

Care Cards

Ferrets



Basic Values

Ferrets are lively, comical animals that are easy to maintain in a household. Their average life span is 5 to 8 years. They reach sexual maturity at 4 to 8 months of age, usually in the first spring after birth. The normal gestation period is 41 to 42 days, with an average litter size of 8 to 10 kits. The kits eyes usually open between 21 and 37 days old, and kits are totally weaned by 6 to 8 weeks of age. The normal ferret body temperature is 100 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit. Female ferrets must be spayed early or they must be set up with breeding males. Otherwise, if not bred, many females will remain in estrus and develop bone marrow toxicity secondary to elevated estrogen levels.

Housing

Ferrets are best housed in wire cages or custom-built wooden cages. Glass tanks are not suitable for housing ferrets because they provide poor ventilation. Whatever you choose to house your ferret in be sure to make it escape proof. Ferrets can be kept either indoors or outdoors. If housed outdoors provide a shaded portion of the cage for cooling. They do not like temperatures over 90 degrees Fahrenheit and no lower than 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The cage should have a dark tunnel or sleeping enclosure. You can provide old clothes or towels for bedding.

Shelves can be provided for additional sleeping or playing areas. Ferrets can be trained to use a litter box. The box should be frequently cleaned to prevent the ferret from soiling its cage.

Nutrition

Ferrets are strict carnivores. They depend primarily on meat protein and fats for their dietary requirements. The protein in the diet should be of high quality and easily digestible because of their very short gastrointestinal transit time. Ferrets do not need a large amount of carbohydrates for energy. Feeding a high carbohydrate food may prevent absorption of other nutrients which may result in disease. Ferrets also do not have the ability to digest large amounts of fiber. High fiber diets should be avoided. We recommend ferrets be fed a diet high in good quality meat protein and fat, and low in complex carbohydrates and fiber. The protein level should be 30% to 40%, and the fat between 18% to 30%. Obesity is rarely observed in ferrets. We prefer a dry ration over a canned product. Most ferrets will thrive on a high quality kitten food or ferret food. Avoid giving sugary treats. Acceptable snacks include fresh meat scraps, meat baby food, and fish or liver feline treats.

Water should always be available in either a sipper bottle or a heavy bowl. Ferrets will play in water, and therefore the bowl should not be easily tipped over. Do not add any supplements to the drinking water.

Bathing

Ferrets, like cats, do not require routine bathing. Ferrets normally will produce a slight musky odor on their body. Frequent bathing may strip the skin of essential oils and cause drying and itching. I recommend bathing with a mild cat or ferret shampoo no more frequently than once a month.



two vaccine series. Canine distemper is fatal in ferrets. The only protection is vaccination. There currently is only one approved canine distemper vaccine for use in ferrets (Fervac-D). If your ferret is vaccinated with a non-approved vaccine, it may develop the disease instead of being protected from it. Ferrets should also be vaccinated for rabies at 3 months of age. Like canine distemper, there is only one approved rabies vaccine for use in ferrets (Imrab). All vaccines should be repeated on a yearly basis to insure constant protection.



Note: Ferrets are illegal to own in many states and they are not considered domestic pets in others, because of this it is very important your ferret stays current on its rabies vaccine. We do not think your ferret will ever contract the disease, however ferrets like to bite while they are playing. Unlike dogs, which are held for an observation period after a bite exposure, ferrets are euthanized for laboratory rabies examination if there is any suspicion of disease.



Vaccines

All ferrets must receive a checkup and vaccination against canine distemper within 24 to 48 hours of purchase. The distemper vaccine should be repeated every three weeks until the series is complete. Juvenile ferrets, under three months of age, should receive a three vaccine series. Any ferret over three months of age, that has never been vaccinated for canine distemper, should receive at least a

