

## Q. HOW DO I FERRETPROOF MY HOME?

Ferrets love to worm their way into any little hole. As small as 2x2 inches or smaller for kits can be very bad. Crawl around every square inch of your home to look for any kind of holes near the floor and under cabinets, especially in the kitchen and laundry area. Even holes inside cabinets should be blocked just in case. Also watch out for heaters or furnace ducts. Recliners and sofa-beds are extremely dangerous, many ferrets have gotten crushed in the levers and springs underneath. Even regular couches can be dangerous if the ferret digs or crawls his way into the springs or stuffing. Swivel chairs can roll over the foot or tail of an unsuspecting ferret. Next, look around the area your ferret will be playing in. Keep in mind that many ferrets are excellent climbers and jumpers, and they can find complicated routes to places you never thought they could reach. They can also open cabinets and drawers, and crawl up from behind. Ferrets love to chew on sponges, erasers, shoe insoles, foam earplugs, silly putty, foam rubber, styrofoam, insulation, rubber door stoppers, and anything else spongy or springy. These things can all cause intestinal blockages. Toilet paper rolls and paper towel rolls are a problem because ferrets can get their head stuck in them and choke or suffocate.

## Q. WHAT WILL I NEED TO TAKE CARE OF MY NEW FERRET?

food for your ferret  
a food dish (preferably a heavy ceramic one)  
a water dish (also heavy ceramic) or a water bottle  
litter boxes and litter  
bedding (not wood shavings)  
a cage (the bigger the better)  
ferret shampoo (or baby or kitten shampoo)  
pet claw clippers (human nail clippers work also)  
toys (ferretproofed)  
a veterinarian (preferably familiar with ferrets)  
Linatone or Ferretone and Bitter Apple

## Q. WHAT KIND OF CAGE SHOULD I GET?

Cages should be made of wire mesh for ventilation. Aquariums are not recommended because they do not provide enough ventilation and will make your ferret feel isolated. Wood cages are not recommended because the wood can soak up urine and other liquids, so cleaning them is nearly impossible. If you are planning to keep your ferret caged more than occasionally, the cage should be minimum 2x3x2. A second or third ferret could also share that size cage. Of course, the bigger, the better, especially if the ferret will be spending any amount of time in the cage. In the cage you'll want some sort of bedroom. A ferret won't be very happy sleeping on the open floor of a cage. Old towels or old t-shirts make excellent bedding. DON'T use wood shavings. A box or basket makes for a comfy bed providing it is well padded with bedding. Wire floors are very hard on your ferrets feet, so cover all flooring with bedding, carpet remnants, or linoleum. Food dishes need to either be anchored or very heavy, and water bottles are suggested for cages. We also suggest securing the litter box if it is movable. Hammocks, tunnels, and ferretproofed toys are also suggested.

Also, be sure your cage door fastens securely, perhaps even add wire or twist tie closures in loose corners.

## Q. WHAT SHOULD I FEED MY FERRET?

When looking for a good ferret food, check for these requirements on the back. The key ingredients are fat and protein. The food needs to have 30-35% protein (32-38% for young ferrets under the age of 4), and 15-20% fat (18-22% for young ferrets). The first ingredient should be animal protein, preferably chicken or poultry, no fish, and as at least 2 or 3 of the next few ingredients. We recommend Totally Ferret as our first choice, and Iams kitten, Eukanuba cat, Pro Plan kitten, or Marshall ferret as close seconds. As your ferret gets older, Totally Ferret Senior, Iams cat, or Pro Plan cat is recommended. Check foods labeled as ferret foods carefully, they often do not meet ferret food requirements. This is not always the case, but it is best to read the ingredients for yourself. Dog food is not acceptable, as it lacks nutrients ferrets (and cats) need.

## Q. SHOULD I GIVE MY FERRET ANY SUPPLEMENTS?

Linatone and Ferretone are two very popular vitamin supplements. Once ferrets get a taste of them (and you may have a hard time getting picky eaters to take a taste), they will usually do anything for more. However, no more than a few drops a day should be given, since they are high in vitamin A, which can be very harmful in large doses. An alternative is to dilute the linatone or ferretone with olive oil (not any other kind of oil). 50-50 is suggested. A little bit more can then be given, and the taste does not change. Laxatone or Petromalt, which are hairball remedies are also very strongly recommended, since ferrets are so very fond of eating things that can cause intestinal blockages in them (which are life-threatening). For these, simply follow the directions on the bottle, estimate how much by taking the recommended cat dosage and adjusting for a ferret's smaller weight.

