

## Breeding Gerbils

### **What are the standards for becoming a certified gerbil breeder?**

*By Donna Anastasi*

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**Q:** My gerbils just had two litters for the first time. They were planned litters, and we took steps to ensure the health of the parents as well as the pups. My fiancé and I are looking to breed gerbils in order to become established locally in Arizona as a small step toward owning a pet shop in the future. What are the standards for becoming a certified breeder? Are there standards? Where would be a good place to start selling our gerbils?

**A:** A good breeding goal is to produce gerbils that are healthy, super tame and friendly due to early and frequent socialization with people. Baby gerbils, when well socialized, jump into a hand and run up an arm to come out and play. People seem to like dark-eyed gerbils in the more vibrant colors, spotted patterns, and Siamese or other colorpoints too. Adopters usually want some color variety so they can tell their gerbils apart.

When starting out, raise just one or two litters and see what the local interest is for gerbils. Any breeder should have the capability to keep all babies that are not placed. People who wish to breed and don't yet own any gerbils should consider adopting a breeding pair from an established breeder and working closely with him or her. Advertising can be in a free-to-get town paper, online, on in-store bulletin boards, on animal online forums, on your own website and through the American Gerbil Society Breeder listing.

The American Gerbil Society has standards for its members on breeding gerbils, these include: Breeders should educate themselves on gerbil care and breeding, and develop a short- and long-term breeding program, keeping in mind the health and temperament of the gerbils. Breeding pairs should be selected with consideration given to temperament, health, vitality, color and conformation. Ensure that the individual has the necessary time and resources to properly care for all gerbils in their care. Understand the importance of socialization of pups between ten days and six weeks. Breeders should realistically consider their ability to provide adequate socialization before breeding. Breeders should have a good understanding of the symptoms and treatment for common health issue in breeding and raising pups. Pups should not be sold until they reach the age of 6 weeks. Breeders will screen all prospective buyers and will not sell gerbils as "feeders" (to be used as snake or reptile food). Breeders will keep the gerbils in safe bedding and a safe environment, sell them in pairs, and provide accurate care information. The breeder is responsible to educate new or prospective owners before they take any gerbils home, and the breeder assumes a lifetime responsibility (and return policy) for every litter he or she produces.

This organization also has "in the works," a breeder excellence award. Check out The American Gerbil Society's website for more on gerbil care and breeding.