## **YVCipedia AMPHIBIAN**

Axolotl Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

The **Axolotl (*Ambystoma mexicanum*)** is a fully aquatic salamander native to a small region around Lake Xochimilco, Mexico. Unlike most amphibians, axolotls **retain their juvenile (larval) features throughout life**—a condition called **neoteny**.

These fascinating animals are famous for their **external feathery gills, wide heads, and regenerative abilities**. They are **hardy if kept in proper conditions**, but they do best with owners committed to maintaining **cool, clean, filtered water**.

Axolotls typically reach **8–12 inches long** and live **10–15+ years** in captivity with good care.

## **Housing & Environment**

Axolotls require **fully aquatic setups**, ideally with minimal current and plenty of floor space.

**Minimum enclosure size:**

* Juvenile: 10–20 gallons
* Adult: **20–40 gallon long tank** per axolotl
* Larger tanks are better for water stability and waste dilution

**Key enclosure features:**

* Tight-fitting lid—axolotls can jump
* Bare-bottom or fine sand substrate (gravel is dangerous if swallowed)
* Hides such as PVC pipes, caves, or ceramic pots
* Gentle filtration—avoid strong currents

**Recommended substrate:**

* **Bare-bottom tank:** Easiest to clean and safest for young axolotls
* **Fine aquarium sand:** Safe if ingested in small amounts
* Avoid gravel or small pebbles (high impaction risk)

**Cleaning guidelines:**

* Remove waste daily with a turkey baster or siphon
* Perform **20–30% water changes weekly**
* Use a **dechlorinator** for all replacement water

## **Water Temperature & Quality**

Axolotls need **cool, clean water** to stay healthy.

**Temperature range:**

* Ideal: **60–68°F (16–20°C)**
* Short-term acceptable: **55–72°F (13–22°C)**
* Avoid prolonged temperatures above **74°F**—heat stress is deadly

**Water parameters:**

* **Ammonia:** 0 ppm
* **Nitrite:** 0 ppm
* **Nitrate:** <40 ppm
* **pH:** 6.5–7.5

**Filtration and aeration:**

* Use sponge filters, canister filters, or hang-on-back filters with **gentle flow**
* Consider baffles to reduce current
* Aerators or air stones help maintain oxygen levels

**Monitoring:**

* Test water weekly with aquarium test kits
* Use a thermometer to maintain safe temperature

## **Lighting**

Axolotls **do not require specialized lighting**. In fact, they prefer dim conditions.

**Lighting guidelines:**

* Use low to moderate ambient light
* Provide cover or hides to avoid stress
* If live plants are kept, use subdued plant-friendly lighting

## **Diet & Feeding**

Axolotls are **carnivorous** and prefer **soft, sinking foods**.

**Feeding guidelines:**

* Juveniles: Feed **daily**
* Adults: Feed **every 2–3 days**

**Appropriate foods:**

* High-quality sinking carnivore pellets (Hikari, Mazuri)
* Earthworms (pesticide-free)
* Frozen bloodworms (treat for juveniles)
* Frozen brine shrimp (treat)
* Occasional raw, lean freshwater fish (avoid goldfish—thiaminase)

**Feeding tips:**

* Use tongs or a feeding dish to avoid substrate ingestion
* Remove uneaten food promptly to maintain water quality

## **Behavior & Handling**

Axolotls are **gentle and slow-moving**, spending most of their time resting on the bottom.

**Handling recommendations:**

* Avoid handling unless absolutely necessary
* Use **wet hands or a soft net** if you must move them
* Support their body fully—never squeeze
* They have **delicate skin and gills** easily damaged by rough handling

## **Healthcare & Veterinary Care**

Plan for an **initial veterinary exam** after acquisition and **annual wellness checkups** with a vet experienced in amphibians.

**Common health issues:**

* Heat stress (often fatal)
* Impaction from gravel ingestion
* Fungal and bacterial infections (white fuzzy patches)
* Poor water quality diseases (red skin, gill deterioration)
* Metabolic bone disease from poor diet

**Warning signs:**

* Loss of appetite
* Floating uncontrollably or struggling to submerge
* Curled gills or tail tip (stress indicator)
* Skin sores or white patches
* Lethargy

Prompt veterinary care **improves outcomes and prevents complications**.

## **Enrichment & Habitat Design**

While axolotls are not active climbers, they still appreciate **a secure and enriched environment**.

**Enrichment strategies:**

* Smooth hides for security and shade
* Live or artificial plants for cover
* Varied textures (smooth stones, caves—large enough not to swallow)
* Occasional rearrangement of décor to stimulate exploration

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Native to **Lake Xochimilco, Mexico**, now critically endangered in the wild.
* Famous for **neoteny**, retaining larval features like gills for life.
* Can **regenerate limbs, gills, tail, and even parts of the heart and brain**.
* Lifespan of **10–15+ years** in captivity with excellent care.
* Not recommended for beginners who cannot maintain **cool, clean water**.

### **Supplies & Care Checklist**

* 20–40 gallon tank (per axolotl) with lid
* Sponge filter or gentle canister filter
* Digital thermometer and test kits (ammonia, nitrite, nitrate, pH)
* Dechlorinator for water changes
* Smooth hides (ceramic, PVC, resin caves)
* Fine sand or bare-bottom setup
* Feeding tongs and dish
* High-quality sinking carnivore pellets
* Frozen or live worms and invertebrates
* Siphon or turkey baster for waste removal
* Cleaning supplies dedicated to aquarium use
* Secure carrier for veterinary visits

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*