



Fragging, Mounting, and Caring for Corals

An excessively brief summary

Consider this a care sheet for getting started. Almost every word of this document will cause controversy and indignation among experienced reefkeepers. Please refer to more complete references when you have a chance. Note that the categories below reflect common methods of fragging and mounting, rather than any biological relationships.

For those looking for more detailed instructions, Anthony Calfo's *Book of Coral Propagation*, although out of print, is a classic. There are many online tutorials, including some amazing ones from [Gallery Aquatica TV](#).

Branching or Scrolling Stony Corals ("SPS" and friends)

Examples: *Acropora*, *Pocillopora*, *Montipora*, *Stylopora*, *Turbinaria*

Fragging tools: fingers, bone shears, needlenose pliers, Dremel.

Method: What unites these corals is the general ease of breaking them. Some species are more brittle than others, but they can all be fragged using shears or pliers. Grab at the location you want to break, and either twist or cut, and off it comes.

Mounting: Frags can be secured to plugs or rockwork using super glue gel, epoxy putty, or wedging them into a crack in the rocks. If the frag is healthy and in a good environment, it will grow and encrust onto its new location.

Care: Most *Acropora* species, require strong light and circulation. Others, like *Montipora*, are less picky, but all will thrive in locations where they receive lots of light and water movement.



Large-Polyp Stony Corals (LPS)

Examples: hammer, torch, frogspawn (*Euphyllia*)

Fragging tools: bone shears, gravity, Dremel, bone saw.

Method: The skeletons of these corals are generally light and brittle, so fragging can be accomplished by cutting with shears, accidentally banging the corals against the side of the tank, or dropping from a modest height. Cleaner cuts are made with saws or Dremel. Cut as close to a branch point (as far away from the polyp) as possible to minimize damage to living tissue inside.

Mounting: They can be glued or epoxied to frag plugs or wedged into cracks in the rockwork. Unlike most of the other corals on this list, *Euphyllia* do not encrust, so they will need a location in the rockwork or on the floor of the tank where they can remain stable.

Care: Place in areas with moderate to low flow; can tolerate most light conditions.



Massive and Encrusting Stony Corals

Examples: *Favia*, *Favites*, Brain corals (e.g., *Platygyra*, *Diploastrea*), Chalices (e.g., *Echinophyllia*)

Fragging tools: Hack saw, band saw, tile saw, chisel

Method: Because their skeletons can be robust or are encrusted onto rock (or both), these corals require more effort to cut than most. If you are lucky enough to have access to a band saw or tile saw, then it is a simple matter to make clean cuts. A stainless-steel hack saw (like those used in meatpacking) also does a clean job but requires more effort. Hammer and chisel, while quick and easy, has little control or frag size and can cause considerable damage at the edges.

Mounting: Once fragged, these corals can usually be left on their own. Chalices and brains can produce a lot of mucus when stressed, making it difficult to glue them.

Care: Tolerate a range of conditions and vary with species.

Leather Corals

Examples: Toadstool (*Sarcophyton*), Finger leather (*Simularia*), Kenya tree (*Capnella*)

Fragging tools: razor blade, scissors

Method: Cut off as much or as little as you want. Toadstools are commonly fragged by decapitation and cutting the cap into wedges. Even a chunk without polyps will usually develop into a complete coral within a few weeks.

Mounting: These corals will encrust if left in stable contact with a surface for a few weeks. Because of their mucus, glue is not very effective. Instead, some people glue or epoxy plastic toothpicks onto rocks, and impale the leather onto the toothpick. Wedging a frag into a crack in the rockwork, if available, also works.

Care: Although adaptable, leathers thrive with strong light and circulation. They tend not to get fouled, so can grow in less than pristine water conditions.



Photosynthetic Gorgonians

Examples: sea rod (*Pseudoplexaura*), candelabra (*Eunicea*), spiny sea fan (*Muricea*)

Fragging tools: bone shears scissors

Methods: Easily cut up with scissors or shears. Clean flesh off of bottom ¼” or 1/2” of internal skeleton to provide a surface for gluing.

Mounting: Need to be held steady until flesh encrusts onto substrate. Super glue the cleaned skeleton to a frag plug and leave in an area with low circulation until the coral is stable. Making a little “volcano” out of epoxy putty, allowing it to cure, and then gluing the coral into the hole in the epoxy, will provide support until the coral encrusts.

Care: Once secured, gorgonians prefer strong light and flow, and clean conditions.



Softies I:

Examples: mushrooms (*Discosoma Ricordea*), Xenia, Anthelia, clove polyps (*Clavularia*)

Fragging tools: razor blade, scissors, hammer and chisel (if encrusted on rock)

Method: Mushrooms and soft corals often spread on their own and can be removed from rocks and glass as desired with a razor blade. A large collection on a rock can be separated with a saw or hammer and chisel.

Mounting: Left undisturbed for a few days, they rapidly attach to substrate. Securing with string or a zip tie, covering with mesh, or leaving them in a cup with rubble on the bottom will all work

Care: Varies. Mushrooms and Anthelia are largely indestructible, as long as they receive some light.



Softies II:

Examples: zoanthids (*Zoanthus*, *Palythoa*), star polyps (*Pachyclavularia*)

Fragging: Razor blade, scissors

Method: Similar to Softies I, but these species form mats. If growing on glass, can be scraped and cut into convenient pieces. Zoanthids can be peeled from rocks, whereas star polyps tend to adhere too tightly. Will grow onto a tile or small rock placed next to the colony.

Mount: These species are easier to glue in place than softies like mushrooms. Small pieces of mats can be secured and allowed to encrust. Gluing to tiles allows easy separation later.

Care: Most are rugged once they are established, and not finicky about flow and light.



A final word about tool care: Rinse all tools in clean fresh water immediately after you are finished fragging. Power tools such as tile saws and Dremels obviously will be ruined if not cleaned immediately. However, even surgical stainless tools, like bone shears, will rust if left too long in salt water.