

Gerbils also appreciate a nesting box. Tear unscented white tissue into narrow strips to provide your gerbils with safe, inexpensive nesting material. Gerbils can become entangled in commercial nesting material, injuring themselves. Some gerbils enjoy an exercise wheel. Many gerbils do well on metal wheels with rungs, but you should monitor your pet carefully to make sure she is not injuring her feet.

Keep your gerbil's habitat clean by removing soiled litter regularly. Wash food dishes, water bottles and the cage bottom once a week. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding clean bedding and returning your pet to his cage.

DIET

A good commercial gerbil food will provide your gerbil with a balanced diet. Pellets and seed mixes are both available. You can supplement the feed with occasional treats such as puffed wheat, dried kidney beans, apples, broccoli and carrot. Young gerbils can benefit from the extra protein an occasional cricket or mealworm provides. Just place the food in the centre of the cage and allow the gerbils to forage. If you provide a food dish, the gerbils will probably bury it with their bedding, but this is not a problem. Make sure the gerbils have eaten everything before replenishing their food. Otherwise, your gerbils may pick out their favourite high-fat foods, leaving the healthier alternatives behind. Fresh water should be available at all times.



HEALTH

With good care and attention, your gerbil may never be ill. However, find a veterinarian specializing in exotic animals and experienced in treating gerbils before you have an emergency. A gerbil's health can deteriorate quickly. If your gerbil is not eating or drinking, or has diarrhea, see a veterinarian immediately. If your gerbil's nose is red, or appears to be bleeding, an allergy to the bedding is a likely cause. Try another safe alternative.

Gerbils clean themselves by rolling in dust, so you will need to provide a dust bath. Fill a large ceramic bowl with chinchilla dust and place it in your gerbil's cage. Remove the dust bath once your gerbil has finished. Repeat this two to three times a week.

FERTILITY

Gerbils become sexually mature at five weeks. Determine each pet's sex, and keep males and females separate at all times to prevent unwanted babies. Because it is difficult to find enough appropriate homes for them, breeding gerbils is strongly discouraged.

MORE INFORMATION

The American Gerbil Society: www.agsgerbils.org

*Gerbils are friendly and inquisitive,
and will thrive in a quiet, dimly lit space
in your home.*

A QUICK GUIDE TO GERBILS



Curious, friendly and intelligent, gerbils can be happy and healthy in almost any home. Once tamed, they make ideal companions for children or busy apartment dwellers. Gerbils are highly social animals and are happiest sharing their habitat with another gerbil. Their average life span is between one and three years.

Before adopting a pet gerbil, consider the following:

- Gerbils need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat.
- Gerbils need daily exercise and play.
- All household members should understand how to hold and play with a gerbil, and they should all be as eager as you to welcome a gerbil into the family.
- A pet gerbil will probably require taming.

SETTING UP HOUSE

Essential items

- Spacious cage with solid, deep bottom
- Nesting box
- Shavings
- Large ceramic bowl and chinchilla dust
- Water bottle
- Pre-mixed gerbil seed or pellets
- Gnawing material
- Ceramic or metal food dish
- Exercise wheel
- Cardboard tubes



GENERAL CARE

Gerbils enjoy time outside their cage, but should not be allowed to roam unsupervised. They may look chubby, but they can quickly squeeze through tiny spaces and become hidden or hurt. Your gerbil can use a wheel or a plastic ball to run around in for exercise, but will still require supervision.

ONE OR TWO?

No matter how attentive you are, a pet gerbil will be much happier with another gerbil companion. A fellow gerbil can sleep with, eat with and groom your gerbil. If possible, keep a pair of the same sex. Two siblings, or gerbils that have been kept together since about six to eight weeks of age, should bond without effort.

HANDLING

Most gerbils need to become accustomed to handling, a process that can take up to two weeks. Children should not handle a gerbil until taming is complete. Give your gerbils a day or two to settle into their new home, then gradually accustom them to your presence. Begin with presenting your hand for sniffing, progressing to hand feeding and gentle scratching on the back of the head. Don't rush things — let your gerbil set the pace.

To pick up a gerbil, calmly coax your pet into a corner and gently lift with both hands. Some gerbils like to jump, so form a little cave with your hands and keep them inside. A tame gerbil may like to explore your lap or perch on your shoulder, but stay alert for jumping. Never pick up a gerbil by the tail, even at the base.



HOUSING

Place your gerbils' home in a quiet space, away from direct heat and sunlight. A ten-gallon aquarium with a secure, chew-proof, open-air cover is an ideal choice for two gerbils. Plastic cages full of tunnels look fun, but gerbils can easily chew themselves free. A wire cage must have bars no more than one centimetre apart. Gerbils love to dig, so fill the cage with two to three inches of bedding. Aspen or pine shavings, recycled paper or corncob bedding are all good choices. Avoid sawdust and cedar chips, which contain harmful oils.

Your gerbil will need constant access to fresh water. Bottles are preferable to bowls, as your gerbils are likely to kick bedding into a bowl. If you're using an aquarium, you will need to purchase a special bottle holder. A food dish isn't necessary, but if you prefer using a container, select a non-plastic dish. Your gerbils will also need objects to gnaw on. Cardboard and untreated wood pieces from the pet store are all good choices. Gerbils love old toilet paper rolls, running in and out of the tubes before gnawing them to shreds.



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