

CHOOSING A CAGE

Contrary to one popular 'ferret myth', ferrets should not be left to roam your house without your supervision. There are just too many dangers lurking in homes to leave these curious creatures to their own devices. This means your fuzzy will need a home of his or her own - one that is safe but allows them room to move around and entertain themselves when you are not home. Ferret cages come in many different sizes and shapes, they come in a variety of materials, and they can be "store bought" or homemade.

Here are some general guidelines to help you choose the right home for your fuzzy or fuzzies.

- Size - at least 3' x 2' for 1 ferret; more space will be needed for more ferrets
- Ventilation - wire cages should be used, as opposed to aquariums, to allow for ventilation around the litter box
- Security - ferrets are clever and can discover ways to escape their cages that we could never think of. Be sure all doors are secure.
- Safe - be sure there is nothing inside your ferret's cage that could be hazardous (i.e. rubber toys, tasty cloth, or unsecured shelves, litter boxes and ramps).

ABOUT MD FERRET PAWS

MD Ferret PAWS strives to protect and improve the lives of ferrets in Maryland. We seek to improve the relationships between ferrets and humans through education and outreach. We promote legislation and research that makes life safer and healthier for all ferrets. Through our efforts the status and life of the ferret as a companion animal will be enhanced, legitimized, and more enjoyable for everyone. We need your help to accomplish these goals! Visit our website to see how you can become a member!



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SO YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT GETTING A FERRET? (WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW)

PLAYTIME

Ferrets are very social animals and need a lot of time and attention. You cannot leave them in a cage 24 hours a day like hamsters and gerbils. They need 1-4 hours of playtime daily (preferably supervised and definitely ferret-proofed). Before getting a ferret, really think about how much time you will have to devote to your ferret.

SAVINGS

Ferrets are expensive pets to care for properly. Not only do you have the initial cost/adoption fee, but you also have annual exams and vaccinations such as distemper and rabies as well as maintenance costs of food, bedding, and litter. They should also be tested for ADV (Aleutians Disease Virus) yearly.

You also need to have money set aside in case of emergencies. Your ferret could be accidentally injured, get a blockage from ingesting something that couldn't pass through its system, get a disease, or any number of other things that could require veterinary care. Some of the most

common illnesses in ferrets are cancers, which commonly require surgery. For these reasons, it is advised that you set aside some money every month in a savings account or other means in order to be prepared in an emergency or when surgery comes up.

POOP HABITS

Ferrets poop A LOT. They have a transit time of 3-4 hours so anything they eat will pass through quickly. You will need to clean bedding and litter boxes frequently to decrease/eliminate odor. One important thing to remember is that ferrets are not like cats and while they can be litter-trained you can't expect them to have 100% accuracy with a litter box. You will have to be prepared and tolerant of cleaning up messes frequently - inside and outside the cage.

LEGAL STUFF

Are ferrets legal where you live? They are illegal in California, Hawaii, New York City and Washington, DC and some other cities. Check with your local Animal Control or Humane Society to be sure they are legal in your area before you get a ferret.

Are you allowed to have a ferret where you live? Do you own your own home? Not all landlords allow ferrets. Be sure to check with him/her before renting if you already have a ferret or before getting a ferret. Be honest. Don't try to hide a ferret that isn't allowed to be there. Some day, the landlord will find out. The maintenance department could come in while you are away and find out that you have ferrets. Then you will either have to

find a home for your ferret or move. Avoid putting yourself and your ferret into this situation.

DESTRUCTIVE

Ferrets can be very destructive. A closed door is more than they can resist. They will scratch at the door or the carpet in front of it in an attempt to get to the other side. You can place a plastic carpet protector, plexiglass, or old linoleum front of the door and you might also have to tape it down to keep them from continuing to dig in front of the door. They also love to dig into sofas and the underside of mattresses to burrow and hide their treasures. They might also leave some gifts that aren't exactly treasures (poop). Ferrets can damage/break valuables, carpet and screens.

ODOR AND BATHING

People often ask if ferrets stink. The answer is no. Their litter box can have an odor and so can their bedding if it's not kept clean. Ferrets have a musky odor (stronger in unneutered males). Many people like this smell but some find it offensive. The only way you know is to be around other ferrets.

The worst thing you can do is to bathe your ferret too much. When you bathe the ferret, you are removing oils from the skin. The body's natural reaction is to make more oils to keep the skin from drying out. With these oils, you create more of the musky odor. A bath once or twice a year is sufficient unless your ferret gets into something yucky or gets really dirty.

Ferrets are also born with scent glands. If you purchased the ferret from a pet store, it most likely has been descented (glands were removed). This procedure is NOT necessary unless the gland is infected or causing other health issues for the ferret. When a ferret with intact scent glands is frightened or excited, it may 'poof'. The smell of the 'poof' dissipates after a few minutes and while mildly unpleasant, it is not nearly as awful as a skunk.

FERRETPROOFING

There is really no such thing as ferretproof, only ferret resistant. No matter how hard you work to have your home ferretproofed, your ferret will always manage to find something that you missed. One thing to remember is if the ferret's head can fit, so can the entire ferret. They like to get into and behind cabinets and most appliances, dig up houseplants, etc. You need to literally get down on your hands and knees and look at everything from their point of view. Ferretproofing a never-ending process.

SMOKING

You should never smoke near your ferrets. Second hand smoke is as dangerous to them as it is to humans. Smoking can cause breathing difficulties, chronic coughing, lung cancer, tracheal calcification, etc. If you have to smoke, do it outside or in another room.