



## Sticky Basics: The Art of SPS Frag Gluing

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**C**ongratulations on purchasing your new SPS frag and welcome to the world of captive coral propagation! If all goes well, soon you will be able to frag your new coral to trade with other reef keepers, but first, you need to attach your frag to your reef both to protect it and to maximize its growth. This article will discuss my preferred method for protecting and mounting SPS frags to an existing home reef – super glue gel.

If your SPS frag isn't securely attached to your home reef it is in danger of getting knocked over by a wandering snail, crab, other reef animal, being blown over by your water flow, or being dislodged by a stray hand while you are working in the tank. Constantly having to handle and reattach frags that fall over will slow their growth, extend their acclimation time or even damage the coral. A dislodged frag may also disappear into your rockwork never to be seen again, or fall onto a neighboring coral, which can result in the death of one or both of the animals.

Almost as important as having a secure attachment for your frag is its 'movability'. You may discover you need to move the frag to a location in the tank with better lighting or water flow, or you may simply want to move the animal for aesthetic reasons. There are a whole host of coral pests and diseases (red bugs, acro eating flatworms, coral eating nudibranchs, rapid tissue necrosis, slow tissue necrosis, etc.) that can be treated more easily and safely by removing the infected coral from the show tank for quarantine or therapeutic dip, rather than treating the entire system. The ins and outs of quarantine tanks and dipping regimens are outside the scope of this article, but you can check the RHM online forums at [www.reefobbyistmagazine.com](http://www.reefobbyistmagazine.com) for more information. If you glue your frag directly to the rockwork in your reef, and it encrusts

as it should, you may have no way to remove it should the need arise.

My method is pretty simple – after dipping the frag in your favorite anti-coral pest dip and acclimating the specimen to your tank water, super glue the frag to a piece of rock rubble, then super glue that rock rubble to your existing rockwork.

I like to use rock rubble in a show tank rather than any of the commercially available frag disks or plugs because the rubble looks more natural, blending in well and quickly with the existing home reef. I am also a fan of reuse, and would much rather use readily available broken up used rock, rubble or even dead coral skeleton that has already been harvested from wild reefs instead of throwing it away and buying a new product. I find the commercial disks and plugs to be great for propagation systems, but prefer using rubble for 'show' tanks. If you don't have any reef rubble, check with your local fish store or your local reef club to see if they have any available.

I prefer super glue gel to super glue liquid or any of the epoxies because it doesn't run, it sets up quickly, and it is easy to 'break' the attachment point without hurting the coral if the frag needs to be moved. Super glue of any kind really is *super* glue, so you may want to wear latex gloves when working with

it. You may also want to have some super glue debonder on hand should it end up somewhere undesirable.

Make sure you have everything you need: the frag, super glue gel, rubble, a container of tank water to hold the frag while the glue sets, latex gloves, and possibly some toothpicks, a Popsicle stick or something similar. When you are in the middle of working with a quick drying adhesive like super glue, you don't want to have to stop and search for something you need to complete the project. You should also prepare a suitable workspace, like a kitchen counter covered with newspaper to protect it from stray glue.

Before you get started, take a look in your tank and decide where you want to place the frag. Next, select your rubble to fit that spot. Look for a piece that matches the curve of the rock or a piece that looks like it 'belongs' in that space. Make sure it is small enough to look right, but big enough to allow the coral space to encrust as it grows out. A piece around the size of a quarter is what I generally use for SPS frags, and rubble can even be broken or cut to size using a strong pair of coral or bone shears. You also want to select a piece of rubble that will allow you to position the frag on it easily – a hole or indentation will provide a secure place for your frag once the glue hardens.

Now it is time to glue. If the rubble is wet, dry off the area where the frag will be attached. Squeeze a dollop of glue directly onto the rubble and put it aside – you should have a minute to work with the frag before the glue sets too much to be useful. Dry off the cut end of the frag and put another dollop of super glue gel on that spot (see image a). Next, holding the rubble in one hand and the frag in the other, put the glued end of the frag into the glue on the rubble and move the frag around a bit to mix the two glued areas. Try to position the frag so part of it actually touches the rubble (see image b). This can lead to faster growth and encrustation



**a** | A frag of Eddie's Purple Monster and a piece of rubble each with a dollop of super glue gel.



**b** | Eddie's Purple Monster frag glued to the rubble, with part of the frag touching the rubble to encourage future growth.

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in general. Also, try to orient the frag in such a way that the original top side of the coral (the side that has been facing up towards the lights) will be facing your lights so the coral doesn't bleach and die. While the super glue is still soft, use a toothpick or other tool to smear any blobs of glue onto the rubble for both a stronger bond and aesthetic considerations. Then, place the rubble and frag into a bowl of tank water to allow it to set well (see image c). This takes anywhere from 5 to 10 minutes. The better the super glue sets, the harder it will be to accidentally knock the frag off the rubble when gluing the rubble to your reef.

You are now ready to glue the rubble with the frag to your existing rockwork. Exercise caution when using super glue gel under water, as it can be tricky. When super glue gel is put in water, it almost immediately gets a skin of polymerized glue over a center of still 'wet' glue. This skin can make it difficult to get the glue to actually adhere to the rock, so it is a good idea to 'prime' the rockwork where the frag and rubble are going to attach with some super glue gel (see image d). Put a large dollop of super glue gel on a Popsicle stick or a latex glove covered finger and smear it around on the rockwork. The smearing will break the 'skin' and allow the glue to both adhere to the rock and set very quickly.

Once you have the site in your reef prepared, remove the rubble with the glued frag from the setting container and put a large dollop of glue onto the portion of the rubble that will

be against the rock (see image e). Quickly put the rubble into place against your existing rockwork, gently wiggling the rubble around to break the newly formed skin on the glue against the 'primed' super glue already on the rock. After a few seconds, you should feel the glue start to set. This is the time to set the rubble and frag into its final position. Once you do, hold it in place for 20-30 seconds. If there are any lumps of glue showing, use a toothpick to smear them around both for a more secure and aesthetically pleasing bond (see image f). In a couple of weeks, the frag and the rubble should look like they have always been part of your reef.

If you need to remove the rubble and frag from your rockwork, grasp the rubble in one hand and your rockwork in the other and twist the rubble. This should snap the hardened super glue. You can also use a butter knife, screwdriver, or similar tool, sliding it between the rubble and the rockwork so you can pry off the rubble by snapping the hardened glue. Either way, it is critically important to make sure you securely hold your rockwork so the twisting or prying doesn't move the rocks and collapse your aquascape.

My favorite thing about this method is how easily it allows you to grow frags of your own. As the coral encrusts onto the rubble, you can simply glue another piece of rubble to the existing rubble and let the coral encrust onto that. Once the coral is growing nicely onto the new rubble, snap it off and voila! - instant encrusted frag!



**C** | Eddie's Purple Monster frag glued to rubble, setting up in a container of tank water.



**E** | The underside of the rubble with a liberal amount of super glue gel ready to attach to the primed spot in the existing reef.



**D** | Future home of the frag and rubble 'primed' with a smear of super glue gel.



**F** | Eddie's Purple Monster frag in place. In a few weeks, the rubble and the exposed super glue gel will look as if they have always been a part of the reef.