## Q. WHAT ARE GOOD TREATS AND WHAT SHOULD I AVOID?

Just about anything can be given; fruits, raisins, licorice, and pounce cat treats are some of the most popular, but some ferrets can go wild over the most unusual things. Ferrets cannot digest fiber, so limit raisins and other vegetables or fiber foods to small amounts. Most ferrets are lactose intolerant, so cows milk and ice cream should be avoided. Goats milk and soy milk are acceptable however.

## Q. WHAT KIND OF LITTER SHOULD I USE?

Clumping litters are not recommended since they can get into the ferrets nose or rectum, clump, and cause problems. Wood chips are not recommended for the same reasons as bedding. Very dusty litters are not recommended since the dust can cause respiratory problems in ferrets. Litters that are recommended are: Compressed wood pellets (wood stove

pellets) that disintegrate into sawdust when wet, newspaper pellets, sheets of newspaper, or corn cob litter.

## Q. SHOULD I USE WOOD SHAVINGS AS BEDDING?

No. Many pet stores use cedar or pine shavings as bedding, but it is not recommended. Cedar in particular has been associated with allergies and respiratory problems in various animals, including humans and ferrets. Pine and other wood chips also produce a fair amount of dust which isn't good to breathe. Furthermore, your ferret would much rather have an old towel or t-shirt to cuddle up in.

## Q. DOES MY FERRET NEED TO BE NEUTERED? HOW ABOUT DESCENTED? DECLAWED?

Neutering - Yes. A male unneutered ferret is extremely aggressive towards other ferrets when in heat, to the point of killing other male ferrets. A female unneutered ferret must either be bred every year or spayed. If she goes into heat and she is not bred, she will die from aplastic anemia. DO NOT try to breed ferrets unless you are working together with an experienced ferret breeder. Breeding ferrets is very difficult and we do not recommend it. Descending - maybe. Descending can cause problems if the ferret is not properly descended by an experienced vet. Also, a ferret that has not been descended will not smell any more than one that has been providing the ferret has been neutered, and that the bedding is changed at least once a week. Declawing - no. Ferrets have nails like dogs, not cats. They should never be declawed.

## Q. WHAT VACCINATIONS WILL MY FERRET NEED AND WHEN?

Canine distemper: Fervac-D, Galaxy-D or PureVax. Kits should get three shots, four weeks apart, with the last one no earlier than 14 weeks. Two is not enough. Then a yearly booster shot. Kits bought from a pet store will generally only have had the first shot, and still need two more. Canine distemper is airborne, and 100% fatal to ferrets. Rabies: Imrab-3. One vaccination at 14-16 weeks, then a yearly booster shot. Ferrets do not need to be vaccinated for feline distemper or parvo. They don't need a 5-way dog vaccine. Ferrets do occasionally have adverse reactions to vaccines. These are rare, but life-threatening. Watch your ferret for at least an hour after a vaccination for signs for a reaction (vomiting, diarrhea, loss of bladder control, difficulty breathing, seizures, convulsion, or anything else that is alarming). If this happens, get your ferret to the vet immediately. We recommend waiting at least 15 minutes at the vets afterwards, and having 2 to 4 weeks in between the distemper shot and the rabies shot to lessen the chance of a reaction.

## Q. HOW DO I TRAIN MY FERRET NOT TO NIP?

A ferret which has been well treated and bred to be a pet should not bite or be vicious, but ferret play does include mock combat, and kits won't know how hard they can put their teeth on you without hurting you. Just remember, ferrets are not malicious, they just need to learn what behavior is acceptable. In all cases, positive reinforcement (giving treats) works much better than punishment. Nose flicking is instinctive, but the ferret will learn to associate your hand with pain and you want to avoid that. Alternatives include, try using a signal he already understands such as a high pitched yelp, give him a time out in a cage and ignore him for a few minutes, which most ferrets hate. Cover your hands (or other body part) with bitter apple or bitter lime. Most ferrets hate the taste of this, and will soon learn that you taste very bad. Scruffing and shaking gently while you hiss at him will mimic the mother and tell the ferret that you are boss and you don't like what he did. Saying NO very loudly while doing this will also teach the ferret to associate NO with being in trouble.

