



## GERBIL CARE

So you want a gerbil? Try two or more! Gerbils should be kept in same sex pairs or groups as they are very social creatures! Gerbils are good hardy pets, they don't get sick often, they are social, and they hardly smell! But of course, as any good pet owner does, you want to make sure all of the information you get is correct. This packet is the right place for you.

### **Bedding**

No matter what all the websites say, no matter what the people at the pet store say, no matter how good it smells, cedar, pine, or any softwood beddings are big no-nos. Have a look at this article: [The Toxicity of Pine and Cedar Shavings](#). While this linked page may be mainly about rats, this information applies to ALL small mammals. So I bet you're thinking, well what do I do now? Fortunately there are many options.

A wood that is a good alternative shaving to Cedar and Pine is **Aspen**, a safe hard wood that is less dusty. If wood shavings aren't for you, many people opt to use **Carefresh** brand bedding, which is good in odor control, is soft, and can be burrowed in easily. Yesterday's News is a cat litter that also works nicely for most small animals, but gerbils need to be able to burrow in the bedding you give them and a more dense litter would not provide them with that. It is recommended that you give gerbils at the very least 6 inches of bedding however, the deeper the better! Gerbils feel the safest when they're able to create intricate burrows in their enclosure.

### **Cages**

Cages are a lot of fun, but those plastic tube ones that are colorful and great-looking are not appropriate for your gerbils. Gerbils are very heavy chewers and will easily destroy anything plastic. Plastic is also not safe for them to ingest so it's best to avoid it all together. For a pair of gerbils a 20 gallon tank is the minimum size and the best option. Topping your tank with a wire or mesh topper will also provide good ventilation while making more room for toys and items. Whenever you clean the cage it is nice to switch it to a different set up to give your gerbils a fresh perspective. Fun accessories include a corner wooden house, a bowl of chinchilla bath sand, a wheel in the corner, or wooden toys hanging from the wire mesh top. A glass water bottle or a water bowl are the best options. Make sure to clean and refill them each day with fresh water.

## Toys

Most toys you see for small animals are not good for gerbils. In fact anything you see that is soft and fluffy or made of plastic marketed at gerbils would be better discarded. Gerbils are chewers; in fact they need to chew hard materials to keep their teeth from overgrowing. Toilet paper cardboard rolls are perfect for them; they go through them and have a ball, and then they chew them apart. You can also give them wooden chew sticks made for small animals.

Every gerbil should have a wheel--most importantly, a wheel that is safe for rodents. Wire rung hamster wheels are not safe. Gerbils can get their tails and legs stuck in them. You can fix these wheels by taping the wheel so legs can't get caught, or covering it in cardboard. It is preferable to buy a safe wheel as well as one that is not made of plastic. Some alternative options to the typical plastic wheel are metal and wooden wheels. Even with metal wheels you want to make sure they have a solid flooring to prevent bumblefoot or other injuries that could come with a mesh or wire rung wheel. Wooden wheels are very hard to come by in the U.S and they will need to be replaced as your gerbils will destroy them, but they are the safest option. The only place to find them is online on sites such as Amazon. The wheel should also be at least 8 inches in size to prevent any curving of the spine. With larger gerbils it's even best to go up to 10 or 12 inches.

Gerbils do enjoy a good sand bath. Chinchilla sand is the best option for this, as regular dust can cause respiratory problems. You can provide a small bowl for your gerbils to bathe in--a bunny bowl works fine--just make sure it's ceramic or glass or they'll chew!

## Feeding

[Gerri Gerbil](#) is the best food for gerbils, but is often difficult to find. You can make your own mix to best meet your gerbil's nutritional needs by mixing [Suebees mix](#) and a gerbil seed mix. If your gerbil picks out their favorite foods you should use a pelleted food for small animals and try mixing it with a little bit of Suebee's for variety so they don't get bored with their food. [This](#) website has a lot of information about gerbil food, and gerbil care in general.

