to these items.

TOOTHPICK AND AN ELASTIC BAND: These items will be used to attach the new xenia frag to the live rock.

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

I will be demonstrating a different fragging technique in this issue, but the same method that was used in the mushroom article (glass ramekin, elastic band, and meshing) could be used with xenia. It is actually my preferred method for fragging xenia, but knowing multiple techniques always allows you to adapt to whatever equipment you might have at hand.

HOW TO FRAG XENIA

The easiest way to frag xenia is when it is still in the tank. This way the xenia will be inflated to its full size, making the placements of the cuts much easier. It also allows you to identify which branches are best suited to fragging, because they will all be extended.

If you are using a scalpel it is best to frag the xenia out of the water. You should place the coral on a solid surface where you can safely make the cut.

When you have identified a healthy branch of xenia, simply cut it from the mother colony. My tip for this stage is as follows: Do not cut the coral flush to the main body of the coral. You want to leave a little 'stalk' that will recover and grow into another fraggable branch. By cutting the coral flush, there is a high possibility that the wound will heal flush,

resulting in one less branch to frag in the future.

Once you have cut a few frags off the colony, you now need to attach them to the live rock. Working with xenia is a little tricky because it is so slimy, so the next step might take a little trial and error. Take the wooden toothpick and push it through the base of the frag as though you are making a skewer. This is actually easier said than done, so I have come up with an easier way to achieve this! Use some form of foam or polystyrene and lay the xenia on it. This prevents the xenia sliding around, but also allows you to push the toothpick through the actual polystyrene, so there aren't the problems you would have if the surface was solid.

Once you have skewered the frag, use the rubber band to attach the toothpick to the live rock or plug. It should attach itself to the live rock within 3 weeks. You can then remove the elastic band and pull the toothpick out. The little hole that is left will heal within a few days.

Some people use an elastic band to directly hold the xenia onto the rock. This method yields poorer results because the elastic band often sits too tightly and often causes tissue necrosis on the frag.

Once you have attached all the xenia to the live rock, return it to the tank. Place it in a medium flow so that it can be encouraged to start pulsing.

POST FRAGGING CARE

It is normal for the xenia to sulk for a day or two. Keep an eye on the frags and if anything dies or looks unhealthy, remove it from the tank.

As with most soft corals, xenia thrive in nutrient-rich water. While they technically are photosynthetic, I find that some target-fed food does induce the pulsating action that is needed for a healthy frag. I have read where some people say that xenia do not feed on suspended particles, but my experience has been different. My xenia go into pulsing overdrive when I feed the tank.

I also recommend running carbon to absorb any excess organic waste that might be produced by the recovering xenia.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Your xenia fragging endeavours should have a high success rate. They are an easy coral to frag and have unbelievable recovering abilities.

They are the perfect coral to practice on and will help you to hone your skills for the more difficult corals to follow! **JT**



Xenia is possibly the easiest coral to frag. Hobbyists regularly accidentally frag them when moving. If you're new to fragging, then this coral is a sure winner.

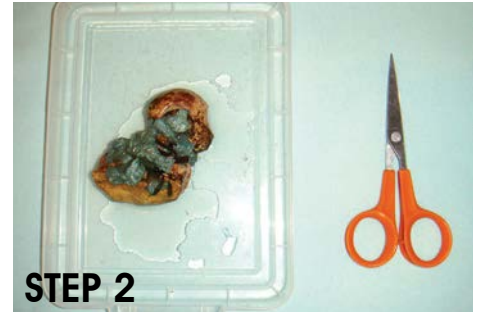
FRAGGING

XENIA



STEP 1

Here you can see the various tools used to frag the xenia. Remember to have all the equipment close to hand to ensure you're not skittering around trying to remember where you last put the elastic bands.



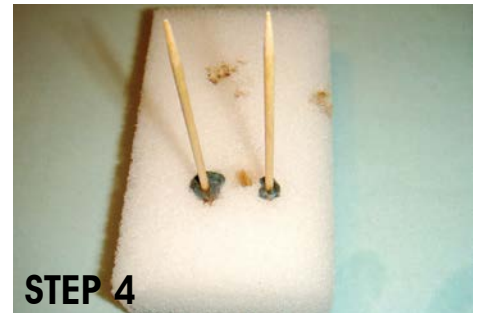
STEP 2

First find a suitable colony with a decent number of branches to frag. Xenia are quite hardy corals when it comes to fragging and don't mind being out of the water for extended periods of time.



STEP 3

Neatly cut a branch from the colony using sharp scissors. Place the frags into the container of water until stage 4. Ideally you want to cut frags that are about 3-4ins long, as this will give you a good surface to skewer when the frags shrivel up.



STEP 4

Now the tricky part; lay the frags on the sponge (polystyrene works well too) and push the toothpick through the base of the frag and into the sponge. Don't worry if the xenia frags shrivel up after you have cut them from the colony. This is normal.



STEP 5

You will now need the rubber bands and some live rock rubble or frag plugs. Fasten the toothpick to the live rock by tying it down with the rubber band and return the mounted frag to the tank.



STEP 6

After about 3 weeks the xenia will have attached to the rock. You can now remove the rubber bands and slowly pull out the toothpick with a gentle twisting motion. The remaining hole should heal over within the next couple of weeks.