

Ferrets

Ferrets are intelligent curious pets who love to explore. They are very playful and will amuse you for hours with their antics. When playing, they can get so excited that they bounce into walls! However, they are also quiet animals and make ideal apartment pets.

Their scientific name, *Mustela putorius furo*, means "little thief" and they live up to that name by stealing and hiding toys and other items like socks. Because they are so active, ferrets need playtime out of their cage several hours a day.

Ferrets are more like dogs or cats than most other small pets, and are best for adults and older children who want to have a lot of interaction with their pet.

One ferret, or more?

Because ferrets are so playful and social, it's best to get two so they can play together. However, just one ferret can do well with regular play with its owner.

Male or female?

As adults, male ferrets are twice the size of females, but both sexes make equally good pets. The male ferret is called a hob and the female is a jill, while a neutered male is called a gib and a spayed female is called a sprite. The male's penis appears like a large belly button.

Feeding

The best care for ferrets begins with proper nutrition. These playful animals require a nutritionally balanced diet precisely formulated with at least 30% highly digestible protein from real chicken and egg, and 20% fat to fuel their high-energy needs. Some commercial diets offer 40% protein, which is even better. Ferrets can be very picky so make sure their diet is one they like to eat. Because of their short intestinal tracts, ferrets need to eat frequently, so make sure they have access to a high-quality, extruded nugget diet at all times, as well as fresh water. You may give occasional healthy treats, but make sure they do not make up more than 10% of their diet every day. When a balanced diet is fed, additional vitamin and mineral supplements are not required and could be harmful.

Housing

Ferrets need a large, secure wire cage, at least 36" X 18" X 18" tall, and the bigger the better to provide room for lots of fun toys. The safest size mesh is 1" square. The floors of the cage should be solid, not wire, to protect their feet. Provide a large ferret litter box on each floor of the cage containing a litter made of recycled paper or organic pellets. Do not use clay litter, pine or cedar shavings since they cause respiratory infection. Ferrets must be kept indoors at temperatures below 80 degrees F.

Accessories

Ferrets prefer a water dish to a bottle, and a dish will encourage them to drink the proper amount. A dog travel water dish will help discourage them from splashing out the water. Food dishes should be tip-proof and easy to clean.

Sanitation

Clean the litter box every day, or more often as needed. Provide fresh food and water daily. Wash the cage, accessories and bedding weekly.

Maintenance

Ferrets need their nails trimmed, ears cleaned and teeth brushed with a cat toothpaste and toothbrush every 2-3 weeks. You can put a few drops of a fatty acid supplement on your ferret's tummy to keep him busy licking it off during grooming. A bath once a month is adequate and more frequent bathing actually increases their musky smell.

Health care

Ferrets must have a series of vaccinations starting at 6 weeks of age, similar to those for dogs and cats. They should have an annual veterinary exam. Pet ferrets must be spayed or neutered by about 6 months of age. Veterinary Pet Insurance (www.petinsurance.com) now offers health insurance policies for ferrets.

Special needs

Young ferrets tend to be nippy and require patient training. Some first-time ferret owners may prefer to adopt a ferret at least 8 months old. All rooms where ferrets are allowed to play must be extensively "ferret-proofed." Avoid any toys, especially those made of latex or foam rubber, which can be chewed apart and swallowed.

Life cycle

Ferrets live an average of 6-8 years, although it's possible for them to live 15 years. They have a breeding season during the spring and summer. The gestation period is 40-42 days and the average litter size is 6-8. The babies are called kits and their eyes open around 5 weeks. The kits can be weaned at 10 weeks.

Expert Help

If you have questions about your ferret, do not hesitate to contact us. We will be happy to help you choose a ferret care book for more complete information. You, your veterinarian, and the staff here at the store will form the team, which will be responsible for your ferret's well being.

Supplies Checklist

- Large wire cage
- Litter box and litter
- Water bowl
- Food bowl
- High-quality diet formulated specially for ferrets
- Toys, such as tubes, balls and interactive cat toys
- Bed, such as a hammock
- Harness, leash and safety bell collar
- Carrier
- Nail clippers
- Cat toothbrush and toothpaste
- Ear wash
- Shampoo and conditioner
- Hairball remedy

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