

Purchase some ordinary household ammonia that contains no additives or scents and a bacteria culture such as Hagen's Cycle or Stability (I usually use Stability)

1. Once you have your tank filled and the water circulating add the recommended amount of bacteria culture. Some bacteria culture recommends adding a recommended amount each day for the first week - do whatever your bottle says.
2. Get something to measure your ammonia such as a syringe or teaspoon. Add ammonia in small increments (e.g. 1 tsp at a time) and keep track of what you are adding. After each addition of ammonia wait for the water to circulate for about 1/2 hour and test your ammonia level. Keep adding small amounts until your ammonia level reaches 2ppm (record the amount of ammonia you needed to add because you will need to know this later)
3. Now you have to wait for the ammonia level to reach zero. During this time, you will leave your aquarium lights off and do not run your protein skimmer. It is beneficial to raise the water temperature to 78-80 degrees F so that the bacteria can multiply more readily. You can test your water every few days during this time.
4. When your ammonia level reaches zero add the same total amount of ammonia you added the first time.
5. You can now start testing your Nitrites - you should see them begin to rise and peak. They will begin falling as the nitrifying bacteria begin to multiply. Continue testing your ammonia levels and when they reach zero again add the same total amount of ammonia you added the first time.

Each time your ammonia level reaches zero add your original volume of ammonia.

6. Once your nitrites reach zero you can begin to test your Nitrates - these levels will continue to rise and may level out at a constant value

You will notice that it will begin to take less time for your ammonia levels to reach zero each time you add more ammonia. This is because the bacteria are multiplying and getting stronger. Once your tank clears 2ppm in 12 hours and your Nitrite levels are zero at the same time your tank is almost ready. Add the ammonia a couple more times to make sure it is clearing in 12 hours then perform a large water change (at least 80% or more to reduce your Nitrates) and your tank is ready. It is advised to check your pH before stocking as the ammonia method of cycling often reduces your pH. A good buffering agent can help out with this.

With this method your tank will be more than ready for your livestock and cleanup crew. If wishing to add a lot of livestock at a time you may wish to have your tank clear more ammonia each time, but usually 2ppm is sufficient.

The protein skimmer can be turned on once you get your livestock and your lights can be turned on as soon as the cycle is finished. If adding seahorses, remove the heater and let the water cool down to around 70-74 degrees F before adding them. If it will be a few days before you add livestock, it is a good idea to continue feeding your tank ammonia so that the bacteria don't begin to die off.

It takes approximately a month to 6 weeks to properly cycle a tank so don't get discouraged while waiting.