



The axolotl (*Ambystoma mexicanum*) is a paedomorphic salamander that is native to lakes and wetlands in southern Mexico City, particularly Lake Xochimilco and Lake Chalco. Due to a condition called 'neoteny', axolotls retain most of their juvenile features into adulthood. They have cylindrical bodies, short legs, a relatively long tail and feathery external gills. They belong to the amphibian family and their body and gills must remain moist so they can breathe. With four toes on the front feet, five toes on the back feet and moveable eyelids, axolotls live their entire life



permanently in water, never emerging onto land. Their care requirements are minimal, sufficient sized habitat, with proper temperature and filtration water flow well controlled.

Although axolotls remain in the water most of their life, they have both gills and lungs. They also retain juvenile traits, like a tail and body fin, that other salamanders lose in adulthood. One of the attributes of axolotls which has fascinated biologists and researchers is the axolotl's ability to regenerate limbs. Should an animal lose a foot, for example, they're able to regenerate the limb in a relatively short space of time.

HABITAT

An axolotl habitat not only requires space for the stand, equipment, and the tank but you also need ease of access around it for cleaning and maintenance purposes. Select an area that will not block accessories you will need to service such as the filter, water changes, décor, and your axolotl.

Placement of the habitat is also important, do not set up the tank in front of a window or in a room that receives large amounts of direct sunlight. Since algae utilizes sunlight as an energy source, heavy growths of unsightly algae can occur and cover rocks, decorations, and glass walls. Usually, an inside wall away from windows with direct sunlight and heating and air conditioning vents is the best location.

Since axolotls originated in cold water lakes, an axolotl's ideal water temperature is about 60-64°F/16-18°C. Temperatures at or above 75°F/24°C can be fatal to your axolotl, so it is important to monitor your water temperature. If the temperature in the habitat should rise to



intolerable levels, position a fan to blow across the surface of the water to lower tank temperature.

FEEDING-DIET

Axolotls are carnivores so a well-balanced diet consisting of high-protein foods is best. Nutritional content of axolotl food is extremely important to its health, make sure to choose a food developed specifically for the axolotl.

Young axolotls should be fed daily, whereas adult axolotls only need to eat 2-3 times a week. There are a number of axolotl commercial foods available.

Frozen and freeze-dried:

- Bloodworms
- Krill
- Mysis
- Brine shrimp

Live food:

- Earthworms
- Black worms

HABITAT MAINTENANCE

Consistent, routine maintenance is vital to the ongoing health of an axolotl habitat. Staying on top of tank maintenance helps prevent critical emergencies and usually results in a healthy habitat.

WATER CHANGES

Routine (20-25% every 2 weeks, more frequently as needed) water changes have always been the primary habitat maintenance step. Proper filtration helps extend water quality and slow down the buildup of harmful chemicals but it alone is not capable maintaining a balanced habitat. Water changes not only allow for the physical removal and dilution of harmful nitrogenous pollutants and decomposing organic wastes but it can also improve water clarity.



ACCLIMATION

Axolotl are often packaged in plastic bags that contain the pet store's water that the axolotl is used to. When transporting the axolotl to its new home, it is important to allow the axolotl to slowly adjust to the new water, temperature, and pH parameters. The most common method is to float the bag which will allow your axolotl to acclimate to its new home.

1. Darken the room, turn off the light.
2. Float the sealed bag on the tank's water surface for 20 minutes. This will enable the water in the bag to match the temperature in the tank.
3. After 20 minutes, open the bag and roll the bag down 1-2 inches to create an air pocket within the lip of the bag. In most cases, this will allow the bag to float but be exposed to the room air.
4. Start slowly adding small amounts of the tank's water into the bag and repeat every 5-8 minutes until the bag is filled but still floating.
5. Using a soft aquarium net, position the net over a bucket or bowl and carefully pour your axolotl into the net. Never add the bag of water into the tank.
6. Quickly release your axolotl into its new home.
7. Water Conditioners are available to aid in the introduction and acclimation of your new axolotl. Water Conditioners specifically can enhance the slime coat on fish, reduce stress, and help in healing any damage caused by netting or transportation.

With axolotl habitats, little problems can become large problems quickly. An axolotl habitat is a closed environment that requires a little routine maintenance once established. Through regular maintenance and proper feeding your axolotl will remain healthy, vibrant, and live a long and happy life. Observe your axolotl and habitat daily, don't overfeed, perform timely water changes and enjoy your pet. But when your axolotl isn't acting right or you see bacteria or parasite problems, act quickly to treat them. If you wait too long you may lose your axolotl.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR AXOLOTL

Daily:

- Young axolotls should be fed daily, whereas adult axolotls only need to eat 2-3 times a week. There are a number of axolotl commercial foods available.
- Do not overfeed.
- Check your filter to make sure it is operating properly.
- Check water temperature to confirm it is within the acceptable range of 60 degrees F - 65 degrees F.



pets in the
classroom

CARE SHEET

Axolotl

- Check your axolotl and water. Consult your pet store or veterinarian if the axolotl appears listless or weak, or if you notice a change in their normal behavior, loss of appetite, or if water appears cloudy. Be sure to take a sample of your axolotl's water with you. Water that appears cloudy, yellowish, or smells bad is indicative of poor water quality. A 20% - 25% dechlorinated water change and filter maintenance is recommended to correct these conditions.

Weekly:

- Rinse or change your filter media as needed.
- Add dechlorinated water to compensate for any evaporation loss.
- Test pH, ammonia and nitrite weekly using reputable test kits. Performing these tests will allow you to monitor the water quality of your habitat. If readings are not in the preferred range, perform a partial water change.

Monthly (or as needed):

- Replace your filter media every 2-4 weeks. As carbon gets older, it becomes less efficient. Poly-fiber filter pads/inserts can be rinsed once or twice before changing. It is always best to install new filter media.
- Perform a 20% - 25% water change (more frequently if necessary) use a gravel vacuum to thoroughly remove any uneaten food and waste buildup.

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