



## MOUSE CARE GUIDE

While they may initially seem less interactive than other small animals, with proper care and love mice can be fun and social pets! Follow these tips to ensure that your new pets lead happy and healthy lives.

### **A. MOUSE BFFS**

Most mice do best with mouse friends. Females need the company of other females (one or more) or a neutered male. Neutered males do well with females, but not other male mice whether neutered or intact. Intact male mice need to live alone--they have a powerful instinct to fight and kill other male mice, even littermates. If intact males and females are kept together, you could end up with 4-30 new baby mice every 3 weeks!

### **B. FEEDING**

Mice are natural foragers. Some people like to feed them a bird seed mix, but others prefer a uniform lab block so they can't only eat their favorites. You can give them one or the other, or both.

Ironically, mixes labeled 'mouse food' are NOT suitable. They all are too high in crude protein which can result in a fat mouse and, in the worst case, allergies. Mice should have about 13% protein in their diet. Also bad is any food made by Kaytee. They use cheap ingredients and lots of preservatives. The best seed mix for mice is **Vita Prima Sunscription Parakeet Food** (available at Petco or online at Amazon, etc.). With any other mix, make sure you pick out the peanuts, striped sunflower seeds (black oil sunflower seeds are ok), and raisins. Peanuts and sunflower seeds are too high in fat; each one is like a candy bar for your mouse. Some people also pick out the corn.

Let the bowl get almost empty (but not totally empty) before you put more food in. This will result in a more balanced diet, as the mice won't be able to just pick out their favorite foods from the mix. Be careful not to mistake empty seed shells in the bowl (such as millet) for food.

For lab blocks, we recommend **Mazuri Rat & Mouse Diet** or **Supreme Science Selective Mouse Food** (available on Amazon but ships from the UK, so plan ahead.

<https://www.amazon.com/s?k=B00S5CMXZU>)

Give them a mousey 'salad' of fresh food, about 1/4 tablespoon (3/4 teaspoon) per mouse, **twice a week**. A good base 'salad' is

- cooked brown rice
- toasted wheat bread
- rolled oats (regular, not quick oats) or uncooked oatmeal; just a pinch for either
- veggies like spinach, carrots, broccoli, or cauliflower
- herbs (basil, parsley, etc.)
- cucumbers
- pasta (cooked or uncooked)
- romaine lettuce
- fruits like apple, carrots, bananas, cucumbers, or pears
- high quality dog kibble OR scrambled egg OR bits of plain-cooked chicken or turkey (no red meat) OR insects like mealworms or crickets (no more than three per day, per mouse and can be freeze-dried)

Fresh food needs to be slowly introduced with only one new item per week until you have all the ingredients you wish for your salad built up in order to avoid upset stomachs. For example, Week 1: give spinach. Week 2: Give spinach and rice. Week 3, Give spinach, rice and scrambled egg etc, until you build up a complete 'salad' of what they like.

Any fresh food must be removed after two hours or it can go bad. You can make a big batch of salad and freeze it to keep it fresh.

Other foods mice like include: plain Cheerios (max 7 per mouse per day), corn flakes, molasses (blackstrap), flax seeds, barley, split peas (uncooked), cooked soya beans, yellow millet (sold for birds), Timothy hay (bake or freeze it first to remove parasites), grapes/blueberries/cranberries (should be peeled first).

Foods to Avoid:

- raw almonds (contains cyanic acid, which evaporates in roasted almonds)
- Sunflower seeds (they are safe, but very fatty)
- peanuts (also safe but very fatty)
- peanut butter
- tomato
- onion or garlic
- spices
- celery (the string is a choking hazard)
- avocado seeds
- cheese and dairy products
- chocolate
- acidic fruit (oranges, lemons)
- raw meat (although live mealworms are ok)
- iceberg lettuce
- white millet (too fatty)
- fresh bread (stale bread has fewer enzymes)
- soda (mice do not have the ability to burp, so even a small amount of fizz can be harmful).

## C. HABITAT

### 1. Tanks vs. Cages

Mice are incredibly adept at escaping from cages. Even bars that seem close enough together to contain them can often have a random spacing which is slightly bigger, enough for them to get out. A rule of thumb is that if a pen can fit through an opening, then so can a mouse. For this reason, the safest habitat is an aquarium tank. A 10-gallon tank is fine for up to 3 mice but they'll be happier with more space like a 20-gallon long.

TIP: Petco has an unadvertised tank sale every year of \$1/gallon so you can get a big tank for fairly cheap. Just keep an eye out for signs in the store.

Make sure you get a metal screen top (reviews on Amazon favor the Zilla Fresh Air lid) and find a way to secure it. You can put something heavy on it to weigh it down or use locking clips that are sold separately (although some people say these don't always work).

TIP: Velcro works very well. For each corner of the tank, cut a 3-inch strip of sticky Velcro. Leave the plastic backing on the loop strip. Cut about ½" off the hook strip and stick that to the lid. Stick the rest of the hook strip to the tank right below the lid. Then use the loop strip with the backing still in place to secure the lid to the tank.

### 2. Toys

Mice love a cluttered cage with lots of things to climb on, hide in, etc. If you have more than 3 mice, make sure you get two food dishes and water bottles.

One way to suspend things in a tank is to use a plastic grid also known as light diffuser (you'll find it in the lighting section at Home Depot). It cuts very easily with snips or wire cutters, and can be sized to fit right in the lip of the tank. The screen cover will easily fit over it, and it gives you a way to hang 'furniture.'

