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CARING FOR YOUR FERRET

Ferrets make great pets and are easily cared for. They can often be litter box trained and can even be allowed to roam loose in the home. A ferret's average life expectancy is 5-8 years (occasionally up to 10 years). The following information can help you in your decision to have a ferret as a pet.

Brief history:

Ferrets have been domesticated for >2000 years and were utilized for rabbit and rodent control. They were introduced to the United States in the late 18th century. They were bred for their fur until the late 20th century. They didn't become popular as pets until the late 1960s. They range in size from 2-4 pounds. Ferrets come in a variety of colors as illustrated below.

Color	Examples
Sable (most common)	
Albino	
Black-eyed white	
Cinnamon	

Housing:

Ferrets can be housed indoors or outdoors, singly or in groups. They are sensitive to temperature extremes and should not be kept in areas that are above 90° F or below 20° F. Wire cages are best, avoid glass aquariums as they do not provide enough ventilation. Some cage specifications are given below.

- The cage should be a minimum of 24" X 24" X 18" in size.
- Multi-level wire cages with smooth or wire flooring is appropriate.
- Cages made from nonporous products are ideal for cleaning and disinfection.
- Ferrets can be easily trained to use a litter box.
- Keep the cage clean, dry and ventilated.
- Ferrets enjoy small, dark places to hide and sleep. Appropriate places would include the inside of a t-shirt, towels, hammocks or tents.
- Ferrets are playful and need lots of toys for entertainment. Avoid soft rubber or foam toys as these are more likely to be ingested and cause intestinal blockage. PVC piping or cardboard tubes, toys made from cloth, metal, hard plastic or paper bags are safer toys for exercise and behavioral stimulation.
- Make sure the home is ferret-proof before allowing ferrets to roam free. All free roaming ferrets should be closely monitored and couches and chairs (especially recliners) should be inspected prior to use.

Feeding:

Ferrets are carnivorous (meat eating) and require a diet high in animal protein and fat and low in carbohydrates and fiber. Ferrets will imprint on foods during the first 60-90 days of life and can become very picky eaters if they only imprint on one type of food. Therefore, it is very important to feed ferrets a wide variety of foods during the first 6 months of life to prevent food imprinting and becoming a finicky eater.

- Adult non-breeding ferrets require a diet containing 30-40% protein and 18-30% fat.
- Recommend a high quality kitten food or commercially prepared ferret food.
- Commercial dog and adult cat foods should be avoided
- Diets with primarily plant proteins should be avoided as these can cause urinary calculi (stones).
- Some good-quality commercial ferret diets are listed below.
 - o Marshall Farms Premium Ferret Diet
 - o Totally Ferret
 - o Mazuri Ferret Diet
 - o Zupreem Premium Ferret Diet
 - o Wysong
- Treats can be pieces of meat or meat baby food.
- Water should always be available through either a bowl or a sipper bottle

Handling:

Ferrets are lively active creatures that don't stay still for long. Well handled and socialized ferrets are okay with being handled and can be picked up by placing a hand under their chest and either supporting the back legs with the other hand or allowing them to hang free. Ferrets that are not as socialized may not appreciate being picked up.

Routine Care:

Ferrets do not require much grooming, some ferrets like being bathed and playing in water, use a shampoo designed for ferrets to prevent irritation to their skin. Toenails should be trimmed once a month and are similar to trimming a cat or dogs toenails. Non-breeding female ferrets should be spayed to prevent bone marrow dysfunction brought about by high levels of estrogen. Fortunately, most ferrets are spayed prior to being sold. Your ferret should be seen by a veterinarian yearly for a wellness exam. Ferrets should be vaccinated annually against canine distemper virus and rabies.