

MEXICAN WALKING FISH



Mexican walking fish are fascinating creatures. Looking and often acting like miniature prehistoric monsters. They can grow up to 30cm in size. These animals are often kept as pets and are also extensively used for study as laboratory animals. A little known fact is that the natives of Mexico have used the roasted axolotl as food since pre-Aztec times.

Axolotls are the larval stage of a salamander, and are different from other amphibians in that they have the ability to reproduce while remaining a sexually mature larva. They also have the ability to undergo metamorphose.

Mexican walking fish come in various colours, including dark brown, black, albino and golden forms, (which have bright pink gills) and a spotted form, which is seldom seen.

The name walking fish refers to the animal's habit of walking under water. They should not be removed from their aquarium and forced to crawl on land, as they cannot breathe out of water.

HOUSING

Axolotls are best housed in conditions similar to goldfish, as their water requirements are very much the same. They prefer a cool environment, ranging between 12-20C. An aquarium 60cm x 30cm x 30cm will house a full-grown pair of axolotls. The tank should be aerated and filtered as axolotls extract oxygen from the water through their gills, and the quality and clarity of water is important to their well-being. The pH of the water should be kept at 7.0 (neutral) and lighting is best kept dim.

FEEDING

In the aquarium, axolotls can be fed small pieces of raw lean beef, beef liver or beef heart. It is important to provide some variety by occasionally feeding live food such as mealworms or even small fish. Axolotl pellets are also available but be careful they don't pollute the water.

Feeding every second day is usually sufficient. Their preferred eating time is at dusk and be sure to remove any uneaten food.

BREEDING

Male and female axolotls are not difficult to differentiate when sexually mature, which is at about 12 months of age. The male shows a swelling around the cloaca area (the sexual opening) between the back legs. Males have a longer tail and the head is narrower. The female lays between 300 to 1000 eggs when she spawns in the early spring. Eggs hatch in about 2 weeks at a temperature of 14-18C. Parents should be removed from the tank after spawning and young raised on live food. Newly hatched brine shrimp or sifted water fleas (daphnia) are quite suitable at first. Later they will take aquatic "black" worms (tubifex).

LIFESPAN

Given the right conditions, your axolotls should give you 10-15 years of enjoyment. They are certainly one of the world's most interesting creatures.

