

Ferret Litter Training 101

Before you surrender your position in the little box war, employ these training tactics with your ferret.

By Chrissy Denayer

Posted: April 2, 2008, 5 a.m. EDT

The mystery of litter pan usage is better understood by ferrets than by most of their humans. For most ferrets, the litter pan in either a) a large bed, sleeping in which is better accomplished by emptying all its contents prior to snoozing; b) a large toy, playing in which is better accomplished by emptying all its contents prior to playing; c) a useless piece of plastic that must be pushed out of the corner so the corner may be used for "deposits"; or d) a waste receptacle for the previously mentioned "deposits."

While many ferrets take to the litter box as if born to use it, others need encouragement. By understanding your pet's personal habits and preferences, you can tailor your tactics to win the litter box wars.

Ferrets and Their Personal Habits

Ferrets are generally neat animals. They are cognizant enough of social etiquette to keep their potty area removed from their eating and sleeping areas. The good news is that ferrets are naturally inclined to use corners as their bathroom of choice. The bad news is twofold. First, there are exceptions to every rule; and second, in a typical four-sided cage, there are four corners. In a cage with multiple levels, there are even more corners.

The first rule in successful litter training is to let the ferret choose the potty location. Countless hours of frustration can be avoided by allowing the ferret to dictate its preference in this instance.

Ferrets on the Loose

Free-roaming ferrets pose more of a challenge. There are many corners in the average house or apartment. Any piece of furniture located against a wall creates two additional corners. With so many choices, it's inevitable that ferrets that roam free will discover "corners" their humans have not previously considered as such. Again, the best way to circumvent human frustration with ferret latrine location is to allow the ferret to choose the location and place the litter pan there.

Redirecting the Misguided

Ferrets are imperfect - they make mistakes. Correcting mistakes in a cage is relatively simple. First, place a very large litter pan or several litter pans in the cage along with a hammock or sleep sack, a food dish and a small drip area allowance for the water bottle. Ferrets will seldom use their bedding or eating areas for elimination, leaving only one other option for this purpose: the litter pan(s). As the ferret consistently uses the litter pan, the larger size can be traded for a smaller one. Gradually, the ferret is allowed more floor space as the pan(s) are downgraded to smaller sizes or deleted until only one pan remains in the cage.

When ferrets are allowed to roam, they are far more likely to make mistakes than when confined to their cages. Most ferrets will make an effort to use the litter pan when in the general vicinity of its location, but few will travel to another room to use one.

Do not be discouraged - remember some ferrets will never be 100 percent accurate in using the litter pan. What they lack in bathroom etiquette is more than compensated by the love it shares with its humans.

Waste Management and Disposal

Common sense dictates that the most frequently the litter box is cleaned, the less noticeable the odor will be. Consideration must be given to the number of ferrets using the litter pan to decide how often to clean it. If not done frequently enough, many ferrets will simply stop using the litter pan as a form of protest.