

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOUSING

Cage	2
Bedding	2
Furnishings	3

FEEDING

Staple Diet	4
Treats	4
Safe/Unsafe Treats	4

EXERCISE

Activity	5
Play	5
Wheels	5
Exercise Balls	5
Pet Proofing	5

SOCIAL NEEDS

Mental Stimulation	6
Bonded Buddies	6
Bonding with Your Gerbil	6

HANDLING & GROOMING

Safe Handling	7
Grooming	7

HEALTH

General Information	8
Signs of Illness	8
Common Illnesses	9

BEHAVIOR

Vocalization	10
Body Language	10

SUPPLY LIST



HOUSING

CAGE

Specs

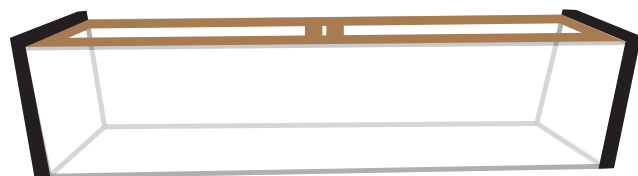
Cages must be a minimum of 30 inches long, 12 inches high, and 12 inches wide (or 2 cubic feet) for 1 - 2 gerbils. Gerbils prefer deep cages with at least 6 inches of bedding, tunnels, nesting materials, and climbing toys.

Temperature

The temperature inside the cage should always be between 65° and 80° F with the humidity between 30% and 70%.

Material

Cages should have plenty of ventilation, but be sure your gerbil can't escape through or chew on the holes. Any cage should have a solid floor since standing on wire can cause injuries and bumblefoot. Inspect your pet's cage daily for any signs of chewing.



IKEA Deltolf DIY cage

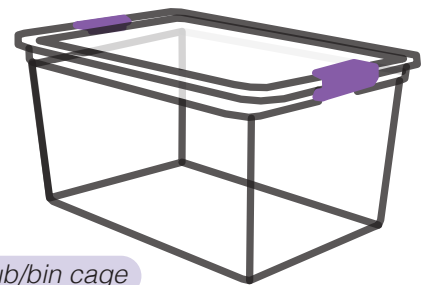
Examples

Aquarium tanks of at least 20 gallons have enough room but can be heavy. Some people choose to flip an IKEA Detolf cabinet on its side and build a custom lid, which provides double the required space and an excellent view of your gerbil's living area. We recommend making a DIY tub/bin cage as they are appropriately sized, inexpensive, lightweight, and easy to clean.

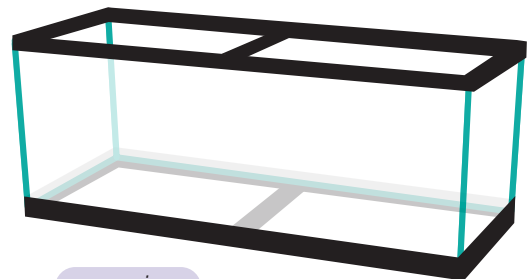
Store-bought cages such as Habitrails or similar are not recommended because even with the connecting tubes, they do not have enough floor space.



65° - 80°



tub/bin cage



aquarium

BEDDING

Gerbils enjoy burrowing and building nests. *Unscented* soft recycled paper, shredded paper, and paper pellets are all great bedding options either by themselves or mixed. MNPPR strongly recommends avoiding all wood-based beddings due to the general sensitivity of pocket pets.



soft recycled paper



shredded paper



pelleted paper



HOUSING

FURNISHINGS

Essentials

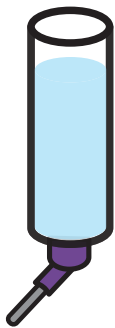
Set your gerbil's cage up with the primary essentials including a water bottle, food bowl, lots of chew toys (wood or lava), a wheel, at least one shelter/hide, and a sand bath. Most gerbils love running on wheels so be sure to provide one of the appropriate size and material. Learn more about wheels in the exercise section of this handbook.

