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 **Care Sheet**

**Description:** *Ambystoma mexicanum,* or more commonly known as the Axolotl or Mexican Walking Fish - is actually not a fish at all - rather an amphibian (salamander to be specific). Axolotls are part of the order Caudata/Urodela. They originate from the bottoms of two lakes in Mexico, but don’t be fooled - the lake was fed from a large glacier and remained cool throughout the seasons. Thus, axolotls require cooler water temperatures than most would believe. Axolotls have since been deemed an endangered species in the wild, and are now bred and thrive in captivity. The Axolotl’s life cycle is a rare phenomenon as they live their entire lives in the larval stage, yet still manage to breed. “It is believed that they have evolved to be this way due to low levels of iodine in their native waters. Experiments have been done and Axolotls will metamorphose when exposed to iodine, and they develop into salamanders that look similar to the closely related Tiger Salamander.
Axolotls have excellent regenerative abilities and can regrow limbs, tails and even heart and brain cells at an outstanding rate. This has made them a popular focus in scientific research.” [theamphibian.co.uk]
 Page 1 **Morphs (Colourations):** There are several different colour variations [morphs] in Axolotls that occur in captivity.
***Wild type:*** Mottled green with shiny eyes and dark purple gills.
**A*lbino:***White/very light pink with clear pink/red eyes and bright pink/red gills.
***Melaniod:*** Black/dark grey with black eyes and dark gills.
***Leusistic:*** White/pink with dark eyes, bright red/pink gills. May or may not develop freckles.
***Golden Albino:*** Golden/yellow with shiny patches, pink/fire orange eyes, bright red/pink gills.
***Copper:*** Copper/olive with dark eyes, bright red/pink gills.
***Other morphs:*** There are other morphs that are considered rare and unique, these morphs consist of Piebald, Golden Non Albino, Chimaerism.
***GFP*** (Green fluorescent protein)Is a recessive gene that can be contained in any morph. This means that axolotls who carry the GFP gene can glow green under black/blue light.
 **Size**: Axolotls can grow up to 25-30cm (10 – 12 inches). Dwarves at around 7 inches.

**Life Span**: Axolotls can live up to 15 years with appropriate care, but generally clock out at about 10 years.

**Habitat** \*\*Very Important\*\*:An *aquarium* will be required to house an axolotl, as they are an entirely aquatic species that enjoy heavily vegetated freshwaters. Axolotls are quite an active species, so the bigger the aquarium the better. Axolotls require at least 10 gallons each when adult size is reached. The aquarium should be fitted with a tight mesh or screen lid, as they are prone to try and leap from their enclosures.
\*Axolotls are **NOT** adapted to live on land; they dehydrate and can die very quickly if they are not in water at all times. It is possible to handle your axolotl once in a while as long as they remain in water, but it is advised not to as the axolotl has a protective slime covering their body, and handling could damage him/her.
\* The bottom of the tank may be lined with aquarium or play sand (make sure to rinse prior to putting into your tank); you can also leave it bare if you wish. **Avoid any gravel or rocks as the axolotl can ingest these and DIE.
\*** If you do not have a gentle filter in your tank, daily water changes are required to keep bacteria and ammonia (found in axolotl excrement) levels down. Axolotls require a low-flow filter because they become stressed if the water output flow of the filter is too strong. With a filter, it should only be necessary to change 1/3 of the water every week in a tank 20 gallons or less. In a bigger tank (20gals+) 50% water change should be performed once a month. A sponge filter should be used for axolotls smaller than 5 inches, a small regular filter can be used when they’re 5’’ plus.
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\* De-chlorinated water should always be used for your Axolotl as they are very sensitive to various chemicals and cannot handle water with chlorine/chloramines. Water should be kept at a PH level of around 7. PH levels should be checked after each major water change to ensure that a similar PH is always maintained.
\* Axolotls require somewhere to hide and can become stressed if this is not provided. This can include plants, logs, large rocks, flowerpots, and aquarium ornaments you can purchase at your local fish store.
 **Temperature:** The ideal water temperature for your Axolotl is a temperature gradient of 16-20°C (60-68°F). This is generally around room temperature so no additional heating should be required. In most cases, hobbyists experience difficulty keeping their tank cool in the warmer months. Lower temperatures lead to sluggish behaviour, slower metabolism, and decreased appetite. Temperatures above 24 °C (75 °F) are very stressful to axolotls. Such temperatures cause metabolism to increase and consequently, an increase in appetite. Stress resulting from more than a day or two of exposure to these temperatures will quickly lead to disease and death. It's useful to have a small thermometer in the aquarium to check the water temperature and avoid any issues with such. \* Avoid using lighting in your tank as axolotls do not have eyelids and are sensitive to bright lights.

**Diet:** Axolotls are carnivores that should be fed every 2-3 days. They have teeth designed for gripping rather than biting or tearing. Thus, their food is typically swallowed whole; so what you decide to feed them must fit into their mouths. Axolotls should be fed a variety of different foods to avoid boredom of a specific food. It’d be like us eating cereal every day of our lives for every meal – *boring*! Some examples of appropriate foods to feed your axolotl are: bloodworms, earthworms, black worms, white worms, brine shrimp, daphnia, and carnivore pellets. Feed as much as they can comfortably eat within 10 minutes. We feed our juvenile axolotls bloodworms, and carnivore pellets. Adults receive all of the above.  **Sexual Maturity:** Axolotls can reach sexual maturity from anywhere between 5 months and a few years, it all depends on frequency and quality of food, and the water temperatures/conditions. One sign to tell if your axolotl is sexually mature is darker tips of the toes. Some ways of determining the sex of your axolotl are as follows: - Mature females tend to have very rounded bodies. Sexually mature male's cloacal region (private part area), is larger than that of a female. Males also typically have longer bodies and tails in comparison to females.

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**** 🡨 Male axolotl, larger cloacal area

 🡨 Female, much smaller cloacal **Stress**: To tell if your axolotl is stressed, take a look at their gills. If they are flipped forward – they are most likely stressed. This is the most evident way to tell such. If they seem normal - they are most likely fine. Prolonged stress exposure can succumb the axolotl to disease and eventually death.

**Cooling**: If cooling your tank in the warmer months is an issue, move your tank into a lower level of your home (if applicable). If temperatures are still too high, point a fan at your tank and be sure to have a mesh lid rather than a lighted aquarium hood - the mesh allows more air to circulate leaving the tank cooler.

**Additional information about breeding, illness, genetics, bio, etc.** **can be found on**:
www.ALotlAxolotls.weebly.com
[www.axolotl.org](http://www.axolotl.org)
[www.caudata.org](http://www.caudata.org)
[www.theamphibian.co.uk](http://www.theamphibian.co.uk)

Thank you for purchasing your new pet(s) from A Lot’l Axolotls!
If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact us!

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