

Some Tips for Feeding Finicky Axolotls

Nathan Montoya, Curator, Indiana University Axolotl Colony

The following suggestions have been distributed to our Axolotl Colony feeder crew. Our axolotls are individually maintained in fish globes and hand-fed approximately three times per week. If any animals refuse food, it may be a good idea to begin to re-evaluate your feeding methods. Here are some tips.

1. Be sure you wake your axolotls before you start feeding them by shaking the rack, but also make sure you aren't upsetting them or scaring them by shaking the rack too violently.
2. Is the food fresh? If it is rancid or beginning to spoil, throw it out and get fresh food. Be sure the food is thawed.
3. Size the bite of chow to the size of the animal and its past eating behaviors: small animal = small bite; hasn't eaten in a while = small bite.
4. Put the food in the water gently--not too abruptly--and be sure the axolotl sees the food coming so s/he is not startled.
5. If an animal moves its head away from the food, it may not be rejecting it but rather just checking it out. Wait until the axolotl actually rejects the food and then assess the nature of the rejection: If the animal shakes its head or swims away, be patient but persistent--keep trying. If the animal thrashes about, let it be! Try the next time around after they have calmed down.
6. Check for any discomfort if the axolotl still won't eat:
 - Is the water level too high or too low for comfort? Adjust it.
 - Is the water cloudy or dirty? Change it.
 - Does the animal need medical attention? Does it look or act abnormal in comparison to your other axolotls? Does it have any bumps, swellings, or growths? Fuzzy material on body or gills (fungus)? Is it pale or anemic? Is it lethargic? Hyperactive? Talk to itself? Spastic? Seek advice and treatment of any of these symptoms.
7. Excluding any medical problems, if your animal still rejects food, try varying the feeding method.
 - Try dropping the food off the spoon onto or in front of its mouth. It may snap it up.

--Wiggle the food to get its attention.

--Leave the food on the bottom of the bowl near its nose--it may eat it on its own time.

Each animal will react differently to each technique. Dropped food in bowls may result in the axolotl snapping up the food or it may be afraid and swim around the bowl. If so, let it settle down and try a different technique. Always watch for signs of interest in food: Do the gills move? Does the animal sniff the food? Retch at the mere sight of food?

8. Finally, your animal may respond to a different type of food. Try any of the following gourmet axolotl delicacies:

Straight Liver: Our basic "No Frills" dish. A favorite with the younger set. Pureed to perfect consistency. Goes down like buttered silk.

Sliced Liver: The "Filet Mignon" of salamander cuisine. Carefully prepared in delicately tasty strips. A real palate pleaser.

Daphnia: The perfect appetizer. Bite-sized morsels lovingly raised in our own special ponds.

Axolotl Larvae: A really sweet bunch of kids. For the mature axolotl with a taste for the exotic. More than a mouthful's wasted!

Vickie's Special Mix: The newest addition to our menu. A "Vegetarian Delight" blending tofu, fresh alfalfa sprouts, and a host of garden goodies solidified in gelatin for today's discriminating axolotl. Write for recipe!