Variety

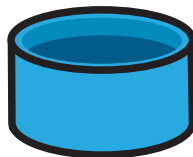
It is important to have a variety of toys, beds, and fun stuff you can rotate to keep your gerbil interested. Good examples include toilet paper tubes, fiddlesticks, tunnels, bird toys, bits of fabric, ladders, cardboard, and treat balls. Visit the homemade toys tab on our website for more ideas.

Chewing

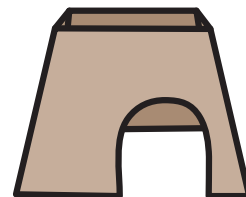
Gerbils are known to be prolific chewers. Because of this, many owners choose not to allow any plastic at all in their environment. This is the best way to protect your pets from ingesting pieces of plastic that can cause an obstruction and make them ill. There are glass water bottles, ceramic or glass dishes, solid metal or wooden wheels, and wooden hides available on the market.



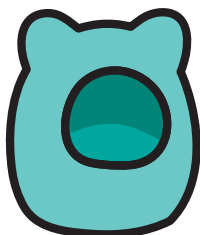
water bottle



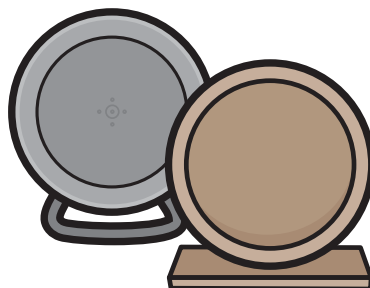
food dish



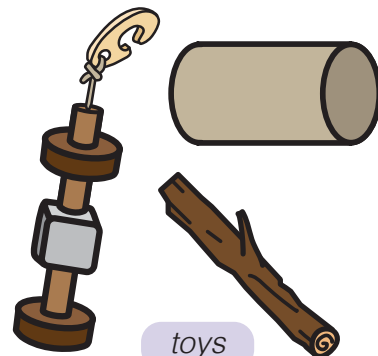
hides



sand bath



wheel



toys



FEEDING

DIET

Staple Diet

Always keep your gerbil's food bowl full of high-quality hamster/gerbil kibble, pellets, or blocks such as Oxbow. Seed mix food should not be used. They are often missing vital nutrients and many gerbils will only eat their favorite tasting pieces causing an unbalanced diet. If your gerbil is overweight, they may need fewer treats or more exercise.

Treats

There are many options for store-bought treats made for gerbils, but fresh food can also make great treats, just make sure they are not storing anything in their nests that may rot. Gerbils should never get more than 1/4 tablespoon of treats a day or they may become obese.

SAFE TREATS

<i>apples</i>	<i>green beans</i>
<i>bananas</i>	<i>mealworms</i>
<i>bell peppers</i>	<i>parsley</i>
<i>blueberries</i>	<i>peas</i>
<i>broccoli</i>	<i>pumpkin seeds</i>
<i>carrots</i>	<i>plain popcorn</i>
<i>cauliflower</i>	<i>raspberries</i>
<i>Cheerios</i>	<i>sunflower seeds</i>
<i>cranberries</i>	<i>timothy hay</i>
<i>cucumbers</i>	<i>unsalted crackers</i>
<i>cooked eggs</i>	<i>yogurt</i>

UNSAFE TREATS

<i>any citrus fruit</i>	<i>onions</i>
<i>apple seeds</i>	<i>peanuts</i>
<i>cabbage</i>	<i>poppy seeds</i>
<i>cheese</i>	<i>raisins</i>
<i>corn</i>	<i>raw beans</i>
<i>fizzy drinks</i>	<i>raw meat</i>
<i>garlic</i>	<i>rhubarb</i>
<i>milk</i>	<i>walnuts</i>



EXERCISE

Activity

Gerbils are naturally nocturnal but can easily adapt to their humans' schedule if you set a routine and stick to it every day. Young gerbils are more active and playful than older animals. As they age, most are content to explore for a little then spend time cuddling in your lap.

