

Before Adopting a Ferret

By Alicia Drakiotes

Ferrets can make wonderful pets. They are very social creatures, they can be very affectionate, and they bond closely with their caretakers. However, before you decide to get a ferret, there are some things you should know:



Ferrets are high-maintenance pets. Ferrets require a particular diet and constant cage cleaning. They require patience and ongoing training during their lifetimes. Ferrets also require veterinary care from a skilled, “ferret friendly” veterinarian. Veterinary training for ferrets barely scrapes the surface in vet school. Outside class time is required for a good ferret vet when diagnosing and caring for the medical needs of these special pets.

Ferrets cannot be kept in a cage long-term. While cages provide security for unattended ferrets, their psychological and physical need for exercise requires that they be allowed out of their cages several times a day for at least two hours of play time. If you are away from home a lot, you need to provide pet sitting for your ferret. Home sitting, where they are allowed out of their cages for daily exercise, is preferable to being boarded in a small cage for extended periods of time.

Ferrets are very susceptible to stress. They can become physically ill with ulcers and other illnesses if their needs are not understood or tended to. Changes in their daily routine or living environment can also cause stress symptoms and illness.

Ferrets are not meticulously clean. They do strive to use the litter box while in their cages, but make sure you keep the litter box clean, since they tend to use other corners of the cage if it's dirty. When out of the cage, however, few ferrets can be trained to travel back through the house to heed a “potty call.” Ferrets generally have the attention span of a two-year-old toddler – they get busy playing until, oops, there is an accident! For this reason, supervise your ferret when he's out of the cage so you can pick up on the posturing behavior that indicates you need to get him into a litter box.

A ferret may not be the perfect pet for you if:

- You have young children in the home under 8 years of age. Children need to be old enough to appreciate the animal and must be supervised at all times when in the company of a ferret. Being held tightly by a youngster can cause multiple organ and spinal injuries. The most common injury to ferrets is being crushed, often from being stepped on or being squeezed within the mechanisms of reclining furniture.
- You are a person who is required to travel extensively in your occupation.
- You have time or cost concerns for upkeep, training and maintenance.
- You cannot have on hand an emergency veterinarian fund of \$500 per ferret per year. (The average cost of an emergency visit to the vet is \$500.)

In conclusion, please carefully consider what you are willing to exert in terms of effort and costs before you welcome a ferret into your home.

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