

## Make Your Mice Happy

**Enrich your pet mouse's environment to help it be healthier and happier.**

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Pet mice spend the majority of their lives within their enclosure or home-cage. Not surprisingly, the quality of this environment has a huge impact on the physical and psychological welfare of mice.

True environmental enrichment provides stimulation and opportunities for mice to perform natural or species-specific behaviors. These include socializing, grooming, exploring, foraging, climbing, hiding, gnawing, manipulating objects, nesting and digging.

It follows then that the optimum environment for mice is one that allows and facilitates these behaviors. Studies show that environmental enrichment can lower stress hormones, boost immunity and improve brain function in mice. The good news is that you can do plenty of things to enrich your pets' environment.

### Mice Enjoy Mouse Companions

Mice are social creatures and prefer, where possible, to be housed with other mice. Mice that live together will play together, groom one another and sleep together. Keeping two mice is no more trouble, but twice the fun — watching mice interact with each other can provide hours of entertainment.

Think carefully about social arrangements first. Male and female mice housed together will inevitably reproduce, yielding potentially hundreds of mice within a matter of months.

If you do not intend to breed mice, pairs or trios of females are probably ideal. Mice get along best when they are from the same litter.

Male mice are much more likely to fight than females. Males generally do not like unfamiliar males and will fight an "intruder" — sometimes to the death. Even well acquainted males that are separated for a short period of time (as may occur during cage cleaning) may turn on one another. If males are housed together, placing some used nesting material into the cleaned cage might reduce (but not eliminate) aggression.

Scientific studies suggest that where a mouse must be housed alone (for example an extremely aggressive mouse), provision of other forms of environmental enrichment might reduce the stress of isolation.

### Mice Enjoy A Place Of Their Own

Solid shelters and dividers within the cage allow mice a place to retreat from the outside world, and provide a structure that mice can climb, chew and interact with. Given the opportunity, many mice prefer to build their nest within an in-cage shelter.

Studies show that mice prefer small, angular shelters. When offered a shelter with one open side or two, the majority of mice choose a box with one open side and typically sleep with their head toward that side.

While many mice retreat into tunnels or shelters when the cage is opened, these structures can actually make it easier to catch and handle mice, because the shelter can be gently picked up, which allows the mouse to crawl out onto your hand.

Mice appreciate shelters with a flat roof rather than a steeply angled roof. Flat roofs allow mice to climb on top and use the structure as a platform.

Dividers and shelters may also reduce aggressive encounters by giving mice a space to retreat from one another if tensions rise. Shelters and dividers that are easily dismantled are much easier for mouse owners to clean.