Play

Some fun things to try with your gerbil are making a maze, playing chase with a toy, creating an obstacle course, wrestling with your hand, and hiding food for them to find. Gerbils should get a minimum of one hour per day of playtime with you outside their cage, even if they have a large habitat or a wheel in their cage. Unless your gerbil is used to you and easily lets you pick it up, make sure to only allow your gerbil out in areas where they are easy to catch such as on your bed or in a chair. Start by letting them run around on your hands, arms, and lap before giving them more space in a gerbil-proof area.

Wheels

With all that energy, most gerbils love to run on wheels. Any wheel should have a solid base and be of the appropriate size for your gerbil. Never use wire or mesh wheels since tails, toes, and other body parts can get stuck in the mesh or bars and cause serious injuries. As noted previously, it may be best to provide wheels made from wood or solid metal instead of plastic to prevent heavy chewing.

Exercise Balls

Exercise balls are a way you can allow your gerbil to explore larger areas and still stay safe. Make sure to always monitor them when they are in exercise balls to ensure they don't get stuck or escape, and thoroughly wash the balls after each use to keep them clean. Be sure to limit your pet's time in an exercise ball to short periods and try to incorporate handling your gerbil into their exercise routine.

Pet-Proofing

Make sure to gerbil-proof before play by covering outlets and cords, putting away anything you don't want chewed on, moving houseplants, blocking any small space you cannot reach into such as under the fridge, and securing other pets in a different area or room.



SOCIAL NEEDS

SOCIAL NEEDS

Mental Stimulation

Gerbils are very social, smart animals with lots of energy. They love spending time with their humans, playing games, and solving problems.

Bonded Buddies

Gerbils are communal animals and will be happiest when living with other gerbils. It is strongly recommended to keep a minimum of two gerbils at a time. Unaltered gerbils should be kept only with other gerbils of the same sex.

BONDING WITH YOUR GERBIL

Key Components of Training

**TRUST • POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT • CONSISTENCY
REPETITION • PATIENCE**

Tips

Every time you approach your gerbil's habitat, bring a small treat for your pet so they learn to associate you with pleasant things and look forward to your visits. Offer treats with an open palm when able.

Speak softly to your gerbil and call them by their name so they get used to your voice and learn their name.

Keep your gerbil's cage somewhere you spend a lot of time so they get used to your voice, scent, and movement.

Never grab your gerbil, especially when sleeping. Instead, place an open palm on the floor in front of them and allow them to come to you. Gently make some noise so they can wake themselves up and approach you when they are ready.

The more time you spend with your gerbil, the sooner they will become comfortable with you.



HANDLING & GROOMING

SAFE HANDLING

Picking Up Your Gerbil

Waiting for your pet to come to you before picking them up is a great way to develop trust. Talk to your gerbil and let them sniff your hand before attempting to pick them up so they know it's you. To teach your gerbil to feel secure while being held, place a treat in the palm of your hand and rest it flat, palm up on the floor of the cage without moving for as long as you are able. When your pet feels comfortable, they will come to sniff your hand and climb onto your palm to take the treat. Once your gerbil is comfortable being on your hand, you can take them out to play. Hold them close to your body and speak softly to comfort them. If your pet is new or too nervous to climb into your hand, utilize a small bed or box using the transport box method. Never pick a gerbil up by the tail.

GROOMING

Nails

Gerbils' nails are tiny and the risk of cutting a toe is high so nail trimming is not recommended. Gerbils should wear down their claws naturally, but if they get long you can provide a rough surface like a brick to climb on and slowly file down their nails.

Dental Care

You do not need to brush your gerbil's teeth. Provide plenty of chew toys so they can wear down their teeth naturally. Check your gerbil's teeth regularly to make sure they are not overgrown or misaligned. Take them to the vet if symptoms of dental issues present themselves so they can be trimmed by a professional.

Brushing

Gerbils should not need to be brushed, but if your gerbil's fur is tangled or debris is stuck in it a clean toothbrush can be used.

