Ferret Care Sheet

With proper care, handling and attention ferrets can be affectionate and long lived pets. They have a fabulous character and personality and will become much loved family members when socialised and well cared for.

Female Ferrets must be sterilised if not mated, otherwise they can die. See ‘Breeding’ for more information.

Housing
Ferrets do live longer and are healthier when kept indoors. A wooden hutch with a removable tray are great homes for your ferret. There are also a variety of plastic hutches and metal cages suitable for Ferrets. Ferrets are much like cats and do appreciate enough space for play and exercise so the more room they have the happier they will be. The bottom of the cage can be lined with a thick layer of newspaper. It is best to avoid sawdust and shavings as it could cause respiratory problems in your ferret and can make them sick if they eat it.

Like most animals, ferrets like to have a place to 'hide-away' in to make them feel safe. A home or tube of some sort is ideal.

Ferrets can be toilet trained! Use a litter tray lined with a paper based kitty litter for best results. Placing the tray in the darkest corner of the hutch really helps, as ferrets will instinctively toilet in this area. Use positive reinforcement when you notice the ferret using the tray. Do expect accidents, ferrets don't have the best aim but never punish them for it. If the Ferret is having issues with toilet training, collect the fresh droppings and place them in the tray, over time the smell will attract the Ferret to toilet in the tray. It is best to clean the tray daily.

Summer Time
Ferrets hate the heat, so having an indoor hutch for summer time will help. If the weather is warmer than 25°C, bring your ferret inside to help them stay cool. If your ferret is unable to come inside, place a 1lt frozen water bottle in the Hutch and rotate it as it thaws. Your hot ferret will lie next to the bottle and drink the condensation to keep cool.

Ferrets love to swim! So provide a fresh bowl full of water daily, often the ferret will 'snorkel' in the bowl. In summer a sink filled shallow with water is a great place for supervised play. Remember Ferrets cannot sweat and heat stroke is deadly causing many ferrets to die annually due to the heat.

Food
Ferrets love to eat, and they need food available all the time, they have a high metabolism and need to eat every four hours. There are numerous brands of Ferret food but a fine quality dry kitten food such as Iams® Kitten Biscuits will be just as good. Along with access to biscuits all the time, your ferret should be given fresh meat twice daily. This includes frozen mice, frozen chicks, frozen quail, rabbit, chicken, raw chicken necks, raw chicken wings, chicken frames, organs and mince.

Fresh water is a must and should be in a bottle for drinking and a bowl for swimming and keeping cool.
Training a Family Ferret

Ferrets are fine when alone but they do need human company every day. Getting a younger ferret will allow you to make a strong bond with them and provide you with a playful friend. If you wish to get two Ferrets, it is best to get them at the same time. Often when introduced later your ferrets may fight.

Only let your ferret out of the hutch when supervised to prevent accidents. Don't be afraid to 'rough play' with your ferret as this is how they play naturally, but do have a limit when play gets too rough with a simple firm response like 'Gentle'. This also applies if your ferret nips for no reason. If this happens never put them down or back in the cage as this just reinforces the behaviour. Always supervise young children when they are handling a ferret and teach them to treat the ferret gently.

You can nip-train young ferrets with positive reinforcement when they are gentle and calm. If they are very stubborn, a mist from a water bottle every time they bite works. Putting some butter on your hand and offering it as a treat works too as your ferrets learns to lick rather than bite. NEVER use negative punishment as ferrets don't respond well to this and it can lead to behavioural issues.

You can take your ferrets for walks using one of the many leashes and harnesses available at Pet Magic. Most ferrets get along well with cats and dogs but not with small animals and birds. A variety of cat toys and small dog toys are great for your ferret, along with empty tissue boxes and toilet rolls. These will provide hours of entertainment for your ferret.

Grooming

Ferrets need little grooming and a healthy ferret will groom themselves regularly. If your ferret needs grooming now and then, a damp cloth (with no soap) works well along with an occasional brush to keep the fur healthy. Your ferret's nails may need trimming occasionally by carefully using small animal nail clippers. You can bathe your ferret no more than once a month, but only ever use a good quality Small Animal Shampoo. Excessive bathing will only increase the smell. A sterilised ferret will smell less, as the oil producing glands will become less active.

Breeding

You must sterilise your female ferret, as unsterilized females will remain in heat until mated with. If they are not mated, your female can die from anaemia and infection. Males should also be sterilised to avoid health issues later in life. Sterilised Ferrets smell less, live longer and suffer from fewer health and behaviour issues. Sterilisation should happen when your ferret is between 6-8 months old.

Breeding Ferrets can be very demanding and should only be done by those you have experience and plenty of time. If you choose to attempt this, always get advice from those who have done so successfully. For more information on breeding contact Western Australian Ferret & Ferreting Society (9246 4040)

Health - 'Prevention is the Best Cure'

Ferrets can contract canine distemper and should be vaccinated at 10 weeks old followed by an annual booster. If your ferret catches canine distemper there is no cure.

It is vital that you use a monthly treatment to prevent Heartworm and fleas. Your ferret is also vulnerable to ear mites, ticks and sarcoptic mange mites. All of these can be prevented against by a monthly treatment of Revolution® "Puppy and Kitten". Ferrets do not suffer greatly from intestinal worms, primarily because of their short digestion period. Intestinal worms in ferrets can also be treated with Revolution®.

If you have the flu, do not handle your ferret. Influenza can be passed from humans to ferrets and vice-versa although ferrets cannot catch the common cold.

Ferrets can fall sick quickly and can show no symptoms until the last minute. Frequently check your ferret for weepy eyes, runny nose, flu symptoms and always watch for sudden changes in behaviour. A usually docile ferret that acts excessively defensive may be sick. Check your ferret's body condition every day paying particular attention to the skin, eyes, ears and feet.