

----- Feeding

Each gerbil will have different tastes. It is important to know what can & cannot be fed to gerbils. A good premixed gerbil food is recommended. It is easy to get the right combination of protein, minerals, vitamins, & bulk. If you want to give your gerbils a treat, try things like Cheerios & Rice Krispies cereals (nothing with artificial flavor, sugar, or marshmallow) or Corn Chips. They also enjoy the occasional peanut & sunflower (great for hand feeding during your visits) but those are very fatty. They also like an apple, carrot, & lettuce, but remove it after one day & don't give it to them too often. You might want to give a half an apple to gnaw on for a few hours then remove it. Other supplements are treats are raisins, cheese (small amounts), occasional dog biscuits, breakfast cereal, occasional cooked egg & occasional mealworm. Avoid rhubarb, raw kidney beans or onions, & potato leaves. Plant bulbs are toxic to most rodents. Because they are a desert animal, gerbils drink very little water, however they do require fresh water every day. Shallow bowls or bottles with sipper tubes can be used (clean regularly).

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 Gerbil requires...

- Aquarium or Cage of appropriate size & wire gauge
- Water bottle(best), dish or bowl
- Substrate or bedding material (Aspen shavings)
- Litter Box (optional)
- Cave/Den/Hiding spot
- Toys/tunnels/swings (for climbing & exercise)
- Excercise Wheel (their exercise & your entertainment)
- Food dish for gerbil pellets or blocks
- Food dish for fresh fruits & veg'



Gerbils

- breed dependent: weighing between .2kg (dwarfs) & 3kg, length of 15cm up to 40 cm (the tail is 1/2 the total length)
- Life Span: 2 - 3 years on average.



----- Temperament

The word "gerbil" is a diminutive form of "jerboa", a group of rodents occupying a similar ecological niche. A gerbil is a small mammal of the order Rodentia. Once known simply as "desert rats", the gerbil subfamily includes about 110 species of African, Indian, & Asian, including sand rats & jirds, all adapted to arid habitats. Gerbils are social animals, & live in groups in the wild. They rely on their sense of smell to identify other members of their clan. Gerbils are known to attack & often kill those carrying an unfamiliar scent. The typical Mongolian gerbil is a desert species, lives underground in a network of tunnels, which include chambers with families. Adults move away & meet others from other chambers, extend the network, create their own chamber, then breed. Gerbils come up for food & water, but gerbils will eat a lot of fatty foods in one sitting, suggesting stores in the form of fat reserves rather than food storage. Gerbils were first introduced to the pet industry in 1964. These were the Mongolia gerbils. Their value as pets was soon appreciated & they are now found in pet shops all over the world.

Gerbils are great pets, especially as a child's first pet. Their playful antics, curious nature & temperament, teddy bear looks & calm nature make them ideal. They do bite at first, but do take well to humans. Hand-feed a couple sunflower seeds to get them interested in you. The amount of feed given to a gerbil is also important. A routine should be set up to feed the gerbil every 24 hours (roughly at the same time). Night time is good. Try not to give too much to avoid spoiling within the period. Remove any uneaten food from the previous day before feeding. Fresh is best for any animal! Gerbils are social creatures & are nocturnal; they are active at night & rest in the day. So they will be ready to play with you for a period, then rest. More than one gerbil requires little extra effort or space & is far more entertaining for them & you. They should be of the same sex however. Consider the consequences of breeding. Gerbils can make a very good pet with consistent & gentle handling.

Housing



Gerbils are friendly, smart, comical, entertaining & a good pet choice.

A common misunderstanding when purchasing a home for pet gerbils is that they can live in housing designed for hamsters or mice. This is not correct as they require the ability to be able to dig tunnel systems, rather than have them created for them. The commonly plastic structures of hamster & mouse cages is inappropriate for gerbils due to their ability to gnaw through it very quickly. A 10 - 15 gallon fish tank is ideal(per gerbil) with more space always the best choice. Make sure you have a lid for the tank. They will climb or scale everything in their environment to find an escape route! It is their nature to be curious & go exploring, don't aid it. Fill the tank or cage 1/3 full with bedding. They love to pile it up, & bury their food in it. Gerbils like to sleep in a place that is dark, warm & dry. Use soft fabric materials for the sleeping box. You could also include an exercise wheel. Gerbils are very active animals, they need an entertaining environment. Let your imagination be your guide.

- **Water:** The water bottle is best as a constant water source. gerbils tend to tread in water bowls or tip them, they often become a labour. Make sure you replace the water in the same spot each time for them to find it. Remember to change the water & clean the water bottle water often!
- **Substrate:** For substrate (bedding) aspen is a good way to go because it doesn't give off any oil. Give them something to tunnel in. Most pet stores carry a ready made product. Shredded paper may also be used. Cedar & pine are not recommended & avoid sawdust as it causes breathing problems. Add some rags, fur scraps or soft fabric material for the sleeping box.
- **Toys:** Gerbil's teeth grow continuously. They need a few wood items to gnaw at. Toilet paper & paper towel tubes; The gerbils will run in and out of the tube before settling down to a good gnaw. They love it, but within a few hours it will be shredded.

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Health



Gerbils are robust animals, & with good care & attention may likely never be ill. A scent gland tumor is a common tumor found in gerbils, & occurs most often in elderly gerbils. Noticeable as a small hard lump the tumor will continue to grow if not treated. This type of tumor occurs most often in males, but is occasionally found in females. Take you gerbil to an experience small animal veterinarian. Scent gland tumors are usually operable, & there is a high likelihood of a full recovery. Too many greens & vegetables in their diet can cause diarrhea. If your gerbil has a diet high in vegetables remove them & they should be OK. Also, gerbil's mucus is often mistaken for blood, as it is a reddish color. In mild cases they will go limp when you startle them or place them in a new cage, but in severe cases the gerbil will begin to freeze or twitch at the slightest excuse. Simply put the gerbil back in its cage & leave it alone for a few minutes.

Behavior & Interaction

When bringing a new Gerbil home, do not expect that it will come into your hands immediately as the Gerbil will still be afraid or shy. In order to have your gerbil to trust you, you should occasionally give it treats. Avoid handling too much until it gains trust in you & will come on his own. This usually takes a couple weeks! Patience is an important factor. Also, to avoid any bites from your gerbil, make sure that you wash your hands well after handling any food. When a gerbil squeaks, it means that the gerbil is afraid or agitated. Play fighting goes on frequently among gerbils, especially pups. They will pounce or jump on each other, then give chase around the tank. In a gerbil-boxing match they will stand on their hind legs & hit each other. (the way kangaroos box) Litter box training is possible with gerbils as they tend to use a designated area for waste naturally.

Bathing should only be done in exceptional circumstances. Bathing removes natural & essential oils from the gerbil's coat, which can cause the gerbil to catch a chill & die. gerbils are naturally very clean & will self groom. Your gerbil's natural habitat would have it evading predators, hunting for food, burrowing underground, so they are very active. That energy needs to be released. Ideally with gerbils, you want to deck out the cage with things for them to investigate, places to go or items to play with. They must have things to gnaw at & maintain dental health. You will find their antics & acrobatics highly entertaining & sometimes a bit mesmerizing.

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