



## What's an Axolotl?

An axolotl is a type of salamander. Its name comes from the Aztec word "nahuatl," which means water monster. It is named after the Aztec god xolotl who, according to legend, was turned into a salamander and made to live in the dark waters as a monster. Once found throughout Mexico, it is now only found in the wild in one lake in Mexico City, Mexico. Its population has shrunk considerably due to invasive fish species that compete with the axolotl for food, as well as eating axolotls. Continual development as well as water pollution have also contributed to the axolotl's shrinking numbers.

An axolotl is typically less than a foot long. It has tiny legs and feet and a long tail. A top fin stretches from the back of its head to the end of its tail. A bottom fin runs from between its back legs to the end of its tail. Like all salamanders, an axolotl can regrow lost limbs. It is usually dark in color with black speckles, although albinos and lighter colors are often seen in axolotls bred in captivity.

An axolotl starts out life as a larva. Unlike other salamanders, though, an axolotl's larval features, like the external gills behind its head, don't change into adult ones as it matures. Axolotls in the wild eat fish, mollusks, insects, and other axolotls. They usually live for five or six years, though axolotls in captivity have lived as long as 15 years.

**QUESTIONS: What's an Axolotl?**

Circle the correct answer.

1. An Axolotl is a type of:  
A. bird  
B. salamander  
C. legend  
D. larvae
  
2. The Aztec word "nahuatl" means:  
A. salamander  
B. Mexico  
C. water monster  
D. external gill
  
3. True or False: An axolotl can regrow lost limbs. \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. An axolotl can grow up to a \_\_\_\_\_ long.
  
5. Axolotls bred in captivity are usually \_\_\_\_\_ in color than those found in the wild.
  
6. Axolotls live longer in captivity / the wild.
  
7. Where do you find axolotls in the wild?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Why are their numbers shrinking?  
\_\_\_\_\_