
Axolotl

CARE SHEET

Introduction

Wild axolotls (*ambystoma mexicanum*) are only found in one lake system in the world based in Mexico, and therefore are classed as an endangered species. Fortunately, Axolotls have become popular pets worldwide, and the captive population is now larger than those that exist in the wild. They can reach 10-12 years (although reports of individuals living over 20 years is not unheard of) and reach lengths of 30cms.



Axolotls are unusual amphibians, as they never develop a terrestrial (land-based) form. Normal amphibians such as frogs lay eggs, which then develop into tadpole and mature into frogs for adult life. Axolotls essentially stay as 'tadpoles' for their entire life, but are still able to mate and breed in this 'larval' form. This is known as *neotony*. Interestingly, some axolotls have been known to develop into salamanders when exposed to certain thyroid hormones and iodine compounds, but not all axolotls have this ability.

Diet

Axolotls are carnivorous predators whose diet ranges from insects to small fish. As axolotls cannot chew their prey, in captivity they rely on humans to chop their food into small pieces so they can swallow their food whole.

Like other amphibians, axolotls are prone to develop calcium deficiencies on insect-based diets, and therefore any insects fed should be supplemented with calcium and/or a multi-vitamin. The insects can also be gut loaded which helps to increase their nutritional value. Ideally, an adult axolotl should be fed an amount of 'several mouthfuls' every second day.

Note: Axolotls are adapted to eat moving prey; many axolotls will require training or 'wiggling' of any still prey items before they recognise this as food.

Husbandry

As axolotls have external gills, they have a requirement to be submerged in water at all times. Drying out or desiccation of their gills can cause axolotls to suffocate, and for this





reason, handling axolotls outside of their tank environment should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Unlike more tropical amphibians, axolotls are adapted to temperate water conditions and water heating is often not required. The tank water should be maintained between 17-18°C ideally however they will generally tolerate 14-20°C. The pH should be around neutral (6.5-7.5). The water depth should be at least as deep as the length of your axolotl.

Axolotls should generally be housed separately to each other, as they will frequently attack other members of their species.

Life cycle

Axolotls are oviparous or egg laying amphibians. Both males and females will reach sexual maturity at 12 months of age, but will not reach their full adult size until 2-3 years of age. Breeding between the adults is triggered by a sudden drop in water temperatures combined with a good amount of food on offer. The male and female can be observed dancing together before the male releases packets of sperm into the water, which the female will then take in and produce up to 600 fertilised eggs. It is not uncommon for these eggs to be eaten, but if they survive for 2-3 weeks, the eggs will hatch and release larval axolotl young.

Common diseases

1. Metabolic bone disease
2. Obesity
3. Red leg
4. Water-borne parasites
5. Poor water quality

If you have any concerns about your axolotl please give us a call. We recommend health check-ups for axolotls every 6-12 months.

