

Gerbil Training Day

Some tips on how to train your gerbil.

By Jessica Cordia

Good news, gerbils can be trained. "Gerbils can learn several tricks, such as using a litter box, responding to its name, and even jumping in your hand when you put it in the tank," said Amanda Childress, an American Gerbil Society registered breeder and owner of Star of Texas kennel in Jacksonville, Texas.

Litter Box Training

Training your gerbil to use a litter box makes cleaning its cage easier. If your gerbil uses the box, then you don't have to change the bedding as frequently. "I have had very good luck with potty training gerbils with very little training," said Childress. Put a small bowl partially filled with chinchilla dust in your gerbil's cage. Your gerbil may play in the dust, and then use it for urinating and defecating. Childress said that her gerbils won't roll in the bowl after they've used it because they don't want to soil their fur. Daily, remove the bowl to clean it, and then return it to your gerbil's cage with the dust.

Tricks and Other Training

Your pet gerbil can learn its name, and it can learn that when you approach the cage, you probably will take it out to play. "Well-socialized gerbils will often readily climb up your hands and try to run up your arms once they know it means playtime," Childress said. Your pet gerbil can learn some neat tricks too. "With patience and persistence, a gerbil can learn to do simple tricks," Childress said.

Training Do's and Don'ts

"Training should always be positive reinforcement-type training," Childress said, "You must always reward the gerbil when it performs a correct response, and never punish it." For best results, train in short five to 10-minute sessions a couple of times a day. "Mostly because the gerbil will lose interest quickly and you'll lose patience," said Childress. Your gerbil likely learns best when you train it when it's already awake and active.

Don't get discouraged or angry if your gerbil doesn't want to be trained. Childress said, "Some gerbils aren't going to be born performers, and would simply be happy doing what gerbils do best...being cute and cuddly!"