

## The Lowdown On Hamster Training

**Although they can't learn tricks, hamsters can be tempted with treats and trained to be tame.**

*By Wendy Bedwell-Wilson*

It's after dark, and a Syrian hamster pokes its head out of its burrow — whiskers twitching, nose sniffing. It catches a scent of food and follows it, scurrying past obstacles, climbing over mounds and coursing through brush. When it finds the bit of food, it packs it in its cheek pouch and rambles on to its next morsel of food, stashing it away with the others until sunrise, when it returns to its solitary burrow.

Is this little guy hanging out in the high desert of Syria or scrambling through a homemade agility course? As far as the hamster is concerned, it could be either. Understanding that hamsters come hardwired with their wild roots is key to training the furry critters to learn and perform certain behaviors, said David Imber, a longtime hamster fancier who lives in New York and moderates several online hamster forums.

“Hamsters are very un-evolved creatures,” he said. “They remember their desert environment, and they can't really shake that. They don't know they're in your environment. They're very stuck to their roots as a desert creature that lives by night and is controlled by scent. And their behavior is very much determined by the fact that they're solitary creatures, and the only creature they're ever going to respond to positively is you.”

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