

Setting Up Your Ferret's Cage

By Alicia Drakiotes

Once you have chosen a cage for your ferret, it's time to equip the cage with all the necessary amenities to keep your ferret happy and comfortable.

Remember to thoroughly clean the cage before you set it up for your new pet. Don't use Lysol or similar chemical solutions in cleaning, since residue from these compounds can be lethal. Use a warm soapy solution, and rinse well. After the cage is dry, you can set up the bathroom and the kitchen areas.



Bathroom

Litter box. It's best to place the litter box on the opposite side and diagonally away from the food bowl to help ensure that litter is not tossed into the food bowl. New ferrets may respond well to paper training. Lay clean newspaper in the bottom of the litter box, and change it twice a day to keep the area clean. Newspaper litter is a good choice for ferrets, and it can be composted when soiled.

Don't use cedar shavings or pine shavings for litter. Cedar shavings are toxic to ferrets if they are ingested. Besides, shavings aren't necessary for ferrets and they are messy. You want to teach your ferret good housekeeping habits, not encourage a messy home!

Kitchen

Food bowl. There are many choices available in food bowls. Some clamp onto the cage wire; others are put on the floor of the cage. Ferrets get curious when bored, so they may amuse themselves by tipping over or moving the food bowl around the cage. For this reason, the clip-on food bowl is a good idea. Or, you could use a heavy stoneware bowl, which tends to be harder for ferrets to push around. Another reason to use ceramic dishes is that plastic dishes can abrade over time, and can also absorb stains and odors. There are special dishes and feeders for ferrets who like to dig for choice pieces of kibble, which often causes a mess and wastes food.

Water bottles. While many ferrets prefer drinking from bowls, the water in bowls is exposed to the open air, which can lead to contamination, especially in warmer climates and the summer months. Over time, dust particles settle and micro-organisms thrive in water. Would you want to drink the water someone poured for you yesterday? If you do use a bowl, you should change the water twice a day.

A better system is water bottles, which keep water fresh for a longer period of time. Water bottles operate on a gravity feed, so the water is not exposed to contamination from open air. Nevertheless, you will still want to refresh the water bottle once a day. Clean it with either vinegar and water or baking soda, making sure you rinse it very thoroughly before refilling it. Please don't use bleach to clean water bottles. If any residue is left in the bottles, it can cause nasty irritation to the intestinal tract and gut of your ferret, and may even cause death. Several types of water bottles are available – find one that has a wide mouth, which will allow you to easily clean out any algae or sediment before you refill the bottle.

Bedroom

Once the kitchen and bathroom areas are set up, you can incorporate a lounge or bedroom area. For bedding material, use cotton or fleece instead of some type of shredded material (which, again, can be messy). Ferrets do just fine cuddling up in a warm fleecy sack or an old sweatshirt. You should wash the bedding every week to help keep your ferret clean, since too many baths can be bad for your ferret's skin and coat.

Hammocks that hang within the cage are a wonderful use of space. Not only do they provide a new level to the surroundings, but they also provide a bed. For comfort, a breathable fabric is recommended. Get a hammock that will stay securely fastened when hung. Metal clips work well, but do not purchase hammocks that are suspended by metal chains, since your ferret can catch a toenail or break a tooth in the chain. Also, putting a washable cage mat or rug on the floor will help prevent any sprains or pulled muscles from falling or climbing accidents.

Once the cage is set up, you will delight in watching your ferret enjoy his luxurious new surroundings. But, don't forget that as happy as he might be in his cage, he also needs three or four hours of playtime outside his cage every day.

Alicia Drakiotes is the president and education coordinator of Ferret Wise Rescue and Rehabilitation Shelter (www.ferretwise.org) located in Marlborough, New Hampshire.

See also: [Selecting a Cage for Your Ferret](#)