



## A strange, but fascinating animal.

The axolotl is truly a weird but charming creature. With their adorable puppy-like appearance, regenerative limbs, hearty appetites, and aquatic lifestyle, it's easy to see why. But is it a lizard? A fish? A frog? Close. They are simply a salamander that has never undergone complete metamorphosis; an amphibian that has retained its fin and gills and lives its life underwater.

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## Lifespan

With proper care, the average lifespan of an axolotl can be 6-20 years.

## Size

Axolotls can reach lengths of 6-12 inches.

## Natural History

Axolotls are from Xochimilco Lake in Mexico, inhabiting canals leading up to the lake. Due to pollution of their natural waterways, invasive species, and a decrease in their natural habitat however, this species is considered critically endangered under the IUCN Redlist. As such, it is imperative to always purchase captive bred specimens and never wild caught.

## Housing

As a peaceful, aquatic species, axolotls prefer a shallow water environment with slow moving water. An optimal, minimum tank size for a single axolotl is 20 gallons. A tank should be well biologically established before introducing your new axolotl to its home.

It is tempting to house axolotls with other tank mates, but they will inevitably eat or injure most tankmates. Therefore, it is safest to house axolotls alone or with members of its own species. If housing multiple axolotls together, it is imperative that they are the same size and kept well fed.

## Heating & Water Quality

To remain healthy, axolotls must be provided with consistent water parameters as appropriate for the species. For these fully aquatic salamanders, cooler water temperatures and superb water quality is a must.

Provide your axolotl with an optimal water temperature of 65F, exceeding no more than 72F and falling now less than 50F. Prolonged temperatures above 72F can prove fatal to these salamanders so it is important that temperatures be monitored throughout the year, and consideration for tank placement and for seasonal fluctuations in the home be considered. Measure water temperatures closely with digital thermometers.

Because these salamanders remain fully aquatic for their entire lives, water quality is essential. These salamanders breathe through their gills and extract oxygen from the water around them. Their permeable skin also allows them to carry out some gaseous exchange. Occasionally, axolotls can be observed gulping air from the surface with their small, functional lungs, so if they are gulping frequently, it could be a sign of poor water quality. As such, the use of an efficient filter, in addition to frequent water changes, is a must when maintaining a healthy environment for your axolotl.

Aside from the risk of high temperatures, water flow can also prove fatal to axolotls. If an axolotl is exposed to prolonged, strong water flow, such as that produced by the direct output of a filter, an axolotl can become stressed, making them vulnerable to anorexia or disease. Be sure to purchase a filter which has a low filter output and is not directly flowing onto or in the direction of the animal. Additionally, this species prefers alkaline water (pH around 7.0). Water from the tap can be used if it is paired with a dechlorinator. Water purchased from an aquarium store is also available for those with less suitable tap water. To minimize shock, perform water changes with water that has similar parameters to the existing water parameters of the aquarium.

## Substrates & Cage Décor

Suitable substrate options for axolotls include large aquarium gravel, aquarium sand, aquarium stratum, or nothing at all. Common aquarium gravel is not suitable for axolotls as its small pebble size can be ingested and cause an intestinal blockage. Gravel size should be larger than the axolotl's head (apart from aquarium stratum).

Axolotls tend to uproot plants, so choose hardy plants with tough, established roots to increase survivability. If you choose to incorporate live plants within your aquarium, the correct use of lighting and substrate is also essential in keeping your plants alive and your axolotl stress free. Choose a plant friendly gravel, such as Fluval stratum, and a lighting spectrum that is 4,200-6,700 kelvins. Avoid incandescent bulbs as this can heat your aquarium and invariably stress your axolotl, as previously mentioned.

## Diet & Nutrition

Axolotls are carnivores and thrive on a variety of readily available foods. To satisfy their enthusiasm for food, axolotls can be offered commercial pellets, frozen or live bloodworms or blackworms, cut up earthworms, live insects such as superworms or dubias, live ghost shrimp, etc.

Offer whatever your axolotl can eat within 15 minutes. Juveniles can be fed daily while large adults can be fed every 2 to 3 days.