

Avoid clumping litter products since it can cause an intestinal blockage that may require surgery if ingested. Sterilize the food bowl, water bottle, toys, and litter pan once a month with a weak bleach solution.

9. Have you thoroughly researched the needs and requirements of ferrets?

Before bringing a ferret into your home, learn all you can about these wonderful creatures. Purchase *A Practical Guide to Ferret Care* by Deborah Jeans to find out how to properly care for your pet. Avoid any book published before 1995 since these may contain outdated information. Another good way to learn about ferrets is to volunteer time with an OFA-sponsored outreach or educational program. Online, you can read the Frequently Asked Questions at <http://www.ferretcentral.org> ("Ferret Central") or subscribe to the Ferret Mailing List (email ferret-request@cunyvm.cuny.edu). If you have additional questions about ferret care or where to purchase a ferret, please contact the OFA. The association can also recommend veterinarians in the local area who specialize in ferret care.

If you answered any of these questions NO, then a ferret may not be right for you. There are already too many unwanted ferrets looking for a new place to live with someone who will care for and spend time with them. Please consider all the factors involved including time, money, and health care before you decide to bring a ferret into your home. When considering a ferret, remember that a healthy ferret is alert, has a shiny, clean coat, long whiskers, bright eyes, clean ears, teeth free of tartar, is free from fleas and ticks, and has a docile, playful temperament. Remember, as a ferret owner you have complete responsibility for your pet's health and well-being. If you decide a ferret may be right for you, remember that purchasing your ferret from a reputable source can insure that you are getting a high-quality pet. And taking good care of your ferret will lead a healthy, happy, and long life.

"Ferrets aren't the perfect pet. The perfect pet is one whose unwavering need to overturn every small trash can and scatter its contents is something endearing, not irritating. The perfect pet is one whose imperfect visits to the litter pan are accidents cleaned up without rancor or frustration. The perfect pet is one whose relentless attacks on the carpet means changing the carpet to wood or linoleum, not changing the pet. The perfect pet is one whose trick of stealing your wallet and credit cards, just before you go shopping, is seen as an amazing talent rather than a punishable offense. The perfect pet is one whose playful, gentle nip on a toe invites a smile instead of a frown. The perfect pet is the one chosen after careful consideration of all of the qualities that come with sharing your life with that kind of companion animal."

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Is a Ferret



The Right Pet For You?

For more information about ferrets:

Lane Area Ferret Lovers
3120 Van Avenue
Eugene, OR 97401
Ph. (541) 484-1090
www.laneferrets.org
laneferrets@yahoo.com

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Even though ferrets are cute, cuddly, and playful, please take time to read the following information and see if a ferret is the right pet for you.

1. Do you spend most of your time at home?

If you travel extensively or spend 12 hours or more away from home daily, a ferret is not the right pet. Ferrets require daily care such as feeding, fresh water, cleaning the litter box, and providing a minimum of 60 minutes exercise outside the cage. Ferrets cannot be put in a cage and left alone. They are social animals who are dependent on humans for companionship and play, much like a dog. For their own safety, ferrets cannot be let outdoors unless on a leash and under close supervision. If released, ferrets may not find their way home, cannot defend themselves, and would be unable to locate food, unlike feral dogs and cats.

2. Are you willing to spend a decade dedicated to your pet?

Ferrets are a long-term commitment. Ferrets that are well cared for will live 5 to 10 years.

3. Are all children in the house above the age of 12 years?

Ferrets can play rough and nip, much like puppies and kittens, until trained not to do so. Small children can be rough with ferrets and may lack the sense of responsibility needed to care for them. Having a ferret around a small child or infant means vigilant supervision. Never leave a ferret and a small child alone together, even for a few seconds.

4. Are you willing to supervise interactions between ferrets and other domestic pets?

Ferrets may get along well with other household pets but it is highly dependent upon the animals involved. Cats will usually seek high areas to avoid ferrets or may choose to play with ferrets. Many dogs will ignore ferrets but others were bred to hunt small mammals. Be sure to closely supervise all interactions between ferrets, dogs and cats. Ferrets may play rough or attack birds, rabbits, gerbils, hamsters, or guinea pigs. Never leave ferrets loose with these animals.