## Treats

Gerbils love treats, which makes them great for handling and general training. Gerbils adore sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, and safflower seeds. They just plain love nuts! You can feed them raisins, dried banana, raisins, and unsalted, unbuttered popcorn (which they go wild for) as treats. Unsalted pretzels are another hit. Believe it or not, gerbils actually eat fresh foods and it's good for them! Give it to them in small amounts though, or they may get diarrhea. Gerbils also enjoy hard boiled eggs (sparingly as it has a lot of protein), dandelion leaves (be careful about where you get these), slices of apple, and mealworms. Be careful, but experiment! Look through websites and see if your gerbils like certain foods! Have fun with it!

One recipe that many gerbils like requires sunflower seeds, molasses and flour: put the sunflower seeds and molasses together and have them stick together till it's a sunflower-seed ball, then if needed thicken up the molasses with a bit of flour. The gerbils love it, and you can give it to them as a rare treat on the holidays.

## Trust Training

So you got your gerbil and he or she is a bit skittish. That's completely normal and can be cured easily.

- One method requires you to place your hand in a light fist palm-down into their habitat and leave it there for them to explore. Don't make any sudden movements or attempt to lift the gerbil(s) up on the first go! Give them time to get to know your scent over 10-minute sessions until the gerbil is comfortable beginning to climb up your arm.
- Another method is the treats route. You can put sunflower seeds in your palm, and as the gerbils take the sunflower seeds in your hand you slowly start to handle them more, and more and they associate treats with you.

Using these methods earlier is better, and remember if you have a pair of gerbils they are easier to socialize. Gerbils are very social creatures and should be kept in same sex pairs anyway.

## Behavior

Gerbils have many funny quirks that are cute and fun to watch. Sometimes they are more than just quirks; to be sure, read this!

- Grooming: Grooming is a way to keep clean. Gerbils often groom each other. When gerbils groom it's a good sign!
- Thumping: Gerbils thump to warn others gerbils if their colony is in danger, or in sexual excitement. The gerbil will make a rhythmic thumping sound with their hind feet. Sometimes the other gerbils will join in. It's very amusing and fun to see all of the gerbils thumping! When young the gerbils often thump to impress members of the colony.
- Digging frantically in the corner: Gerbils often dig in the corner. This doesn't mean they want to get out. Most gerbils dig in the wild, and it's just their natural instinct. You may want to add a bit more bedding or make a digging box with some sand to help with these instinctive urges.
- Fighting: There are two different types of fighting. One is serious fighting, the other is just a way for gerbils to have fun. The gerbils will pounce and jump on each other, and chase each other around. In serious gerbil fighting the gerbil might lose weight, have bite marks on their head, butt, or tail, and most often will stay away from the other gerbil. To avoid serious fights use the ["split cage method"](#) to introduce new gerbils. Never keep more than two females or four males together or territorial disputes can erupt.
- Run-aways: When gerbils run away, it's a very scary thing. But they're a lot easier to catch than you think! First thing: DON'T PANIC. Now grab a toilet-paper tube, and put some sunflower seeds in it. The gerbil will most likely scuttle in and you can cover the ends. You can try the same with shoe-boxes. Keep your ears open as gerbils will thump. You'll soon find him if you follow these directions!

## **Colors**

Gerbils come in all sorts of colors. [The Gerbils Color Palette](#) is a great site for figuring out which colors your or other people's gerbils might be. Remember, the colors may be pretty, but gerbil personality is best of all! Don't get a gerbil because of its pretty colors, get it because of how social it is.

## **Getting your Pet**

Now that we've gone through everything, the last question is, "where do I get my gerbil?" It is best to find a gerbil from [Petfinder](#) or a rescue in your area to ensure that your pets are as well-socialized and healthy as possible. Avoid getting one from a pet store unless you are certain that it is a reliable pet store that takes care of its animals well.