

ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE of BOSTON



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Ferret Basics

Ferrets are wonderfully curious and energetic pets that spend most of their time exploring and climbing around. They generally do best with another ferret to keep them company. While they are incredibly flexible, and like burrowing into small spaces, they are fragile, so they must be handled with care. It is important to familiarize yourself with their daily and long-term needs before adding one to your family.

Housing

Your ferret's cage must be large enough to comfortably fit a litter box, food bowls, and a place for your ferret to rest, while still having room to stretch out and play. A cage that is about 3 feet x 3 feet deep x 2 feet high will comfortably fit one or two ferrets as long as the ferret has plenty of out of cage time to run around and explore. We recommend at least 4 hours of out of cage time every day.

When choosing a cage, make sure that it has a solid bottom, as bare wire will damage their paws. Multi-level cages are ideal. You will have to clean the cage regularly, so avoid one with hard-to-reach places. Midwest Ferret Nation and Super Pet have good cage options. Since ferrets enjoy burrowing, bedding that provides a place to "tunnel in" is perfect for sleeping or resting. Your ferret may especially enjoy curling up to sleep in a hammock.

Diet/Feeding

Ferrets are carnivores, and should eat a meat-based dry ferret food such as Zupreem, EVO, or Marshall. You can also feed premium kitten food for a short period of time as an alternative. Dog food is NOT a good substitute as it does not contain enough protein and fat to meet your ferret's nutritional needs. Fish is not an ideal first ingredient for ferrets, so try and look for a food with poultry as the bulk source of protein.

As for treats, try to stay away from foods high in sugar or fiber. Meat-based ferret treats are sold at pet stores; do NOT feed your ferret human food such as raw fruits and veggies. You should not feed your ferret more than one teaspoon of treats per day.

Grooming & Health Care

Bathing: Ferrets naturally have a musky odor to them. The best way to cut down on that smell is to change your ferret's bedding at least once a week. Frequent bathing can actually stimulate the production of the musky scent and make it worse. On the rare occasion that you do want to bathe your ferret, use warm water and ferret or kitten-safe shampoo.

Brushing: Your ferret will shed his or her coat twice a year, and while he or she will self-groom, daily brushing can be helpful to limit hair ingestion.

Nail Trimming: You will have to trim your ferret's toenails at least every other week. Use caution when trimming not to clip the dark vein in the nail, as this will hurt a lot and make them bleed.

Ear and Oral Health: If you notice that your ferret is not cleaning out its ears completely, once a month you can help by wiping out the reddish wax with a cotton ball. Make sure to get an annual dental check-up when you go for vaccinations.

Common Diseases: Unfortunately, ferrets are prone to a number of diseases, especially after age 2. Human influenza (the “flu”) is transmittable between people and ferrets, so be careful if you have flu symptoms. They are also prone to heart disease, skin tumors (which are generally benign), adrenal disease, insulinoma (excessive production of insulin), and other forms of cancer. You should have a good relationship with your veterinarian so that you can monitor your ferret’s health throughout his or her life.

Vaccinations: Follow up with your veterinarian to see when he or she wants your ferret to get boosters for the rabies and distemper vaccines.

Training

Ferrets generally prefer to go to the bathroom away from where they sleep and eat, making it easy to train them to use a litter box. Initially, you should confine your ferret to a small space, such as his or her cage, with a litter box in one corner and the food and sleeping area on the opposite side. If you see your ferret using the litter box, praise him and give him a treat. When you catch him defecating away from the litter box, move him into the litter box. After he has finished, praise him so that he learns where he should be going to the bathroom. Make sure to clean the soiled area very well. As you expand the area that your ferret has access to, make sure that there is a litter box available. Always place the litter box in the corner of the room, as ferrets prefer to use corners rather than open spaces.

Behavior

Exploring: Ferrets love to explore and will squeeze themselves into incredibly small spaces. You will need to “ferret proof” your house so that openings in appliances, holes in walls, and small spaces between objects are closed off.

Biting: In a young ferret, biting is part of play. While another ferret may not mind this because of its tough skin, you probably do not want your ferret nipping at your hands. If your ferret starts biting you during play, simply stop and put him back in his cage. When he plays appropriately, praise him and encourage that play style.

Digging: Ferrets love to dig. Protect your potted plants and clean up anything from your floors that you do not want your ferret to tunnel through.

Further Information

Information for this care guide cited from Dick Bossart’s *The Ferret Owner’s Manual*

Veterinary Partner –www.veterinarypartner.com

MD Ferret PAWS Inc. –www.mdferretpaws.org

Ferret Universe –www.ferret-universe.com

Ferret Central –www.ferretcentral.org

The American Ferret Association Inc. –www.ferret.org

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