

MAKING THE TRANSITION FROM  
BOWLS TO AQUARIA

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In 1978 the Indiana University Axolotl Colony staff decided to try to move a large number of their animals to aquaria from the traditional conditions - animals housed individually in glass bowls, hand-fed, with a complete change of water at each feeding. So far we have had mixed success.

The aquaria are 15 liter glass units. They are thoroughly cleaned and rinsed and are fitted with both an undergravel and a charcoal filter. Two inches of gravel are placed in the bottom; the uppermost layer is made up of stones too large to be swallowed by the axolotls. Salts are added to the water to bring its conductivity to about 3000 micromho. A moderate number of rooted green plants are embedded in the gravel, the pH of the water is brought to 8.0 - 8.1, and the aquarium is allowed to equilibrate for one to two weeks, until the conductivity and pH are stable. Then three or four axolotls are placed in the aquaria.

We have found it necessary to hand-feed many of these animals, since they apparently are unable to break the habit of taking their food from above as they did in bowls. Fish (Plecostomus) are put into the aquaria for a few days at a time to ingest excess feces, algae and bacteria.

The main problem we have encountered is a tendency for certain animals to lose their appetites, become lethargic, and die. The tail of an affected animal may curl, its back may arch, or it may develop a skin mold before death. No remarkable findings are noted at autopsy. This syndrome has caused us to reduce the number of aquaria stocked with axolotls from 60 to about 15 until the cause of the problem can be identified.

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