Autumn's Little Critters: How to Cycle Your Axolotl Tank

Welcome to Autumn's Little Critters! Here, we believe that a healthy tank is the foundation of a happy axolotl. Cycling your tank is an essential process to ensure your axolotl thrives in its new home. Cycling can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months, but with patience and diligence, you'll create a perfect environment for your fascinating new critter.

Understanding the Cycle:

Axolotls produce waste, which introduces ammonia and nitrites into the water. These substances can be harmful and even fatal to your critter. By cycling the tank, you'll establish a colony of beneficial bacteria that will convert ammonia and nitrites into less harmful nitrates. Aim for nitrate levels between 5-20 ppm for a healthy tank.

Important Note: Please do not attempt to cycle a tank with a live axolotl or fish inside. This can be hazardous to their health.

Getting Started: What You'll Need

1. Tank with a Filter
2. Pure Ammonia: We recommend Dr. Tim's Ammonia. [Find it here](https://amzn.to/3rnMS8S).
3. Prime Water Conditioner
4. Liquid Water Testing Kit: Test for pH, ammonia, nitrite, and nitrate. We recommend API's Freshwater Kit. [Available here](https://amzn.to/36KYICm).
5. Cycling Boosters (optional): Seachem Stability or FritzZyme 7 Live Nitrifying Bacteria.
6. Notebook: For tracking your readings.
7. Optional: Used filter media from an established tank to jumpstart the cycle.

Cycling Instructions:

1. Setup: Assemble your tank with all supplies and decorations. Add Prime conditioner for the entire tank.
2. Heating (Optional): Add a small water heater to speed up the bacteria growth. Remember to remove it after cycling as axolotls prefer cooler temperatures.
3. Add Ammonia: Use the ammonia instructions to reach a concentration of 4 ppm in your tank.
4. Recording: Test the water for ammonia levels and record your findings. Add ammonia as needed to maintain 4ppm.
5. Daily Testing: Test your water every 24 hours, recording ammonia, nitrite, and nitrate levels. You're looking for nitrites to rise to about 5 ppm.
6. Monitor Nitrates: Maintain nitrate levels under 80 ppm for easier management later on.
7. Cycle Completion: Your goal is for ammonia to drop from 4 ppm to 0 in 24 hours, nitrites to register at 0, and nitrates to rise above 40 ppm.
8. The "3 Dose Test": To ensure your tank can handle waste, does ammonia to 4 ppm. If ammonia and nitrite levels drop to 0 ppm after 24 hours, repeat for two more days.

After Cycling:

1. Water Changes: Perform 50% water changes daily to reduce nitrates to 5-20 ppm.
2. Temperature and Acclimation: Ensure the water temperature is between 60-67°F before introducing your axolotl. Acclimate them for about 30 minutes.
3. Continued Monitoring: For the first week, test daily. Keep ammonia and nitrites at 0 ppm, nitrates between 5-20 ppm, and pH between 7.2-7.6. Consider crushed coral or an air stone for pH adjustments if necessary.

Troubleshooting a Stalled Cycle:

1. Low Ammonia Drop: Check pH levels; use baking soda or crushed coral in a mesh bag to adjust if necessary.
2. Stagnant Levels: Conduct small water changes to adjust nitrites.
3. High Nitrates: Consider 50% water changes to bring nitrates down to about 40 ppm.
4. Bacteria Growth Promotion: Raise the temperature to 72-78°F to encourage bacterial activity.

Tank Not Ready & Axolotl On the Way?

No worries! You can house your new critter temporarily using the "tub" method with daily 100% water changes in de-chlorinated water. Choose a food-grade safe bin with a hide and possibly an air stone for added oxygen.

At Autumn’s Little Critters, our goal is to help you provide the best care for your axolotl. With a well-cycled tank, you’re on your way to becoming a fantastic axolotl parent!