



## **Axolotl**

*(Ambystoma mexicanum)*

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Axolotls originate from lake Xochimilco and Chalco, in Mexico City, Mexico. Axolotls can grow to be about 10 inches long. They reach sexual maturity when they get to be about 8 inches long, which usually takes 6-12 months. Axolotls can live to be 10 years or older.

**Health Care:** Axolotls can be very good at hiding illness. Common problems include: nutritional deficiencies from diets lacking variety, wounds, and bacterial infections.

**Husbandry concerns:** House new amphibians by themselves until cleared by your veterinarian, often a quarantine period of six months. Keep handling to a minimum as the oils in human skin are harmful to amphibians and axolotls are fully aquatic. If you must catch an axolotl, use a net with fine enough mesh that their toes cannot get caught in it. House in a sturdy 10 to 20 gallon aquarium. Real or silk plants should be provided as hiding spots. Keep a lid on the aquarium at all times as axolotls can jump out of the water surprisingly well! An external canister style filter typically works best to keep water clean, however, be sure it has an attachment to spread the water outflow, such as a spray bar. Axolotls do not tolerate strong water flow like most fish. An axolotl kept in an environment with too much water flow will become stressed and stop eating. Gills curled up forward often indicates too much water flow in an environment. A 70% water change should be done weekly. Axolotls do not generally tolerate high temperatures well and should be kept between 58 and 67F. Temperatures above this can lead to heat stress. Temperatures in the 70's can lead to loss of appetite and death. White lights should be turned off at night. Temperatures can decrease by as much as 12F at night. Be careful with the use of disinfectants when cleaning and wash them off very well, as they can be toxic if absorbed through amphibian skin. Always use dechlorinated water or bottled water as chlorine can be harmful to amphibians. Young axolotls frequently bite off toes or gills of their tank mates and should only be kept together when well fed, with lots of space. Axolotls over 5 inches are less likely to pick on each other, but still may become territorial. Axolotls do not require tank mates and do well kept alone. Axolotls should not be housed with fish for a variety of reasons. The temperatures most pet fish are kept at is too warm for an axolotl. Fish tend to nip at axolotls' toes. Axolotls have been known to try and eat anything that will fit in their mouth, including fish. Fish carry a many types of bacteria and parasites which can affect axolotls but are also very difficult to treat with an axolotl in the tank as they are much more sensitive to many medications than fish.

**More on the back!**

**Diet:** Food items should be rotated and varied to provide a balanced diet. Food should be smaller than the axolotl's head is wide, with the exception of soft worms. Axolotls require aquatic prey such as daphnia or water fleas, which can be found in streams or ponds, or brine shrimp or tubiflex worms which can be purchased at pet stores. Many axolotls will also eat earthworms. Feed daily as much as the animal will eat at one time. Salamanders typically do not adapt well to eating killed prey.

