

Ferret Odors And Biting Behavior

Advice on minimizing ferret odor and handling ferret biting behaviors.

By Mary VanDahm

Posted: August 13, 2008, 5 a.m. EDT

Q: I want a ferret but someone I know had one and didn't like it. It had its own room, but it still stank up the house. Do they really stink that much? And I heard they bite to play and to be mean. Is that true? If I get one, I need to keep the stink down, so should I get a male or a female?

A: Ferrets are unique animals and are not for everyone. They have a natural musk odor that never totally goes away. Intact ferrets give off a strong musk odor to attract a mate and to mark territory. Hobs (intact males) generally have a stronger odor than jills (intact females). If your ferret is neutered, it should not give off a very strong scent no matter which gender you select. Your friend may have had an intact animal.

Washing the ferret's bedding and cage every week and cleaning the litter boxes daily should help keep odors to a minimum. If possible, keep your ferret in a room without carpeting. Carpeting holds odors and is hard to clean. You can throw an old blanket or a couple of small rugs on the floor for your ferret to walk on if the floor is too slippery or cold for your pet. Blankets and small rugs can be tossed in the wash once or twice a week, or as needed.

You can also occasionally bathe your ferret, but don't do it too often. Once or twice a month is usually more than adequate. Bathing strips the natural oils out of your ferret's fur and, if done too often, will cause its coat to be dry and brittle. Over-bathing can trigger your ferret's body to produce more oil on its skin, which will make it smell more. If your ferret seems to need a little freshening up between baths, buy a ferret deodorizing spray and use as needed.

In response to your question about biting – any animal with teeth can bite. Just like puppies and kittens, some kits (baby ferrets) go through a teething stage and may nip or bite until they are taught not to. If the breeder or pet store that you get your ferret from has not socialized the animal, then yes, it might bite. Ferrets have tough skin and can chew on each other with hardly a scratch. If they turn this playful attack on you, it can be painful if you aren't expecting it. Usually a little patience and a lot of handling will calm down a biting ferret. Most ferrets will not bite to be mean unless they are very frightened or have been abused. If you are getting a ferret from a private breeder, get references so you can ask other people how their kits were that they got from the breeder.

One last thing to consider when choosing a male or female ferret is that the males get about twice as big as the females. This means males eat more food and, therefore, produce more poop. The males are generally more laid back, though, so it's a toss up as to which sex to choose. Go out and look at some ferrets and see which one steals your heart.

See more ferret questions and answers>>