



# RAT CARE

## BACKGROUND

**Also known as:** Domestic rat (a descendant of the wild brown rat)

**Weight:** Males, 1 to 1 1/2 pounds; females, 1/2 to 1 pound

**Length:** 14-18 inches, including tail

**Lifespan:** 2 - 3 years

**Cost per year:** \$300

**Good with kids:** Great for families with children 8 & up, but young caretakers should be supervised by an adult.

**Fun Fact:** When rats are very content, they grind their teeth!

## FOOD

- High-quality rodent chow (called rat blocks) should be available to your pet at all times. You can find this at pet supply stores and feed stores—look for a brand with soymeal as the main ingredient.
- Fresh, clean water should be available 24/7. A water bottle with a drinking tube that attaches to the cage is the best way to go.
- Offer small, bite-sized bits of fresh fruits and veggies daily.
  - >> **Recommended:** peas, broccoli, carrots, apples, bananas
  - >> **Avoid:** chocolate, corn, candy, caffeinated beverages, cheese, sticky foods such as peanut butter and anything that's old or spoiled
- Rats LOVE people food, and you can give yours the occasional treat, such as cooked pasta or a bit of pizza crust. Limit treats or you'll have a fat rat!

## BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

- Rats are friendly and curious by nature, 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, pick them up one at a time, one hand supporting the bottom, the other over the back. When you get to know each other better, don't be surprised if your pets want to snuggle or sit on your lap or shoulder!
- Once your rats are hand-tamed, let them play outside the cage in a safe, secure area for an hour every day. Out-of-cage playtime is mandatory—and will keep your smart, active friends mentally stimulated and physically fit. Supervise at all times, as rats will chew on anything in their paths—including electrical wires.

## EXERCISE & TOYS

- A bored rat is an unhappy rat! Provide PVC tubes for your pets to run through, and ladders and tree branches for climbing. Parrot toys, including swings and ropes, are great for rats.
- Some rats love exercise wheels. Get one with a solid surface without wire rungs, so your pets' tails do not get caught while running. It should be 12-14" in diameter.
- Give your pets appropriate chew toys to help wear down their teeth, which grow continuously.
  - >> **Recommended:** unpainted, untreated wood, cardboard, Whimzees

## DAILY CARE

- Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale/uneaten food daily. Clean and refill the water bottle every day.
- Clean cage completely once a week by replacing dirty bedding and scrubbing down the rest of the cage with warm, soapy water.

## CAGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Rats are very social, and should be kept in pairs at a minimum. A pair of females is recommended for first-time caretakers. Males can do well together if introduced when young. Females are more accepting of new friends later in life.
- Keep in mind that older rats generally will not be as receptive to getting a new friend as younger rats will be.
- Introducing new rats takes time and separate cages so if you're thinking about taking on the task make sure you're ready to be patient with them.
- A neutered male can live with females, or a spayed female can live with males. Don't keep intact males and females together, as they will breed.
- Solid-bottom, powder-coated wire cages are recommended for rats. 2' x 2' x 2' is the minimum size for a pair of rats, but get the largest cage you can afford. You can also use a large, multi-level ferret cage or an aquarium with a screen cover for adequate ventilation.
- Rats are prone to colds and heatstroke, so keep the cage indoors, away from drafts, direct sunlight and extreme temperatures, in an environment maintained at 65 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit. A room where the family gathers in the early evening is ideal—your social pets will love it!
- Line the cage with bedding (see Supply Checklist for recommendations). Do not use cedar or pine bedding since they contain oils that are dangerous to rats. Provide shredded paper towels or napkins for your rats to make nests.
- Your pets will need a houses to hide in, and hammocks and perches to hang out on.

## SIGNS OF ILLNESS

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





# RAT SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- Large multi-level rat cage or multi-level ferret cage
- Recycled paper bedding (such as Carefresh brand or shredded newspaper)
- Medium sized boxes, huts or flower pots for hiding in
- Branches or ropes for climbing
- 12-14" solid surface wheel (optional, as not all rats enjoy this)
- 4" PVC tubes for tunneling
- Rodent chow (also called rat blocks)
- Attachable water bottle or water bowl
- Unpainted, untreated piece of wood, Whimzees, or safe chew toy
- Toys – including swings, ropes, hammocks and other toys made for rats/ferrets

