



ANIMALS ARE
NOT OURS

to experiment on, eat, wear,
use for entertainment, or abuse
in any other way.

Facts on Ferrets

The ferret is a domesticated animal whose ancestors are believed to be native European polecats (*Mustela putorius*). Inquisitive, smart, and playful, ferrets have become popular companion animals, but they require a special diet and care.¹ Often, after the novelty of an impulse purchase wears off, ferrets are abandoned to certain death in the wild or to severely crowded animal shelters.

Adoption

If you're willing to open your home to a ferret, first make sure that you don't live in an area that prohibits it: California and Hawaii both ban keeping ferrets as companion animals, and some local communities, such as New York City, also either restrict or ban the keeping of ferrets in homes.^{2,3} Ask your local wildlife department, fish and game department, humane society, or veterinarian about the legality of keeping a ferret where you live and whether you will need to obtain a permit if you adopt one.

Please adopt from an animal shelter or rescue group. Search the Internet or ask your local humane society for a group near you. Never buy ferrets—or any other animal—from pet stores, which sell ferrets raised in disease-ridden, factory farm–like conditions. Please read our factsheet “Pet Shops: No Bargain for Animals (<https://www.peta.org/issues/companion-animals-5/pet-shops-bargain-animals/>)” for more information.

Ferrets can usually coexist peacefully and even amicably with cats and dogs. However ferrets should not be allowed free access to smaller pets such as birds or rodents. Supervision is a must, for the safety of the ferret and other animals. If you have young children, be sure to monitor their interaction with the ferret as closely as you would with a dog. Ferrets can and will bite in self-defense.

Ferret-Proofing

Maintaining a ferret-proof home is essential for the animal's safety and well-being.

Exercise caution, especially with the following tempting but potentially dangerous items in your home:

- Cabinets and drawers (Ferrets can open them.)
- Heaters (Ferrets might knock them over.)
- Furnace ducts (Ferrets can get inside them.)
- Recliners and sofa beds (Ferrets have been crushed in their levers and springs.)
- Anything spongy or springy, such as kitchen sponges, erasers, shoe insoles, foam earplugs, Silly Putty, foam rubber (including inside a cushion or mattress), Styrofoam, insulation, and rubber door stoppers (Swallowing pieces of these items will often result in an intestinal blockage.)

- Filled bathtubs, toilets, and water and paint buckets (Ferrets can drown in them.)
- Plastic bags (Ferrets can suffocate in them.)
- Holes behind refrigerators and other appliances with exposed wires, fans, and insulation (Ferrets love to chew on wires and eat insulation.)
- Dishwashers, refrigerators, washers and dryers (Ferrets can get trapped inside them.)
- Houseplants (Some are poisonous.)
- Box springs (Ferrets love to rip the cloth covering the underside of box springs and climb inside, where they may become trapped or crushed. To prevent this, attach wire mesh or a thin piece of wood to the underside of the box springs.)

Housing

Even if you plan to give your ferret the run of the house, it's best when you're not home to enclose him or her in a ferret-proof room or in a roomy, metal mesh cage—one that is at the very least 24 inches long, 24 inches deep, and 18 inches high, although larger enclosures are certainly preferable. If you have two or more ferrets living together, you will need a much larger cage and preferably multiple levels and sleeping areas. Whatever you decide, your ferret will appreciate ramps, tunnels made from dryer hose or black drainage pipe, a “bedroom” made out of an upside-down box with a cut-out doorway, and hammocks made from old jeans or shirts. Line the cage bottom with linoleum squares or cloth cage pads, and use old T-shirts and sweatshirts for bedding—never use cedar or pine shavings, which are toxic to small animals.

Don't let the temperature in their living quarters climb too high, and monitor the humidity. In the winter, when the heat is on and humidity can get too low, ferrets' skin can get dry and itchy, so use a humidifier. And if the humidity is allowed to get too high during the hot summer and the temperature rises above 85 degrees, ferrets can succumb to heatstroke. Keep in mind that ferrets' wild cousins live in underground burrows where the temperature is 55 degrees with 50 percent humidity.⁴

Litter Training

Ferrets can easily be trained to use a litterbox. They tend to choose their own toilet area in a corner, so start by putting a litterbox with paper pulp litter (NEVER clay or clumping litter) in that area. Gradually move the litterbox closer and closer to the area that you would like it to be in. Ferrets do love corners for their bathroom areas, so if you can put the litterbox in a corner, you will likely have greater success.

