

# Gerbils

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Gerbils are active little pets that are easy to care for. Because they are desert animals, they don't produce a lot of waste, so their cage will stay cleaner and have fewer odors than other small animals such as hamsters, mice or rats.

Gerbils are more active during the day than hamsters. When awake, they are always on the move and it's fun to watch them dig and burrow, play together and run on their exercise wheel.

Because gerbils are so active, it is difficult for young children to hold them, but they can be fun to watch for people of all ages. With proper handling they will become tame and affectionate pets!

## **One gerbil or more?**

Gerbils are very social animals and should be kept in same sex pairs or groups. However it can be difficult to accurately sex a gerbil and for this reason we recommend keeping only 1 gerbil per cage. If you choose to keep more than 1 per cage be prepared to separate them due to fighting or overpopulation!

## **Feeding**

The basic gerbil diet should be a fortified grain mix. You can also give gerbils small amounts of fruit and veggies that should be introduced slowly and in small amounts. Don't give too much fresh food at one time because gerbils will store the excess, which might spoil. Do not offer watery vegetables such as iceberg lettuce or celery as these may cause diarrhea that can be fatal for your gerbil. Treats are great for training and strengthening the bond between you and your gerbils and can comprise 10% of their diet.

## **Housing**

A gerbil cage should be at least 18" X 10" X 10" high, filled with 6-8" of bedding to allow the gerbils to burrow. You can use an aquarium, a large hamster cage with plastic tubes, or a wire cage with a very deep pan. Because gerbils are desert animals too much humidity is bad for them, which is the only drawback of aquariums and plastic habitats. There should not be moisture build-up on the inside of the cage. Try to keep the humidity in the room below 50%. For bedding we recommend aspen shavings or Carefresh bedding that is paper based. Never use cedar shavings as these are too aromatic and may cause respiratory problems.

## **Accessories**

Gerbils need a water bottle and a dry food dish. You can place 4" plastic tubes underneath their bedding and the gerbils will dig down to them to use them for sleeping. They need an exercise wheel, and enjoy climbing toys such as ladders, ropes, and branches, and chew toys.

## **Sanitation**

Clean the water bottle weekly, scrubbing all parts. Remove all moist food that isn't immediately eaten. The cage and bedding needs to be cleaned and changed only about once a week.

### **Special needs**

The gerbil's tail is very delicate. Never grab the tip of a gerbil's tail because the skin will come off. Because gerbils are in the rodent family, they have a need to chew in order to keep their teeth from growing too long. They will chew anything you put in the cage including the plastic toys that may come with the cage. We offer a nice selection of chew toys that are safe for your pet.

### **Life cycle**

Gerbils live an average of 3-4 years, although it's possible for them to live 6 years. The gestation period is 24 days and the average litter size is 4-5. Baby gerbils open their eyes at 16 days and can be weaned at 5 weeks.

### **Expert Help**

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

### **Supplies Checklist**

Cage	
Bedding	Exercise wheel
Water bottle	Climbing toys
Food dish	Chew toys
Gerbil food	Sleeping tubes
Treats	

This information is brought to you by the Pet Professionals at:

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