5. Can you afford high quality meat-based food?

As a carnivore, a ferret requires 5% to 7% of their body weight daily of Totally Ferret or a high-protein, meat-based dry cat food. Dog food lacks the fat and certain amino acids required by ferrets. The cat food found in supermarkets or grocery stores is not acceptable since it contains fillers and

dyes and is grain based. When reading the label, check to see that the first item is chicken, poultry or lamb. The second or third item should also be one of these meats. The protein should be 32% or greater and the fat content should be 20% or greater. The OFA does not recommend foods labeled as “ferret food” other than Totally Ferret. Many “ferret foods” are made without regard to the known nutritional needs of ferrets or may be re-packaged fish based mink food. Ferrets enjoy limited amounts (less than 1 teaspoon daily) of treats such as peeled fruit, cat treats, Cheerios, cooked meat, and malt-flavored substances like Nutra-Cal or Linatone (5 drops daily).

6. Can you afford to have your ferret spayed or neutered?

Both male (hobs) and female (jills) ferrets must be neutered - but for different reasons. Many people purchase a ferret that was altered when the kit was very young. There is much controversy about altering a ferret before it has had a chance to fully mature. Some experts believe that the early altering leads to a higher incidence of cancer. In any case, a ferret should be altered no later than 5 to 7 months of age. A jill will not go out of season on its own. To avoid aplastic anemia, a fatal condition, a female ferret must be spayed before her first season. Hobs will develop a very strong, musky body odor if they are not neutered. Also, hobs will not get along with other males once they come into season and may seriously injure or kill each other. Even after neutering, ferrets may have a slight natural odor. This odor is no more unpleasant than that of a well-groomed dog or cat. However, most people tend to snuggle close with ferrets leading to the misconception that ferrets have more odor than other animals. To minimize odor, bathe ferrets no more than every 2 weeks with a human, cat, or ferret shampoo and change bedding at least once a week. Breeding of ferrets is not recommended. It is highly risky for the jill and may lead to her death and the death of the kits. In addition, the mating itself is very rough on the jill and may result in massive wounds on her neck requiring veterinarian treatment. Removal of the scent glands (descenting) does not reduce body odor and is not recommended by the OFA unless medically warranted. Ferrets usually only “musk” (which smells like burned motor oil and quickly dissipates) if they are ill or frightened.



7. Can you afford routine and emergency veterinary care?

Ferret kits require a series of three canine distemper shots given 3 weeks apart starting at 8 weeks of age. Adult ferrets require a yearly booster. Canine distemper is 100% FATAL in ferrets. Ferrets are not susceptible to feline distemper. The only FDA approved distemper vaccine is Fervac but Galaxy-D is widely used off-label. Do not use combination or feline vaccines. The OFA also recommends a yearly rabies vaccination with Imrab. The 1998 Compendium of Animal Rabies Control states that “...ferrets are now included with dogs and cats in all recommendations regarding vaccination, removal of strays, pre-exposure vaccination and management, interstate movement, licensure, post-exposure management, and management of animals that bite humans.” However, some jurisdictions may vary from the Compendium. It is essential to have a rabies vaccine to reduce the chance of having a ferret destroyed for rabies testing should the ferret scratch or nip a stranger. Ferrets are susceptible to adrenal and insulinoma cancer. Ferrets should have Laxatone weekly to avoid an intestinal blockage from hairballs.

8. Can you afford a house for your ferret?

Even if you plan to let your ferret have the run of the house when you are home, it is best to cage them when you are not home and at night. The OFA recommends a wire cage with 1/2 inch bottom wiring and a minimum size of 36 inches long by 18 inches wide by 18 inches high for one or two ferrets. Never use an aquarium since these impede ventilation. For traveling in the car, a pet carrier buckled into the seatbelt is the best solution. Ferrets are extremely susceptible to collapse or death from any sustained temperature above 80 degrees. NEVER leave them in the car unattended! Basic ferret housing requires a litter pan, a heavy ceramic or weighted food bowl, a water bottle or water dish, and old towels or “sweats” without holes or loose strings for bedding. Other recommended items include a sleep sack for snuggling, an H-shaped harness for expeditions outside, a hammock for sleeping, and toys. Toys should be heavy-duty baby toys without protruding objects, golf or tennis balls, balls with bells inside, 4 inch drain tubing, and plastic or paper grocery bags. Be sure to dispose of toys if they get torn or damaged. Wash the bedding and replace water in bottles at least once a week. (Water in open bowls must be replaced daily.) Scoop the litter daily and replace at least twice a week. The recommended litter is a recycled paper product. Never use any kind of shavings, wood chips or products containing cedar oil since the volatile oils can cause respiratory problems.