

## Need Supplies For A New Ferret?

**This list will help make your new ferret feel at home.**

*By Marylou Zarbock*

Owning a ferret adds much more than an adorable furball to your household. It also adds all the “stuff” a ferret needs to be “at home” in your home. Think of it as having a friend move in with you -- a small, furry friend!

The list of items that need to be ready and waiting for your ferret when it arrives at your home may seem daunting, but each serves a vital purpose.

- 1) **Carrier:** A small pet carrier is the safest way to transport your ferret in the car. Secure it with a seatbelt and all will be well. This carrier is also needed for trips to the veterinarian, visits to friends, attendance at ferret fun matches or wherever else you might travel with your ferret.
- 2) **Cage:** A cage goes a long way toward keeping your ferret safe. Ferret-proofing an entire house is virtually impossible. Unless you choose to create a single, ferret-proofed room where your pet runs free, a cage is probably your best bet. A stainless steel or coated wire cage with a solid-surface bottom is a good choice. Get the largest one you can fit into your home (but no smaller than 36- by- 24 by- 24 inches high for a single ferret) that has bar spacing of not more than 1 inch square. If a cage has a wire bottom or ramps, add linoleum or some solid surface to protect your ferret's paws. Although the cage creates a safe area for your pet while you're away, be aware that you must allow your ferret at least four hours of playtime outside the cage every day.
- 3) **Food:** Ferrets are obligate carnivores with a short digestion time. Food should be available to them at all times, so stock up on kibble before bringing your new friend home. The nutritional needs of ferrets differ from other pets, so choose a quality ferret-specific food. A high-protein (32 to 40 percent), high-fat (18 to 22 percent), low-fiber diet (2 to 3 percent) is required. The protein must be from an animal source. Find out what your new ferret has been used to eating and continue feeding that. If you wish to switch to a higher quality food, do so gradually.
- 4) **Hammocks/Sleep Sacks:** Ferrets are den animals and enjoy burrowing. Provide several sleeping areas for your pet by hanging a hammock or two in the cage and providing one or two sleep sacks. Choose items with closely woven fabric and avoid any with loops that might catch on toenails. Washable fabrics and ease of removal are musts for frequent washings. (Weekly cage cleaning and bedding washing greatly reduces any odor.)
- 5) **Food dish:** A ferret has to eat and a food bowl is the place to put its food. Ferrets might try to play with the bowl, so opt for one that's too heavy to tip or attaches to the side of the cage.
- 6) **Water bottle/bowl:** Hydration is key to ferret health. Always have fresh, clean water available for your pet. Water in a bottle may stay cleaner, but a ferret may enjoy playing in a water bowl.
- 7) **Toys:** A ferret's intelligence can cause it to become bored quickly. And a bored ferret can be mischievous or sink into depression. Provide several ferret-safe toys (no small parts that can be chewed off and eaten) inside the cage and out. Rotate the toys available to keep them “new.”
- 8) **Litter Box:** If you'd rather make due with newspaper for litter control, you can. However, most ferret owners find that the litter box/litter method works well. A ferret-specific litter box brings the most success. Ferrets need a low entryway, but high back and sides.
- 9) **Litter:** If you have a litter box, you're going to need litter to fill it! Some owners even choose to layer the bottom of the cage with it. When choosing litter, avoid those that clump, have excessive dust or emit odors or chemicals. The phenols in cedar and nonkiln-dried pine might negatively affect your ferret's health.
- 10) **Litter Scooper:** Although many things can be used to scoop litter, a litter-scooper may be specially designed to get into corners and make the job easier.
- 11) **Veterinarian:** No, you can't buy a veterinarian and take him or her home! However, you do need to find a ferret-knowledgeable vet in your area. All ferrets should visit a veterinarian at least annually for a checkup, and rabies and

canine distemper vaccinations. Your new ferret should visit the vet for a wellness checkup and review of its vaccination needs. Young ferrets need several vaccines and boosters.

Whew! That wasn't so bad, was it? Now that you've got the basics down, here are a few other items you should get when you have the chance.

- 1) Hairball Remedy: Ferrets can't cough up hairballs as cats do, so this remedy helps hairballs "pass through." Without it, you may end up facing a veterinary bill for surgery to remove a blockage. Follow directions and offer the remedy one or two times a week, or three or more times a week (shedding season [spring and fall] requires more frequent doses).
- 2) Nest Box: This small box inside your ferret's cage will provide it with a quiet, dark place to retreat for sleeping or whenever it might feel the need for privacy.
- 3) Collar: Some ferret owners put collars on their pets, some don't. It's up to you whether you'd like a collar with an identification tag or a bell to help you locate your pet. If your ferret ever escapes from your home, this could make the difference in whether you get it back.
- 4) First-Aid Kit: Find one made for animals.
- 5) Flea/Mite control product: Consult your veterinarian to determine which is best for your ferret.
- 6) Nail Trimmer: Long ferret nails might scratch you, but they also get caught on fabric or other items. Save your pet from the pain of having a nail ripped out by trimming its nails regularly. Trimmers made for ferrets or cats work well.
- 7) Ferret Shampoo: Ferrets don't need to be bathed very often. Frequent bathing may actually cause more odor because it stimulates the production of more body oil. When your ferret does become particularly dirty, a bath will be needed.
- 8) Tooth Brush/toothpaste: Ferrets suffer from dental disease, much as humans do. It can lead to the loss of teeth and possibly injure body organs if bacteria from the mouth get into the bloodstream. Daily brushing to remove plaque can prevent this.

The following items aren't must-haves for ferret ownership, but your ferret would certainly appreciate them!

- 1) Treats: Look for meat-based treats, and don't overfeed!
- 2) Ferret Gate: This refers to any sort of barrier you might put in a doorway to keep a ferret in or out of a room. It needs to be impossible to climb and high enough so a ferret can't jump over it.
- 3) Ferret Playpen: Any time you want to take your ferret to a nonferret-proofed area (another room in your house, outside, a friend's home), a playpen will prove invaluable. This portable system of interlinking wire walls will keep your ferret safely confined.
- 4) Leash & Harness: If you want to take you ferret on walks or outings in the park, these items are a must.
- 5) Dig Box: You can create this "playground" yourself by using a small storage container and filling it with clean dirt, cornstarch packing peanuts, long-grain rice and other ferret-safe (can't be swallowed or inhaled) materials.

And there you have it! Or do you? It seems that ferret owners constantly find something new to care for or entertain their ferrets. Will you?