

Homemade African Cichlid Food Recipe

Article by: DarkDep

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Background

I recently started reading a lot about fish food, mainly because I had a new load of fry to feed and the research roamed into adult fish nutrition. I wanted to supplement the BBS I'm feeding to the fry with a good crushed flake, so I went looking (as my old can was empty). I started reading labels and got a little confused, then distrustful. I was having a hard time understanding why a can of "goldfish spirulina food" had 'spirulina' listed as the 14th of 16 ingredients. Why did a "veggie" based flake have an identical or higher protein rating compared to a "shrimp" based flake? What's this "10% ash" nonsense? I ended up buying a generic spirulina flake that is horrible. None of my fish will eat it.

When in doubt, I can always trust the marketing of the good old New Life Spectrum to make me feed better. So I came home, and read my NLS labels, expecting to be calmed and sure I could trust a fish food manufacturer again. But, even the NLS has a "10% ash" listing. Ash is the "non-food" stuff such as bones, scales, etc that is in a fish food. Some is always going to be there (shells are good for the fish), but the lower the better; especially since "ash" doesn't really give you an indication of exactly what it is. I guess I expected my super-expensive NLS to have better numbers on the label. Plus, they claim that your fish will look "night and day" better with their food. I have never noticed any change in my fish when they were put on NLS.

So, with my NLS running low anyway, I had to make a decision. I decided that because there are *NO controls in place for fish food in North America*, and because I have not been overwhelmed by any recent food I've fed my fish, I decided to see what I could do on my own.

The Recipe

I decided to start with a variation of a cichlid food recipe known as the European Shrimp Mix and modify to my desires. I wanted to prepare a balanced, complete staple food for all of my Africans, and this looked like a promising place to start. I varied it slightly, so I will post my recipe and exactly where I obtained and used each item:

1 lb (454g) Whole Shrimp - You want *complete* shrimp with the heads, shells, and legs. "Cheap" shrimp is better, as long as they are full grown. Don't spend money on "large" shrimp; it won't matter for our application. I picked up a bag of Whole Prawns for \$4.99 at Sobeys.

1 lb (454g) Frozen Green Peas - I used a bag of Green Giant peas I had in the freezer.

2 Big handfuls of Frozen Broccoli - Again, I used some from a bag of Green Giant I had in the freezer.

2 tsp Pure Spirulina Powder - I picked up a bottle of 100% Spirulina Powder from Granny's Health Food Emporium in the Hazeldean Mall, 100g for \$17 after tax. A bit pricey, but this is enough to last you forever or to share. Get the powder, not the capsules. You should be able to find this item at any local health food store. Just ask.

Unflavoured Gelatin Powder - I used 5 packets of "Knox" brand gelatin, available in the baking section of your grocery store for about \$2 a box (4 packs in a box, unfortunately...)

5ml (one capful) Liquid Multivitamins - I used Kent Zoe Freshwater vitamin/mineral supplement that I picked up from Big Als Kanata (~ \$14 after OVAS discount). The original recipe calls for only a few drops of this stuff, but since the label suggests SOAKING food in it, I decided to use a bit more. One capful looked right.

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The Procedure

- Thaw the Shrimp, Peas, and Broccoli so they are just slightly frozen.
- Use a Blender or food processor to grind up the above. My blender is a bit small for all of this, so I did it in two batches and poured the results into a large bowl. You might find your blender has trouble with the solid nature of the ingredients; if you do, just add a little water to the blender and it will help. (Don't go overboard, but enough to get things blending is fine). The final consistency should be a fine paste. Tiny lumps are ok.
- With the mix in a bowl, add the Spirulina Powder and the Liquid Vitamins. Stir the heck out of it with a big spoon. The final result will be a dark green liquid paste.
- Now it's time to mix the Gelatin. The directions on the box are mostly fine; with Knox I did exactly this: Poured 1 cup of water in a pot turned on the oven to low heat. Boiled water in a kettle. While water is heating up, add 5 packets of gelatin to the water in the pot and stir it up. When water is boiling, add 1 cup of boiling water to the pot, and stir. Keep the pot on LOW heat. (It doesn't need to be much). Note that the amount of water suggested for 5 packets on the box is MORE than what is specified here; it is intentional.
- Add the contents of the bowl slowly to the pot, stirring constantly. You want the gelatin mix (which at this point is probably the consistency of water or maybe slightly thicker). I added a big spoonful of the green mix to the pot at a time, and stirred. Eventually you'll get the whole thing in there and your pot will be filled with a seemingly liquid green nastiness.
- When done, pour the mix into a big wide-flat Tupperware container. Anything that will give you a thickness of say, 1-2 cm. Put it in the fridge for several hours.
- After several hours, it will have the consistency of Jell-O. At this time, you can cut it up into convenient sizes, throw into Ziploc bags, and freeze it until ready to use. I recommend using a very sharp knife to cut out a grid of 1cm squares.

How to Use

Break apart a few cubes and put them in a cup (I use a shot glass for each tank). I simply put the cup somewhere room-temperature and let it thaw for approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. This seems to bring the food back to a good consistency where it is solid enough for you to pick up, but will easily break apart when chewed by the fish. Feed one cube at a time. If an aggressive fish grabs a cube you may notice it break apart into little bits...don't worry. I guarantee you the fish will clean it all up. Don't try to heat the cubes to thaw them faster...all that will happen is the gelatin will break down and you'll end up with liquid again (which isn't bad for the fish, they will still eat it, but it's less convenient to handle). Because this food is just dripping with vitamins and minerals, I currently don't recommend you feed it more than once a day.

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First Taste Test!

When my batch was done, I cut up some small cubes and tried it on my pickiest audience, my 90gal African tank. To say they were enthusiastic would be an understatement. They gobbled it with glee; plus, because that tank has fish of various sizes, it made me feel better seeing that the big guys could get an actual full mouthful of food and the little guys could eat the chunks that went flying, rather than forcing the big guys to eat little tiny morsels (traditional fish food).

Economics

This recipe makes a large amount of food; it will easily last a couple months. Although the initial investment in money includes expensive items like the vitamins and spirulina powder, the amount you get vs the amount you use means that every batch you make will get cheaper and cheaper overall. The Vitamins and Powder will last you a LONG time.

Nutrition

The benefits of this food are great. Now I know exactly what my fish are eating, and can vary future recipes accordingly if I want to introduce a new element. This food is high in veggie value, and has enough protein to satisfy the carnivores as well as grow the herbivores without promoting malawi bloat. I hope to research more and produce some percentages, but for now I am very happy. The Shells are important to include, don't decide that it's better to use "shelled" shrimp. Fish in the wild eat small crustaceans shells and all. The shells contain minerals that will benefit your fish.

Current Status

This food has become the standard food for all my African tanks. My wife has asked why certain fish seem to be more colourful than before, so I know it is having a positive effect on their appearance.