

# What to Expect from Your Ferret

By Alicia Drakiotes

Keeping a ferret as a pet is different from having a cat or a dog. You can leave most cats or dogs unsupervised in your home, but this is not true with ferrets. They can get into more trouble than you can imagine if left unsupervised. But, they aren't happy stuck in a cage all the time, so if you decide to get a ferret, make sure you can spend at least a few hours every day with him, monitoring his activities outside the cage.



## What should I expect from a baby ferret?

If you get a very young ferret, you are probably committing to a relationship of eight years or more with your new pet, provided he or she stays healthy. Baby ferrets sleep a lot, but when they are awake, they are dynamos of energy – hustling and bustling about, eager to learn about their environment. One month of a ferret's life is pretty much comparable to a year of life for humans, so it's no wonder they are so darned busy! If you decide to bring a young ferret home, you will need to have around four hours each day, broken into several shifts, to interact and play with your new pet.

## Do ferrets like to cuddle?

Do not expect a ferret to want to curl up and snuggle with you until at least age three. There are some exceptions, of course, but that seems to be the age at which males start to mellow and enjoy being held. Females tend to be even older before they seek out human laps. As they get older, both sexes seek out their humans more often.

## What is it like to keep a ferret?

Ferrets are high-maintenance pets. They require a high-quality kibble food and fresh water several times each day. Their food bowls should be kept clean and well stocked for free feeding. A constant supply of food is especially important for growing and developing young ferrets. Ferrets also need a housing unit or cage comfortably equipped with bedding and toys for those periods of time when they are unsupervised. As mentioned above, they need a substantial amount of time outside their cages each day to play and explore.

Ferrets are meticulous animals, so their habitat or cage areas should be inspected on a daily basis and kept clean. Scoop that litter box morning and night to instill clean litter box habits in your pet. Rotate hammocks and sleep sacks or blankets often.

Veterinary care can be high if your ferret becomes ill or has an emergency. You should find a veterinarian who has special training in caring for ferrets. You can expect to pay two or three times more for ferret health care than for cat health care. Yearly exams and vaccinations for canine distemper and rabies are considered minimum, required care for these pets. Older ferrets (age four and up) should have health checks every six months to identify and control the onset of senior health problems.

Finally, you'll need to monitor the temperature of your ferret's environment. Ideal temperatures for ferrets range from 58 to 78 degrees. Ferrets can be susceptible to heatstroke at higher temperatures, so they should not be kept in places where the temperature exceeds 80 degrees.

### **How much trouble can ferrets get into?**

Ferrets are unbelievably intelligent and mischievous creatures. They can problem solve and accomplish feats you would not expect. For instance, a young ferret sees there is something on the shelf overhead, and she's curious about it. She finds a way to get onto the shelf, then nudges the contents – books, videotapes, collectibles, whatever – and eventually they fall off. The ruckus caused by this activity is so entertaining that she's determined to find other ways to wreak havoc on the humans' living space! When there is more than one ferret, they will work together to move larger objects or boost each other up to higher spots.

Your house plants are also at risk from ferrets. Ferrets are burrowing animals, so unpotting your plants is a great recreational sport for them. Their curiosity can also cause them harm. If left unsupervised, they might crawl into tight spaces that they can't get out of or get entangled in electrical wires. So, as you can see, supervision is key to keeping your ferret safe.

You should not confuse intelligence and problem-solving capabilities with reasoning ability. For example, if you allow your ferrets to play roughly with you, they will play that way with everyone. This can sometimes cause great consternation and upset in homes with very young children. So, you'll need to train your ferret to play gently with all humans.

### **Are all ferrets high-energy?**

All ferrets have high energy in their youth, and some retain this vigor until age five or six. Ferrets live in the moment: When they are not sleeping (which they do about 14 hours a day), their attitude is "Full speed ahead!" When ferrets are fed the proper diet and have ample opportunity to play, they will be vibrant and energetic. A ferret who is lethargic may have a health problem, and you should schedule an appointment with your veterinarian.

### **Why do ferrets make good pets?**

Though ferrets require a lot of care, they make wonderful pets. They combine the best of cats' and dogs' personality traits. They are as playful as kittens their entire lives, and they bond well with their humans. Their compact size makes them ideal for folks who live in apartments, where a larger animal might not be acceptable. (Always check when renting or leasing a place to make sure ferrets are allowed.) Daily life with ferrets is not for the faint of heart, but for those of us who love ferrets, the joy they bring us makes it all worthwhile.

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