

Ferret Care Sheet

Ferrets have been domesticated for at least 2,500 years. Although the exact origin of their domestication is unknown, it is known that the Ancient Romans used ferrets for hunting rabbits. In some areas of the world today, ferrets are still captive bred for this purpose. In the United States, the practice of keeping ferrets as pets did not grow in popularity until the 1980's.

Domestic ferrets usually have brown, black, white, or mixed fur. Healthy adult ferrets typically weigh around 2 pounds, and reach an average length of 20 inches. With proper care, ferrets have an ordinary lifespan of 7 to 10 years.



Behavior:

Ferrets spend between 14 and 18 hours a day sleeping, and are crepuscular animals, which means that they are active during dawn and dusk. The long time spent sleeping is made up for when your ferret wakes up. Ferrets are highly energetic when awake and will seek to satisfy their desires for curiosity and play. They are relatively easily entertained and do not require pet toys, although if you wanted to purchase your ferret a toy, any cat toy would suffice. However, ferrets should never be given rubber or latex toys, as they'll chew and swallow rubber products, which will result in intestinal blockage, the need for surgery, and sometimes death. The typical ferret will often try to play hide and seek, or some form of a predator/prey game, with its owner. Be careful though – sometimes a ferret may nip, just like a dog will, during play.

Ferrets also have a strong nesting instinct and will attempt to hoard many household items they come across during play. Ferrets have been reported to “steal” socks, keys, calculators, shoes, sponges, toilet paper rolls, textbooks, video game controllers, amongst many other items. If you do not want to search every nook and cranny of your house for your car keys in the morning, make sure any items you do not want to chance your ferret taking, are clearly out of your pet's reach.

Diet:

Ferrets are obligate carnivores, dining primarily on meat. Their wild ancestors had a diet of whole small prey, to include the meat, bones, skin, feathers, or fur. Commercial ferret foods are formulated to suit the dietary needs of domesticated ferrets. An ideal ferret food should contain a minimum of 32% meat-based protein and 18% fat. Some people feed their ferrets adult cat foods, which are unsuitable for a ferret's digestive system because of the food's low protein and high fiber content. While ferrets have a fondness for raisins, bananas, peanut butter, pieces of cereal, and other “human” treats, the high

sugar content of such treats is linked to diabetes in ferrets, and in essence, should not be fed to your pet.

As with all animals, it is important for ferrets to have clean, fresh water available to them throughout the day. Water should be changed daily. Water bottles designed for hamsters and guinea pigs work just as well with ferrets.

Caging:

Ferrets tend to do best in double or triple story cages, which suit their playful nature. Of course, single cages can also be used. The minimum recommended cage size for one or two ferrets is 24" inches long x 24" inches wide x 18" high. The more ferrets you have, the larger the cage you'll need. Avoid housing your ferret in a glass aquarium, as they do not provide the room or ventilation a ferret requires.

Ferrets like to snuggle up in cloth fabrics and sleep, so it's important to provide you ferret with bedding materials. Unlike other small animals, ferrets do not need Carefresh or cedar shavings for bedding. Most pet stores sell fleece hammocks designed specially for ferrets, suiting the ferret's instinct to burrow. Towels, shirt sleeves, and pant legs are also ferret favorites. Beds with exposed foam should not be used. Your ferret is likely to rip the foam during play, ingest it, and become ill.

The Bathroom:

About 90% of the time ferrets can be litter trained. As with cats, this requires a litter box. Most pet stores carry litter boxes specially designed for the corner of a cage. Most cat litters will do the job once you have the box, but it is important to avoid heavily-perfumed litter and/or cedar pine shavings. These are harmful to your ferret's lungs and may prove toxic. A low dust clay or "scoopable" litter can be used, but, ideally, a high quality pellet litter works best. Unlike cats, ferrets do not cover their waste, so it is important to clean out their litter boxes on a daily basis.

Interesting Facts:

Ferrets have had jobs in the world of industry, manufacturing, and construction. They have been used to carry wires and lines through narrow pipes and tubes.

Black-footed ferrets, a wild relative of the modern domestic ferret, were almost extinct in the early 1980's. In 1986, 18 were captured and bred. By 1991, more than 200 were bred and released into the wild. Black-footed ferrets are again common in the North American plains.

Ferrets are more closely related to minks, otters, and skunks, than to mice, hamsters, or rats.