Here's a video of how to create a hanging ceiling with egg crate:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbLxsdefiDo>

Hideouts: You should have one hiding place for every mouse. They love empty egg containers (the cardboard kind only, never styrofoam), toilet paper rolls, cardboard boxes (make sure any labels and packing tape is removed first).

One of the most fun aspects of having a mouse is you can make toys for them! It's called an MES (Mouse Entertainment Systems). You can use popsicle sticks (get them at any craft store) and non-toxic glue to make your own mousey furniture. You can also put strips of wet paper towel on top of something solid like an inverted bowl, and then remove the solid object when dry to make a little igloo. Your mouse will have fun tearing up the igloo for bedding. Mice need to chew constantly. Make sure your mouse home has wooden chew blocks or apple twigs (both sold in pet stores or online).

Here are some ideas:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCo9\\_aTUass](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCo9_aTUass)  
<https://www.petmousefanciers.com/t47-homemade-popsicle-stick-toys#80>  
<https://www.petmousefanciers.com/t46-totally-free-toy-ideas>  
<https://youtu.be/CiphcQvPJYw>

### **3. Litter**

Always freeze or bake your litter first to remove any parasites that may be lurking. Freezing must be done in a subzero freezer for 48 hours, while baking should be at 200 degrees for at least 2 hours. Litter should never be Pine or Cedar shavings, which have oils harmful to mice. Options for mouse-safe litter include: Aspen shavings, Fibercore Eco Bedding, shredded white paper with no ink, Timothy hay, Hemp, toilet paper, or soil (sterile with no chemicals!), or Coconut Coir (comes in a brick. To expand it, soak it in water and then dry it out, or spin it dry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSk0Kp0SxRw>).

TIP: The bricks sold for gardening are the same as the ones sold in pet stores, but cheaper. It's recommended that you get organic bricks such as Plantonix brand: (<https://www.amazon.com/s?k=B071YZ84F5>)

NOTE: Some of the paper bedding that comes compressed in a bag, such as Kaytee Clean and Cozy or Care Fresh, contain mites even after freezing; the cold isn't able to penetrate the compressed paper.

### **4. Wheels**

Mice need wheels with a 6.5" or 7" diameter so that they don't have to arch too much when they run. Many wheels on the market today are not safe for mice. If the wheel has an axle or windmill blades, your mouse could get its tail caught, or if one mouse climbs in while another is spinning, its head could get caught. Also avoid wheels that have metal bars for the running surface.

The safest wheels are ones that have an open drum design (like a cake pan) and are attached at the back, with no way for a mouse to get caught between moving parts. Petco sells an open drum wheel made of mesh which is totally tail-safe. Some reviewers complain that it is noisy, but others say removing the washer or applying vegetable oil solves the problem. Periodically examine the running surface carefully because if the metal breaks apart, it could damage little mousy feet.

The Comfort Wheel is also a safe open drum wheel. However, the solid plastic design means it can get dirty fast (mice will often pee and poop while they run). Silent Spinners are not safe because the running wheel is two different pieces of plastic (two different colors) that can separate, causing your mouse's feet to get caught in the track. Wheels with solid tracks are fine, but be warned that your mice will mash poop while they run. A wheel with a mesh track allows for poop to fall out.

Also good for mice are the flying saucer wheels (medium, 6.5 inches, not the small 5.0 inch).

## **D. HANDLING**

When picking up mice, try to gently scoop them instead of grabbing. Once you have a mouse in one hand, cup your other hand over it as soon as possible to prevent it from jumping. Never pick your mouse up by the tail unless it is an emergency. If you need to transfer your mouse to another holding area while you clean its home (Kritter Keepers are great for this), you can often wait for him to go into a tube and then pick up the entire tube. If you're gentle and don't spook him, you should be able to put the end of the tube into your holding area and your mouse will go right in.

Here are a few good YouTube videos about how to pick up mice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNICF1y26yE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjXGirnyy1c>

If you need to catch a loose mouse, remember that mice love to hide in things. Often you can catch an escaped mouse by putting an empty cereal box in front of it. It'll usually dart in to hide. Quickly pick the box up, close the end, and get your mouse back to its home.

If you can't be there to monitor when your mouse enters the box, instead purchase a Havahart humane mouse trap (available online or at Home Depot). Bait it with a little peanut butter and set it up overnight. Try to get your mouse back to its home as soon as possible once the trap has been tripped because mice need to drink often.

You may think that you'd like to introduce your mouse to other pets in the house as friends. However, rats and mice are natural enemies and shouldn't be allowed to play together. With other animals, keep in mind that mice move quickly and are often seen more as prey than other slower-moving animals. Even cats who are fine with pet rats may often go after pet mice. Mice can scare easily, so try not to stress them out by a forced meeting with another pet.

## **E. HEALTH**

A common problem with mice is a skin condition usually caused by too much protein in their diet. Restricting them to seeds and veggies for about 10 days will usually clear it up.

In general, mice have few health issues. The best place to research health issues before visiting your vet is a mouse forum. Vets in general may see mice patients seldomly, but the forums are filled with long-time mousey parents who are very experienced.

To find a vet, search for an 'exotic' vet and be sure to ask them first if they treat mice (not all do). We also have a list of exotic vets on our website:

<http://mainelyratrescue.org/rattieblog2/rat-friendly-vets/>

## **F. RESOURCES**

Mouse Forum: [www.petmousefanciers.com](http://www.petmousefanciers.com)

Forbidden Mouse City Facebook Group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/forbiddenmousecity/>

What to feed mice: <https://www.petmousefanciers.com/t15-mouse-diet>

Safe foods for mice: <https://www.petmousefanciers.com/t2-safe-foods>