



Hemianthus callitrichoides

By Efren Leonida

Hemianthus callitrichoides is small-leaved stem plant that I have found to be very versatile in aquatic layouts. Originating from Cuba, H. callitrichoides (or HC as it's commonly referred to on the 'Net) is a great carpeting foreground plant. Other hobbyists say it can also be used by attaching to driftwood or rock. With sloping and shaping of the substrate, it can be used with dramatic effect in an Iwagumi layout (a style modeled after Japanese rock gardens). Due to its size, it is the 'ultimate' plant for nano tank layouts, but can also be used effectively as part of the foreground in the largest of tanks.

Light requirements aren't too demanding, although it does need at least moderate light. Care should be given to avoid shading by taller plants. As with all plants, it thrives with carbon supplementation (i.e. carbon dioxide, alternatively Seachem's Excel). I have grown HC in both 'high tech' tanks with good nutrient supplementation and carbon dioxide injection, as well as 'low tech' soilbased tanks with no further supplementation. With higher light and carbon dioxide supplementation, growth is more brisk as well as more compact. In lower light setups, growth is steadier and more vertical, although the stems still 'creep' over the substrate forming a good carpet. Personally I find both types of growth appealing. In particular, the slower growth in the 'low tech' tanks furthers the overall goal of less maintenance in these setups.

Planting may be the most difficult part of using this plant in your aquarium. A pair of tweezers helps greatly with the task. Taking quarter-inch to half-inch sections, gently submerge the plant under the substrate. Then gently pull approximately half of it back out, leaving the other portion still submerged. You will get a feel for it after a few tries. What can make planting difficult is if you have fauna that can disturb the portions before they take root and start spreading. Shrimp, snails, catfish and other 'rooting' residents are common culprits, leading to your painstaking work floating to the top of your tank. Waiting two to three weeks before adding the usual suspects to the tank greatly decreases this occurrence, and once it has spread well across your substrate, HC will stay rooted very well. Another alternative is to plant HC in a 'wet' substrate, cover the tank to keep humidity high, and let the plant spread in its emersed form before adding water, fauna and other plants.

Trimming can be performed with any scissors, although curved scissors make the task easier. If using straight scissors, keep the scissors as horizontal as possible and use small snips. Once the plants grow to one-half to three-fourths inch in size, simply trim the top third to half of the plant. The floating cuttings can be scooped up with a net and the larger portions replanted. Another alternative is to carefully cut out 'plugs' from the substrate, or even remove the mat of plants from the tank and replant in portions as initially performed.

Hemianthus callitrichoides is still quite uncommon in stores. However, Florida nurseries have been growing emersed pots and they should be more accessible soon. HC is currently a popular plant in the hobby and is easily obtained from other hobbyists, including ones in our club. If you're planning on setting up a planted tank, keep HC in mind for the foreground.