Diet

Ferrets are predators and strict carnivores and therefore require highly digestible, meat-based proteins. They cannot survive on vegetarian diets or most dog foods, as there is too much vegetable matter in those products, and too much carbohydrate in the diet can create health problems in ferrets.

If feeding dry kibble, be sure that the food contains at least 30 to 40 percent crude protein (of animal origin) and 15 to 20 percent fat. A thorough reading of the label is crucial—the first three ingredients should be meat-based.⁵ Avoid processed treats marketed for ferrets, as they tend to be carbohydrate- or grain-based. Supplements should not be necessary if the optimal diet is being fed. For more details, please read “The Ferret Diet (<https://beta.vin.com/doc/?id=4951366&pid=17256>)” by Dr. Susan Brown.

Keeping Your Ferret Healthy

Ferrets require routine veterinary visits, just as dogs and cats do. If you live in an area that requires rabies shots for dogs and cats, then your ferret will need one too. Ferrets can also get heartworms, fleas, and canine distemper. Please consult your veterinarian about preventive measures. Do NOT use dips, sprays, or collars to combat fleas.

At 4 months, ferrets can be spayed or neutered. This procedure is necessary not only to prevent reproduction but also for the well-being of your animal companion. Neutering greatly decreases a male's body and urine odor once he matures and prevents him from urine-marking his territory in your home. Spaying also reduces a female's scent and prevents her from dying of severe anemia, which can develop in intact females who go into heat but do not breed.⁶

Ferrets kept mostly indoors will likely need nail-trimming every six to eight weeks. A veterinarian can show you the proper way to trim nails.

Exercise is important! You can simulate your ferret's need for burrowing and hunting with toys like large cardboard mailing tubes, dryer hoses, paper bags, PVC pipe, ping-pong balls, golf balls, and small cloth baby toys or feather cat toys that hang from springs. Please give your ferret time to play outside his or her cage for at least several hours every day.

Resources

American Ferret Association (<http://www.ferret.org/index.html>)

Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians (<http://www.aemv.org/>)

References

¹ J. Duda, "*Mustela putorius furo*," Animal Diversity Web

(http://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Mustela_putorius_furo/), accessed 10 May 2018.

² Alex Distefano, "Culver City Woman Leads Fight to Make Ferrets Legal Pets in California," *LA Weekly* (<http://www.laweekly.com/news/artists-out-chinese-capital-in-for-proposed-200-million-arts-district-center-9371354>), 2 April 2018.

³ Aaron Short, "NYC Fails to Overturn Ferret Ban," *NY Post* (<https://nypost.com/2015/03/10/nyc-fails-to-overturn-ferret-ban/>), 10 March 2015.

⁴ Susan Brown, D.V.M., "Ferret Grooming," (<https://www.vin.com/doc/?id=4951543&pid=17256>) Small Mammal Health Series, 5 December 2011.

⁵ Susan Brown, D.V.M., "The Ferret Diet," (<https://beta.vin.com/doc/?id=4951366&pid=17256>) Small Mammal Health Series, 14 March 2001.

⁶ Natalie Antinoff, DVM, DABVP, "Anemia in ferrets: Clinical case challenges (Proceedings)" (<http://veterinarycalendar.dvm360.com/anemia-ferrets-clinical-case-challenges-proceedings>) CVC in Kansas City Proceedings, 1 August 2009.

URGENT ALERTS

(<https://support.peta.org/page/11767/action/1>)

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(<https://www.peta.org/action/action-alerts/brevard-productions-animal-giveaways-florida/>)

(<https://www.peta.org/action/action-alerts/open-admission-sheltering-policies-long-beach/>)

Speak Out Against Animal Giveaways in Florida!
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(<https://www.peta.org/action/action-alerts/gratiot-county-animal-shelter/>)

Groundbreaking Exposé Reveals Pain, Desolation, Abuse, and Systemic Neglect at Former Iditarod Champions' Kennels
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(<https://www.peta.org/action/action-alerts/gratiot-county-animal-shelter/>)

(<https://www.peta.org/about-peta/milestones/>)



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[Turkeys: Torture on the Holiday Table](https://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/animals-used-food-factsheets/turkeys-factory-farmed-torture-holiday-table/) (<https://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/animals-used-food-factsheets/turkeys-factory-farmed-torture-holiday-table/>)