

Ferret Housing Tips

Check out these tips for safe ferret housing.

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Ferrets love to explore and, more often than not, get into trouble. They have been known to chew on and swallow materials such as cloth or anything made from vinyl or rubber. They also like to climb and get wedged between objects or even escape.

A suitable cage with an escape-proof latch is an absolute must for safe keeping. Large, two-to-three story cages are ideal. Ferrets need roomy cages that are at least 30 to 36 inches long, 16 to 18 inches wide, and a minimum of 18 inches high per floor. Also, washable pet rugs are needed because ferret paws are not designed to walk on wire floors.

The cage should be kept in a cool, shaded, dry area away from direct sunlight. Ferrets have poorly developed sweat glands and cannot tolerate temperatures above 80 degrees Fahrenheit. They could easily die of heatstroke.

Ferrets should not be left in a cage for an extended period of time; they need plenty of exercise, love and companionship on a daily basis.

Depending on their age, ferrets sleep between 15 and 20 hours a day; therefore, a comfortable sleeping area is important. Without one, they will dig up everything in their way to make one.

Pet blankets, hammocks with synthetic lambswool centers and small pet beds such as sleeping bags lined with synthetic lambswool are best. Cedar chips should not be used for bedding because they represent a respiratory risk to ferrets. All wood chips absorb urine, musk and waste odors and no amount of air freshener can mask those smells.

Change the bedding every three to four days to prevent odors. Perfumed detergents or fabric softeners are not recommended for use on their bedding because some ferrets are allergic to the chemicals.

Ferrets can be litter-trained in a small confined area such as a cage, but effective training requires appropriate litter products, technique, time (three to four weeks), positive reinforcement and patience.

Pelleted litter products made from recycled newspapers or plant fibers are good because they are super absorbent, dust-free, nonallergenic, environmentally friendly and have longer tray lives. Scoopable clay litters are not recommended for ferrets. The materials from these litters may cause the ferret's coat to become dry and brittle, and constantly inhaling the dust may cause upper respiratory irritation.

A plastic litter pan and a plastic or metal poop scoop are fine and work well.

Soft latex or rubber cat and dog toys are not safe for ferrets because they like to chew on and swallow them. They are a major cause of intestinal blockage in ferrets and could possibly lead to a ferret's death.

Some safe toys include small, hard rubber balls with bells inside, cat teaser toys attached to strings on poles, washable cat crinkle tunnels and bags. Small pet tents provide a fine place for ferrets to play and nap.