

Gerbil Care Information

Small Angels Rescue • 301-668-0404 • www.smallangelsrescue.org

Gerbils are active and curious animals. They live an average of three to four years. Gerbils love to dig tunnels and chew. They have poor eyesight but good hearing and a good sense of smell. They go through several sleep/active cycles throughout the day and night. Gerbils are very social animals and need the companionship of their own species. It is unnatural for them to live alone. They should always be kept in same-gender groups of at least pairs. Gerbils enjoy grooming together, eating together, playing together, curling up to sleep together, and just being together. Introductions between single gerbils can be successful. Introductions must be done very slowly and carefully. You cannot simply get a second gerbil and put it in with your current gerbil. You will have a fight and injured gerbils. We recommend the split-tank method of introduction. For more information about the split tank method, please visit www.twinsqueaks.com. Click on "Tip of the Month" and read all four articles on Split-Cage Introductions.

HOUSING

There is no such thing as a habitat that is too big. Your gerbils will be spending a majority of their time in their habitat, so it should be as big as possible. It should be safe, roomy, comfortable, and interesting. Gerbils are best kept in an aquarium. It should be a minimum of 24 inches long and 12 inches wide. A 10-gallon aquarium is too small. The aquarium should have a secure, well-ventilated, coated wire, screen lid. It is better to have a long aquarium with more floor space than a tall aquarium with unused height. Gerbils will quickly chew up and destroy a plastic cage, and they will kick bedding out of a wire cage. Gerbils can also damage their teeth and noses chewing on the bars of a wire cage. Clean your gerbils' habitat at least once a week.

BEDDING

Use Carefresh Bedding. It is the safest and healthiest bedding choice for your gerbils. It is made from recycled wood pulp and is available at most pet stores. Aspen bedding is an acceptable second choice. Never use pine, cedar, sawdust, corn cob bedding, chlorophyll bedding, or cat litter. Pine and cedar shavings are poisonous to all animals! Gerbils love to dig tunnels. Fill the aquarium one-third full of bedding for burrowing fun. We have 50 Liter bags of Carefresh bedding available for purchase for \$13.99 a bag plus tax.

HIDEAWAY

Gerbils enjoy a cozy space for sleeping and relaxation. Provide a wooden nesting box. Do not use plastic. Use unscented toilet paper or paper towels for nesting material. Do not use the commercial "fluff" from the store. It is unsafe. Commercial fluff can become wrapped around limbs and/or block an animal's intestines if swallowed.

WATER

Use an eight-ounce hanging water bottle that has an angled stainless steel sipper tube with a ball bearing in the spout. A glass water bottle is preferable, but a plastic water bottle is acceptable. If your gerbils chew through their water bottle you will need a water bottle guard. Give your gerbils fresh water everyday. Filtered water is best.

FOOD

Provide a ceramic food dish. Do not use plastic. Feed your gerbils a quality mix made specifically for gerbils. We recommend Supreme brand Gerri Gerbil Food. We usually have Gerri Gerbil food available for purchase at our adoption events for \$4.76 a bag plus tax. It is also available at some pet stores and always available online at www.petfooddirect.com and a variety of other online retailers. **Do not** use Kaytee, Hartz, L&M, or Nutriphase products. They contain a controversial antioxidant preservative called ethoxyquin that is linked to

cancer, organ damage, birth defects, and other serious health problems. Gerbils enjoy a variety of fresh vegetables a few times a week. Gerbils often enjoy, among other things, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, green pepper, parsley, peas, and red pepper. Fresh fruit can be used as a treat. Gerbils often enjoy, among other things, apples, bananas, blueberries, grapes, kiwi, melon, peaches, pears, and strawberries. Gerbils may also enjoy, in small quantities, whole oats, spray millet, whole wheat bread, pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, tofu, and hard-boiled or scrambled egg. Use common sense when feeding your gerbils, and introduce new foods slowly. Avoid iceberg lettuce, dried corn, raw beans, potato eyes, green potato, green parts of tomatoes, garlic, chocolate, processed foods, and any sugary or salty foods. Do not give your gerbils a mineral or salt wheel. They are not necessary or healthy. Mineral and salt wheels are made with glue, and salt wheels are bleached. You can give your gerbils natural wood chews that have not been artificially colored and/or dried apple branches from apple trees that have not been sprayed with pesticides.

HAY

Gerbils enjoy handfuls of timothy hay or orchard grass several times a week. They like to play in it, nibble, it and add it to their nests. Hay can be found at pet stores. Avoid alfalfa hay.

EXERCISE and PLAY

Gerbils need and enjoy an exercise wheel. The exercise wheel should be at least eight inches in diameter. If you give them a plastic wheel, they will (most likely) chew it up and could possibly ingest some plastic. You can use a wire mesh wheel or a wire-rung wheel—but wire rung wheels **MUST** be modified first to make them safe. It's dangerous for gerbils to run on a wheel with rungs. Their feet, legs, and/or tail can slip between the rungs, get caught, and break. To make a wire wheel safe, cover it with masking tape. Then you have a wheel with a solid running surface that the gerbils can't chew to pieces. Solid metal exercise wheels are available online. Flip the exercise wheel upside down, and attach the base of the wheel to the screen lid of the aquarium with twist ties. That will keep the wheel clear of the bedding, and the gerbils won't be able to knock it down and bury it. Gerbils love to chew. Provide your gerbils with safe items to chew on everyday. It gives them something to do, and it keeps their teeth worn down. You can give them hay, cardboard toilet and paper towel tubes, natural wood chews, dried apple branches from trees that have not been sprayed with pesticides, and other similar items. Gerbils need time out of their habitat everyday. You can let them run around a gerbil-proofed room, or you can use a large Rubbermaid tub as a playpen. Another good playpen is the Grrreat Wall, which can be ordered online. Gerbils can easily get out of fence-type playpens. **NEVER** put your gerbils in an exercise ball. Exercise balls are dangerous and stressful for all animals.

DUST BATH

Gerbils often enjoy a dust bath a few times a week. The bathing dust/sand can be purchased online and at most pet stores. It is often found with the chinchilla supplies. Put the dust/sand in a ceramic bowl for bathing fun. It usually works best to offer the dust bath in the exercise area instead of in the aquarium. You can reuse the sand as long as it is clean and not soiled by urine, hay, food, etc.

HANDLING

Before you pick your gerbils up, make sure you have clean hands that do not smell like food. Make sure your gerbils are fully awake and aware of your presence. Scoop your gerbils up gently using both hands, a cup, or a cardboard tube. **NEVER** pick your gerbils up by the tail, not even the base of the tail. The tail can break off or the skin can rip, leaving exposed bone.

Interested in gerbils?

Please email gerbils@smallangelsrescue.org or call 301-668-0404. You can see our adoptable animals online at www.smallangels.petfinder.com.