

Ferrets

Basic Information

- Playful and energetic – need several hours of playtime outside their cage each day. Will generally sleep soundly much of the day when not playing, and will adapt their sleep cycle to owner's schedule.
- Very curious – they like squeezing into tight spaces and exploring everywhere, so careful ferret-proofing is important. Can squeeze through cracks as small as ¾ inch – block these up so that ferret doesn't get stuck or get somewhere dangerous. Plastic tunnels/PVC pipes make great toys, though!
- May chew soft plastic objects – cords, buttons on TV remotes, etc. – so these need to be kept away from them. Avoid toys with soft material that ferrets could chew/swallow.
- Easy to litter-box train – prefer to do their business in corners, so they'll readily use a box placed there. Use pellet litter such as Yesterday's News (recycled newspaper pellets).
- Can be nippy when playing, and need to be handled gently – may not be an appropriate pet for small children.
- Scent can be lessened with occasional bathing, but ferrets will always have a slight musky odor.
- Ferrets usually live about 6-8 years. They remain playful throughout their lives, but young ferrets have much more energy.

Housing

- Need a tall, multi-level metal cage – at least 24"x24"x36" for a pair of ferrets, but bigger is better. Bars should be less than 1 inch apart. Do not use an aquarium.
- Cage should be out of drafts and direct sunlight. Area should be air-conditioned – temperatures over 80° are dangerous.
- Solid plastic platforms are better than wire floors – if a wire floor, cover with towels and bedding or linoleum so that wire doesn't hurt ferret's feet. A removable floor tray is good for easy cleaning.
- Use food dishes that are either heavy ceramic or attach to cage – ferrets like to flip food and water dishes.
- Place cage in corner of room – put litter-box in the corner of the cage closest to walls, and place food, water bottle, and bedding in other three corners. This will make it easy for the ferret to tell which corner is appropriate toilet area.
- Need places to curl up and sleep – cloth tunnels or hammocks (available at pet stores), or towels and blankets.
- Scoop litter daily, and clean litter box, dishes, and bottle once a week.

Diet

- Feed high-quality ferret food – 32%-40% animal protein, 20%-30% fat. Some cat or kitten foods may be adequate, but ferret-specific food is better.
- Protein requirements are different in younger and older ferrets. Switch food as appropriate as ferret gets older.
- Food should always be available – most ferrets can free-feed without becoming obese.
- Fresh water should always be available.
- Treats such as cooked meats/eggs and some fruits and vegetables are okay in moderation – no more than a teaspoon a day. Do not give a ferret salty foods, milk products, refined sugar or chocolate.
- Fatty acid supplements like Ferretone/Linatone are good treats in moderation, and make good training aids.

Health Care/Maintenance

- Bathe ferrets monthly, with shampoo made specifically for ferrets. More frequent baths will dry out the skin and coat.
- Trim nails regularly – every week or two. Ferret nails can snag in carpet or bedding if they get too long.
- Give hair-ball preventative such as Petromalt to prevent hairballs and blockages.
- Ferrets should have annual vet exams up to three years, and twice a year after that. Be sure to find a vet knowledgeable about ferrets – HRS list of recommended vets is a good place to start.
- Ferrets catch the same cold and flu germs as humans, and disease can pass from one species to the other.
- Monitor ferrets' stools. Dark and tarry stools may indicate a stomach ulcer, small and thin stools may indicate a blockage, and bright green, runny stool indicates ECE (green slime disease). Take ferret to vet if any of these are seen.
- Ferrets need to be vaccinated against rabies and canine distemper. Note that, unlike cats and dogs, ferrets do NOT receive these vaccinations at DCHS – adopter should get them at their own vet post-adoption.

Resources

www.everythingferret.com

www.ferretnook.org