

Notice too, the characteristics all mosquito fish share:

- Their bodies are covered with protective scales that overlap like roof tiles or shingles. Use your hand lens to see them better.
- They have large round eyes and see very well.
- They have a dark line (called the **lateral line**) running the length of their bodies. The lateral line is made up of sensitive nerve endings that detect pressure in the water.
- Like all fish, they breathe by pumping water through their mouth and over their gills. How many times a minute does your fish breathe?

The adult male mosquito fish grows to a length of 3.5 cm (1½ in). He is usually a pale gray color. Sometimes he will have a faint blue color that looks like shiny metal when light hits it. His body is slim and his tail is round. The dorsal fin and tail often are marked with rows of tiny dark dots.

Females: Mosquito Fish or Guppy?

The female looks a little different from the male. She is much larger than the male and can grow up to 6 cm (2½ in) long. Like the male, she is a drab grayish blue color. But

she may have a black spot on the tail. Her fins and tail are rounded, and her body is plump. Like the male, her dorsal fin and tail may have rows of tiny dark dots. The dots in the tail are the only difference between the female mosquito fish and the female guppy. Otherwise they look alike.

When the female is pregnant, her abdomen becomes very swollen. A black spot, called the **gravid spot**, appears on each side of her body just above the rear fin. She may have as few as three fry. Or, she may have over 200 at one time (but that is very rare). An average number of fry is 40 to 50.

Small Fry Head for Cover

Mosquito fish are **live-bearers**. This means their fry are born alive and fully formed. They are less than 1 cm (¼ in) at birth. They resemble females in that they are rounded and dull colored, but they are more transparent.

Can you think of a reason why dull coloring is an advantage for a baby fish? Like most live-bearers, mosquito fish like to eat their fry. To survive, the baby fish swim immediately to plants for protection (yet another reason why elodea is important to your aquarium). Then, they'll grow very quickly. Within a week or two they will be too large for their parents to swallow!