Bathing

Gerbils spend a large part of their time grooming and do not need water baths. They do, however, enjoy using sand baths to keep their fur clean and control oil. Place a small amount of small animal sand in a sand bath house or a small dish and let your gerbil roll around until they feel they are clean. Once your gerbil is finished, it's best to remove the sand bath, or else they may start using it as a toilet. Change out the sand regularly or if it gets coarse or dirty. It is generally recommended to use reptile sand rather than chinchilla dust to prevent respiratory issues.



HEALTH

GENERAL INFORMATION

Lifespan

Gerbils live an average of 3 to 4 years.

Reproduction

Gerbils can reproduce between 8 and 12 weeks old. While it's possible to spay or neuter gerbils, the surgery can be risky, so most people instead choose to house gerbils of the same sex together to ensure companionship and prevent breeding.

Routine At Home Health Checks

At least once a week, spend some time examining your pet's fur, skin, and teeth for any physical changes such as lumps, wounds, overgrown teeth or nails, poor coat quality, etc. If any abnormalities are found, it is a good idea to make an appointment with your veterinarian for assessment, as any health concerns can progress very quickly.

Annual Exam

All gerbils should be given a yearly veterinary exam to ensure they stay in good health. Gerbils do not require any vaccines.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS

Like all pocket pets, gerbils are very good at hiding when they get sick so if you see any of the following signs get in contact with your veterinarian immediately:

ANY BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

LETHARGY

DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION

DISINTEREST IN INTERACTION

OVERGROWN TEETH

CHANGES IN EATING

CHANGES IN DRINKING

CHANGES IN GROOMING

DISINTEREST IN TREATS

POOR COAT QUALITY



HEALTH

COMMON ILLNESSES

Upper Respiratory Infection

Gerbils are sensitive creatures and can easily develop respiratory infections that can become pneumonia. To avoid this, keep your pet's cage away from drafts, clean it often, use fleece bedding, provide as large a habitat as possible, and keep stress to a minimum. *Symptoms include sneezing, eye and nose discharge, lack of appetite, and lethargy.*

Dental Problems

Because gerbils' teeth continue to grow throughout their lives, they need to be constantly worn down by gnawing on chew toys. If a gerbil does not have the correct diet or if their teeth are not properly lined up they can grow out of control causing pain, abscess, difficulty eating, and eventually death. This is called malocclusion and can require x-rays, tooth filing, or abscess removal under anesthesia. *Symptoms include drool or saliva buildup on the face, bad breath, decreased appetite, weight loss, or lumps on the face.*

Seizures

If a gerbil gets overstimulated or too frightened they can have a seizure. Though not life-threatening, it can be scary to witness. It is believed that this condition is likely genetic and is common in 20% - 40% of gerbils. Normally, they come out of it and are just fine. If your gerbil has a seizure that does not stop, take it to your veterinarian immediately. *Symptoms include going limp, freezing, and twitching.*

Tyzzer's Disease

This deadly bacterial infection is spread through contaminated food or water. It is highly contagious between animals and must be treated by a veterinarian as soon as possible. *Symptoms include diarrhea, hunched posture, loss of appetite, rough coat, dehydration, and abdominal pain.*

Ear Infections

Much like humans, gerbils can get ear infections that disrupt their balance, are painful, and need medication prescribed by a veterinarian. *Symptoms include walking around in circles, a head tilt, and loss of balance.*

De-gloved or Detached Tail

As a defense mechanism, gerbils can shed or detach their tails to get away if captured by a predator. This is why you should never grab a gerbil by the tail. Losing all or part of a tail is incredibly stressful for a gerbil and leaves them vulnerable to infections as well as future behavioral problems.



BEHAVIOR

All gerbils sound and act a little differently. Only by spending time with them will you fully be able to understand them. Below is a general guide of their communication to get you started.

