



A Compassionate Commitment to Quality Pet Care!

RAT CARE

Congratulations on your new pet rat! Below you will find plenty of information to get you and your rats started on a happy life together.

RAT PACKS

First and foremost, it is important to note that rats are extremely social animals, and they thrive in a household with multiple rat companions. Rats do best in same-sex pairs, or odd-sex pairs with both rats being either spayed or neutered to limit conflict. Male rats will likely need to be neutered prior to living together peacefully, but females are extremely easy to home together.

MALES VERSUS FEMALES

Male and female rats generally have extremely different personalities. While females generally cohabitate much easier than males, they tend to be far more active and curious. Males, however, tend to be much calmer in adulthood and are even known to prefer lounging around in their owner's laps, but they do not usually do as well when housed with other un-neutered males.

HOUSING/CAGES

Rats need an escape-proof home that is easy to clean. They love to have a lot of space to explore, so multi-level open air wire cages are best. There are many cages made for ferrets that would suit rats extremely well, but it is important to make sure that the rats cannot fit their heads through the cage bars. It is recommended to avoid rat cages with plastic bottoms, as rats are notorious for chewing their way through and escaping into the home. Frequent cleaning of the cage is critical in keeping pet rats healthy, as the buildup of ammonia from waste contributes to stress and illness. Specifically, the bacteria *Mycoplasma pulmonis* multiply faster in higher ammonia levels, and cause respiratory illnesses in rats. Frequency of cleaning will depend on the size of the cage and the number of rats, so use your nose as a gauge: if the odor of the litter smells like anything other than how it smelled straight out of the bag, it is time to clean.

FOOD BOWLS/WATER BOTTLES

Rats are extremely dexterous, meaning that, like humans, their front legs are extremely multi-purpose. They walk, climb, hold their food, and dig with their front legs. Water bottles are recommended over water bowls for rats, as the use of their front legs makes them more likely to contaminate a standing water bowl with cage bedding, or whatever they may have tracked their paws through. Change water and test the bottles daily for blockages or leakages. Make sure food bowls are heavy enough to not easily tip over. Stoneware bowls are highly recommended, as they are impossible for rats to chew up.

BEDDING

Many types of bedding exist, but paper based bedding such as Care Fresh is preferred to wood or corncob based bedding to decrease skin and respiratory diseases that may be associated with bedding. Aspen bedding is also considered safe for rats, but it is not as easy for them to burrow and cuddle in. If you are interested in litter training your rats, you may use the same bedding in their litter pans, or another product such as Yesterday's News.

DIET

Provide a high quality pellet diet designed for rats daily. There are many options available, but make sure the pellet food all looks the same (i.e. not a mix of pellets and seeds/nuts/colored bits) because when given the chance, rats will choose the unhealthier, fatty foods rather than the healthy portions. Highly recommended pellet food brands for rats include Oxbow and Harlan Teklad Lab Diets. Supplement their pellets daily with a small amount fresh veggies and fruit, along with the occasional seed as a treat. A diet that is high in seeds is high in fat and will lead to obesity.

ENRICHMENT

Environmental enrichment is a necessity for any captive animal – these items will stimulate their brain, keep them exercised, prevent boredom and depression, and prevent obesity. Provide things in their cage such as materials to shred, treats wrapped in paper or hidden in toys, hide boxes, and hammocks. Introducing these items into your rat's environment can help to eliminate destructive behaviors such as chewing on their cages, litter pans, and other plastic items. Allowing for time outside the cage and providing toys, shreddable materials, and hidden treats can help with the bonding experience as well.

Rats are extremely inquisitive and intelligent little animals, and they are remarkably easy to train with the right incentive. There are many resources to review regarding Clicker Training your pet rats.