

----- Feeding

Rats are omnivores & eat just about anything. Lab Blocks or Animal Pellets are a complete rat nutrition. These are about 3/4 inch long hard extruded greenish feed pellets. Big males should get dog-bones because they are lower in fat, & old males tend to obesity. There are a number of brands of lab blocks out there. Some people have been known to use dry dog food when lab blocks cannot be found, but dog food tends to be too high in protein & fat and may cause skin problems. Small amounts of vegetables, fruit (fresh or dried), meal worms, crickets, high quality hamster diet, dried corn on the cob or low fat whole wheat bread are good as treats. Do not feed chocolate, potato chips or other obviously unhealthy junk foods. Avoid feeding too many nuts or other high protein items, not more than about %5 of the diet if possible due to the high fat content. These foods may help rats with specific problems: banana, garlic, prunes/plums, tea, eggplant, onion, raspberries, yellow mustard cranberries, prunes/plums, strawberries, clove, ginger, dates. Avoid: chocolate, licorice, raw beans, carbonated drinks (rats can't burp) raw sweet potato, bleu cheese -the mold is toxic to rats, raw red cabbage, raw brussel sprouts, raw artichokes, orange juice, green bananas, green potato skin, rhubarb. Good treats: Strawberries, Grapes, Watermelon, Apple, Carrots, Peanuts (In the shell is fun!)

Seek veterinary attention if your pet changes behavior or becomes inactive; this may indicate the pet has an illness.

As a pet owner, you are responsible for proper pet practices. Be prepared to take an ill pet to a Veterinarian & know which Veterinarian in your area can treat your pet.



check-list ✓

Your pet Rat requires...

- Aquarium or Cage of appropriate size & wire gauge
- Water bottle(best), dish or bowl
- Substrate or bedding material
- Cave/Den/Hiding spot
- Rock or branch (for climbing & scratching)
- Food dish for Fancy Rat appropriate pellets or block
- Food dish for fresh fruits & veg'



'Fancy' Rats



- weighing between .5kg and 1.2kg, & body measuring between 12 - 22 cm in length with similar length tail.
- Life Span: 3 - 4 years on average.

----- Temperament

The fancy rat is a domesticated brown rat. The name fancy rat derives from the idea of animal fancy or the phrase, "to fancy" & not their looks. Domesticated rats are physiologically & psychologically different from their wild relatives. They are comfortable around humans, have decreased reactions to light & sound, are less wary of new foods, & better tolerate overcrowding. When acquired from reliable sources, they pose no more of a health risk than other common pets. Fancy rats have their origins as the targets for sport in 18th & 19th century Europe. Specially bred as pets since then, fancy rats now come in a wide variety of colours & coat types & there exists several rat fancy groups worldwide. As in other pet species, a variety of colours, coat types, & other features that do not appear in the wild have either been developed, or have appeared spontaneously. Individual rats may be defined one or more ways; by its colour, coat, marking, & non-standard body type. Fancy rats are commonly sold as pets in stores & by breeders.

Rats are very sociable & ideally live in same sex pairs. In that way they provide company for each other, are less easily stressed & make for healthier pets. They need a friend to groom, play & sleep with. Two rats are no more difficult to take care of than one & are infinitely more entertaining to watch at play. You can house more than two together if you have a roomy cage. Keep in mind that it is so much more beneficial for them when they have someone of their kind to be with. In the event that you have only a single, then the animal will require regular interaction with you or become withdrawn. Rats are highly intelligent & very trainable. They are known for their problem solving abilities & engage their keepers with complex games & interests. Monitor your rat closely if the pet is out of it's cage. They are naturally going to investigate everything & everywhere - including unlikely or incredibly tight spots!

----- Housing



Fancy Rats are safe, hardy & a good pet choice. They are smart & active all day.

Rats do not require a huge cage, but the larger the cage, the less cleaning, & more exercise & entertainment for the pet. One rat will need about 2-3 cbft (15 gallon tank) with an added 1 cbft for any additional rat (they are very social & live in groups). Keep in mind that the cage should provide enough space for a hiding area, feeding area (pellet dish & water bottle), & an area for voiding (litter box). Any cage should have a solid, washable bottom. Wire bottoms cause foot & leg injuries. The sides can be made of wire, & a cover to prevent other animals from entering the cage & escape by the pet (rats are known to be fantastic escape artists). Both wire cages & aquariums are suitable for rats. Because rat urine turns to ammonia quickly, you must change the litter in an aquarium more often than you would in a wire cage to prevent poisoning from air pollution. Make sure the cage is always clean. A clean rat is a happy rat.

- **Substrate:** Aspen is a very good choice for bedding. Being a hardwood, there are no toxic phenols in it making it a safe choice for your rat. Aromatic cedar & pine are choices that you want to avoid. Shredded paper or cloth can be used for your rats bedding. Change the bedding regularly to prevent odor & maintain pet health.
- **Decoration:** Toys & a hiding box are needed for rats & a litter box should be included in the cage. (many rats take to it without any special training). The array of toys or toy ideas is endless for rats as they are highly intelligent, curious & love games.
- **Water:** The water bottle is best as a constant water source. Rats tend to tread in water bowls or tip them, they often become a labour.

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----- Health



Rats have toenails that grow continuously. They may require regular clipping to prevent overgrowth. A veterinarian can demonstrate the proper way to clip nails. Some rats have tooth problems, & may have to have their teeth clipped on occasion. Always keep track of the length of the incisors, & be sure to provide plenty of chewable foods to help wear down the teeth. A yearly veterinary visit is always recommended to ensure the health of all pets. All rats get tumors, especially females. The vast majority are benign & pose no real threat to the health of the animal. They can be removed with surgery if they grow too large or are in an inconvenient area. Mycoplasma, is so common, it's hard to find rats that are free from it. The common symptoms are sneezing & wheezing, but if far enough along, it can also cause gasping for breath. It is treatable with medication. Many people get alarmed when they notice that their rat has a bloody nose or sneezes "blood". This is not blood. In fact, it is porphyrin, from tears! If it seems to be chronic & is making your rat uncomfortable, you might want to see a vet. Most rats with this problem, don't really seem affected by it.

----- Behavior & Interaction

Pet rats are usually kept in groups of two or more animals of the same sex. However, sometimes people keep rats as single pets. A consideration of the social life & welfare needs of pet rats implies that it is far better for them to be kept in pairs than as single rats. The rat in particular, needs company! Fancy Rats are very trainable. They pick up some behaviours on their own, such as squealing when they like something. They can even be taught to play with objects, run through tunnels & follow a leader. They can also be trained to use a litter box inside the cage (never use clumping cat litter) by placing it in the rat's selected waste area. Younger rats are easy to train & take a little less time to acclimatize, while older ones may take a little longer to get used to a new home, but may already be socialized. Rats are quiet, clean, smart, friendly & have good memories. They are ideal for play or petting sessions. They can bite when irritated, however this tends not to be the case most often as fancy rats enjoy interaction & play. Games, toys & puzzles is the best part of owning a rat. Be creative & keep them busy!

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