VOCALIZATION

BEHAVIOR	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
Squeaking	Loud squeaking.	<i>Surprise, protest to being disturbed, or in pain.</i>
Vibrating	A purring noise.	<i>Content, happy.</i>

BODY LANGUAGE

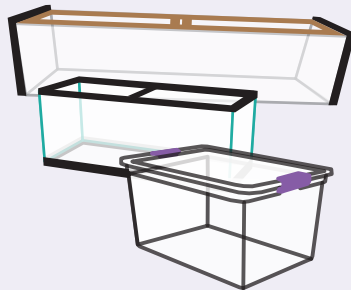
BEHAVIOR	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
Thumping	Stomping their hind feet.	<i>A warning sound.</i>
Grooming	Licking.	<i>Friendship and love between two gerbils or a gerbil and their human.</i>
Burrowing	Building nests and tunnels in their bedding.	<i>A form of play, exploring, and making themselves comfortable.</i>
Biting	Biting.	<i>Fear or mistaking part of a person for food.</i>
Scent Marking	Rubbing belly on items.	<i>Using the scent glands on their abdomen to mark their territory.</i>
Standing on Hind Legs	Standing on hind legs with front paws together.	<i>Concerned or on alert and trying to better investigate something.</i>
Rolling onto Back	Rolling over onto their back.	<i>A request to be groomed by someone they trust.</i>
Licking the Walls	Licking the walls of their habitat or their water bottle.	<i>Thirst.</i>



GERBIL SUPPLY CHECKLIST

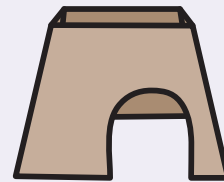
CAGE

One - two gerbils: 30" L x 12" W x 12"H or 2.5 cubic feet. Gerbils prefer deep cages with at least 6 inches of bedding, tunnels, nesting materials, and climbing toys.



SHELTER

Gerbils like to hide in shelters when they are nervous or relaxing. Wood or grass huts, cardboard boxes, etc.



WATER BOTTLE

Glass.



FOOD DISH

Ceramic or glass.



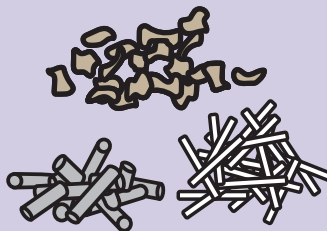
FOOD

MNPPR recommends Oxbow. Do not give your gerbil foods with corn as the main ingredient or foods with mix-ins.



BEDDING

Unscented soft recycled paper (CareFresh), shredded paper, paper pellets.



SAND BATH

You can purchase a ceramic sand bath or use a sturdy bowl.



CHEW TOYS

Wood, lava, etc.



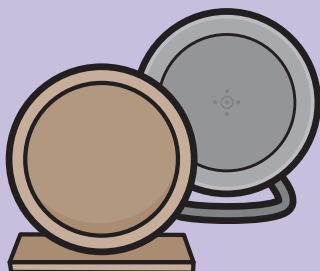
SAND

Make sure to get animal or reptile sand, not dust.



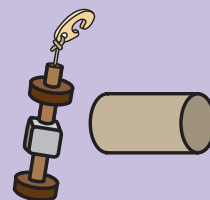
WHEEL

Solid base only. No wire, bars, or mesh. Wood or solid metal base is ideal.



ENRICHMENT

Gerbils are busybodies! Be sure to provide them with lots of fun toys. Check out our homemade toys page for ideas.



EXERCISE BALL

Optional. Always monitor your pet when using.



PET CARRIER



DISCLAIMER AND CREDITS

DISCLAIMER

All information shared by MN Pocket Pet Rescue is researched, up to date, and accurate to the best of our ability. We are not a licensed veterinary organization and do not intend to present ourselves as such. All educational material contains our best recommendations for care specific to each species. However, all animals are different and some may have unique needs. MN Pocket Pet Rescue does not assume any liability for the well-being of any animal not under our care. Always use your best judgment and follow veterinary recommendations whenever necessary. If you have any questions or find inaccurate information please contact us.

CREDITS

Table of Contents

© Can Stock Photo Inc. / cynoclub

Feeding

© Can Stock Photo Inc./ Farinosa

**All illustrations by Burpingcake (Ash Russell)*