## Q. ANY ADVICE ON BATHS, EARS, AND NAIL CLIPPING?

Frequent bathing can tend to dry out a ferrets skin. In addition, to compensate, the ferret will secrete oils that contribute to his smell. We recommend only bathing a ferret once every four to six months. Ears should be checked at the vets for ear mites, and cleaned once a month. Your vet can tell you how to safely clean them. Nails should be trimmed at least once every other week. Cut the nail just longer than the pink line inside it. Be very careful not to cut that, since the ferret will start bleeding and decide that claw clipping is a very bad thing. To hold the ferrets attention while clipping, try putting a few drops of linatone on the ferrets belly, and direct the ferret to it.

## Q. CAN MY FERRET TOLERATE EXTREME TEMPERATURES?

No. When it comes to cold weather, a ferret can be acclimated in the same manner as a dog or cat as long as the temperature does not go below freezing. However, ferrets cannot sweat or cool themselves down in any way. Ferrets are at risk of heat stroke and death at temperatures above 85 degrees. If you have no way of keeping the temperature below that, we suggest cold packs in the ferrets cage, fans, and anything else you can do to keep your ferret cool.

## Q. MY FERRET TREMBLES A LOT. IS THAT NORMAL?

Generally, yes. Ferrets normally tremble for two reasons. First, they often shiver right after waking up, in order to raise their body temperatures. Second, they shake or quiver when excited or frightened. For a young kit, this could be all the time, since everything is new and interesting. For older ferrets, a bath or even a good scolding could prompt trembling.

## Q. IS MY FERRET REALLY JUST SLEEPING?

Most often, yes. Ferrets sleep quite a bit, even adults. A two to four hour playtime followed by a several hour nap is typical. Ferrets sometimes appear to be sleeping with their eyes partly open, and they sleep very heavily, often not waking even when picked up. Ferrets will readily adapt to your schedule, however, and if you let them out to play at certain times everyday, they will adjust so their playtime matches yours.

Ferrets are very sociable animals. They will become attached to you, and will suffer if not handled and played with on a daily basis. Ferrets get along well with cats and dogs, however we recommend supervised encounters for the first several months until you are 100% sure that neither the ferret nor the cat or dog will hurt each other. Ferrets are not like a hamster or gerbil. They need plenty of room to run around in, if only for a few hours each day. Ferrets can also catch human colds and the flu, so if you are sick, try not to handle your ferret much, because once they catch it, it can often progress to pneumonia and death if not treated with antibiotics.



Most of the information in this brochure was reprinted with permission from the Ferret FAQ - 1994-2002 by Pamela Greene on the Internet. If you have Internet access, we encourage you to look up the Ferret FAQ, Ferret Medical FAQs, and other ferret information at: <http://www.ferretcentral.org>. If you have any more questions on ferrets that are not answered here in this brochure, feel free to call us anytime for any reason. This pamphlet was created by Shelley Knudsen.

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# Ferrets

## Frequently Asked Questions

Domestic ferrets, or *Mustela putorius furo*, are rapidly becoming one of the most popular pets next to cats and dogs. An estimated 5 to 7 million ferrets exist in the United States alone. Domestic ferrets are distant cousins to the wild Black-footed Ferret, and are believed to be descended from the European polecat. However, unlike their wild ancestors, they cannot survive on their own outdoors. Ferrets are generally legal everywhere in the United States except California and Hawaii. We suggest you check your local city and county ordinances to see how they apply to ferret ownership.

## Q. IS A FERRET A GOOD PET FOR A CHILD?

Many people have both children and ferrets without problems, but there is a large difference between having both children and ferrets and getting a ferret for your child. Ferrets require a lot of attention and care that most children are just not able to provide. We don't recommend ferrets for ferret households with children under the age of 12, although maturity of the child should always be taken into consideration for any age.

## Q. HOW DO I INTRODUCE A NEW FERRET TO MY ESTABLISHED ONES?

Dominance fighting is normal in ferret introductions. It can range from no fighting at all, to all out war. Usually friendship is established in a few weeks, but occasionally it may take 6 months to a year. If you can, take your current ferret with you when you go to pick up a new ferret so that he can choose his own new friend. If possible make sure the first introduction takes place in an area that neither ferret has ever been before, not just an unused room in you home but preferably someone else's home. If this is not possible, try putting vanilla extract on their noses to confuse their smelling, and bitter apple on their necks to discourage biting. Always supervise the ferrets together until you are 100% sure that they will get along. Expect mild tussling, but if one ferret starts drawing blood, separate them immediately, and try again at a later date. Remember the established ferret must not feel like he is being replaced. Do not ignore him for the newer ferret.