



A Guide to Keeping AXOLOTLS

AXOLOTLS

Axolotls are also called Mexican Walking Fish. They are however not fish, but belong to the family of Amphibians like frogs, toads and salamanders. They are the juvenile form of a salamander but do not metamorphose into the adult stage. They retain their gills and fins throughout their life and never leave their aquatic environment.

In captivity, axolotls come in a range of colours, including “wild-type” (dark- green/black), golden



albino, white albino, white with black eyes, and spotted varieties.

HOUSING YOUR AXOLOTL:

Axolotls are aquatic animals and need to live in water at all times for their skin to stay moist and gills to function properly. The best place to house an axolotl is a large fish tank placed indoors in a shady area out of the sun.

TANK SIZE:

When choosing a tank, consider that axolotls can grow to 25-35 cm in length and need sufficient space to move. The accepted minimum would be a 45 cm long aquarium for one adult axolotl. You can keep a group of axolotls together as long as there is enough space and places to hide. However, axolotls chase and eat anything smaller than themselves so watch out for any fish, young axolotls or other animals placed in the tank. The tank does not have to be very deep as axolotls mainly sit on the bottom and slowly walk around the tank. They occasionally come to the surface to take a breath of air.

SUBSTRATE:

The best substrate to go into the bottom of the tank is sand, e.g. children’s play sand from Bunnings or Mitre Ten, as axolotls will try to swallow anything that fits into their mouths. Swallowed pieces of gravel can cause intestinal blockages and death. Wash the sand until it runs clear before putting it in the tank, then use an aquarium siphon to vacuum up any dirt or left-over food sitting on the sand.

WATER TEMPERATURE:

The ideal temperature is 14-20°C. In lower temperatures the axolotls metabolism slows down markedly. This can be useful to treat diseases. High temperatures cause stress and predispose to fungal and bacterial infections. Check the water temperature regularly and avoid sudden changes. Aquarium heaters and

Axolotls are listed as Critically Endangered in their native habitat, a very limited area in Mexico.

and chillers are available to keep water temperature constant.

WATER QUALITY:

Before you place any animals in a new tank, it has to go through a cycle to establish the right bacteria in the water. Axolotls and other aquatic animals produce ammonia which can build up to toxic levels in a non-cycled tank. Please see the fish handout for more information on cycling your tank.

Regular water changes of 10-20% of tank water are recommended once or twice a week; also testing ammonia, nitrite and nitrate are important to avoid reaching toxic levels of these in your tank. When adding fresh water to an existing tank use a dechlorinator like "Stress coat" to remove dangerous chloramines from tap water.

FILTERS:

Depending on tank size you can get internal or external filters. Under gravel filters are not recommended because gravel is a very dangerous substrate for axolotls. Filters need to be cleaned regularly to keep your tank clean. Only clean filters with warm dechlorinated water or water from your tank, NO soaps or disinfectants, to protect your axolotls and also maintain the good bacteria in your tank.

LIGHT, PLANTS AND ORNAMENTS:

Lighting is essential for live plants but axolotls don't like bright light and sudden changes in lighting. If you want to have live plants and a light on your tank, make sure there are plenty of places for your axolotl to hide, e.g. tunnels, hollow logs and bundles of plants. Also monitor water temperature as a light can often warm the tank to dangerous levels. Axolotls are quite destructive so make sure your plants are robust.

FEEDING YOUR AXOLOTL:

Axolotls are carnivores. They eat by suddenly opening their mouth to suck in water, bits of food and other objects like another axolotl's leg or bits of gravel.

The best staple diet for an axolotl are earthworms grown in a chemical free environment like an earthworm farm. Cut the earthworms into 1cm long pieces and offer them to the axolotl on a stick.

Movement of live food is a great stimulus for axolotls to snap.



There are also axolotl pellets available and other foods like turtle food and salmon pellets may be suitable. Avoid foods like insects, shrimp and mealworms as the chitin exoskeleton can damage the axolotl's mouth. Avoid feeding beef heart and mince

as a regular diet as these are too high in protein; they are okay as occasional treats though.



All amphibians require somewhere to hide, and become stressed if this is not possible.