



# GERBIL CARE

## BACKGROUND

**Length:** 4 inches, not including tail

**Lifespan:** 3-5 years

**Cost per year:** \$300

**Good with kids?:** Great for families with children 5 & up, but young caretakers should be supervised by an adult.

**Fun fact:** These desert dwellers don't urinate that much, so they produce less odor than other pet rodents.

## FOOD

- High quality gerbil mix, made up of pellets, grains, seeds and dried veggies, should be available to your pets at all times. You should also provide a high protein source like mealworms at least once a week. Fresh, clean water should be available to your gerbils 24/7. A water bottle with a drinking tube that attaches to the cage is the best way to go. You can also use a water bowl, being careful it doesn't spill and is always full.
- Offer small, bite-sized bits of fresh vegetables daily and fresh fruits every other day.
  - >> **Recommended:** peas, broccoli, carrots, apples, bananas
  - >> **Avoid:** chocolate, candy, junk food, onions, uncooked beans and anything that's old or spoiled
- Your gerbils may enjoy small bits of sugarless breakfast cereals and whole wheat bread as a treat.

## CAGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Gerbils are social, so it's a good idea to get at least two. If possible, try to get gerbils from the same litter. Don't keep males and females together, as they will breed. Falling outs are possible—keep a close eye on their interactions.
- Keep your gerbils in a wire cage or aquarium with at least 600 square inches of floor space. Try to get the biggest cage you can afford—your pets will appreciate the extra space. There also needs to be enough space for 10-12 inches of bedding on one side of the cage and a 12-inch wheel.
- Keep the cage indoors, away from drafts, direct sunlight and extreme temperatures. It should be kept in an environment maintained at 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Line the cage with at least 10-12 inches of bedding (see Supply Checklist for recommendations). Do not use cedar or pine chips, which contain oils that are dangerous to gerbils. Provide shredded paper towels or tissue paper so your pets can make nests.
- Your gerbils would like a house or cave for hiding when on the surface of the bedding. A smooth, clean stone or rock can help to keep nails filed down.

## BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

- Gerbils are friendly by nature and rarely bite, but you'll need to get your pets used to you—and used to being handled. Start by feeding them small treats. When they're comfortable with that, scoop them into your hand. **Never** pick up a gerbil by the tail, as this can cause injury.
- Once your gerbils are hand-tamed, allow them outside of their cage for a supervised period of time every day. A playpen or gerbil proofed area of a room is a good idea. Supervise them closely so they don't chew on inappropriate objects or escape. Gerbils don't have good eyesight, so take extra care that they don't fall or otherwise hurt themselves. And remove all electrical cords from the area, please!

## EXERCISE & TOYS

- Gerbils LOVE to play! Provide your pets with plenty of extra bedding, hay or shredded paper towels for digging, and PVC pipes and cardboard tubes from paper towel and toilet paper rolls for tunneling. Anything made of soft plastic—it will almost certainly be chewed to bits!
- NEVER use an exercise ball for any animal—they are dangerous and don't allow any ability to explore.
- Give your pets appropriate chew toys to help wear down their teeth, which grow continuously.
  - >> **Recommended:** unpainted, untreated wood or twig, hard dog biscuits, cardboard

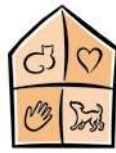
## DAILY CARE

- Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale/uneaten food daily. Clean and refill the water bottle every day.
- Spot clean cage once-twice a week by replacing dirty bedding. Full cage clean outs are not necessary more than once a month if you have enough bedding. It can be stressful to your gerbils when their hard-earned burrows and scent are taken away from them too often.

## SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Bring your gerbils to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly appointment if you think one of your pets is sick—seek help immediately. Common signs that something isn't right include sneezing, lethargy, diarrhea and difficulty breathing.
- Gerbils are susceptible to external parasites such as fleas and lice. If you think your pets are infested, consult a veterinarian.





# GERBIL SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- 40-gallon aquarium (minimum for 2 gerbils) or larger with wire lid or topper, or wire cage with at least 600 sq inches of floor space with room for deep bedding
- High quality gerbil seed mix with an additional protein source
- Bedding, such as Carefresh and aspen
- Care Fresh, aspen, and shredded paper towels for digging/nesting
- Small boxes, huts or flower pots for hiding in
- 12 inch solid surface wheel
- Cardboard tubes (recycle from paper towel and toilet paper rolls) or PVC tubes
- Attachable water bottle or water bowl
- Unpainted, untreated piece of wood or twig, hard dog biscuit or safe chew toy

