

Rat Care Information

Rats are smart, clean and engaging animals. They live an average of two to three years. Rats have poor eyesight but good hearing and a good sense of smell. Rats are nocturnal. They prefer to sleep during the day, and they need attention and playtime in the evening. Rats are very social animals and need the companionship of their own species. It is unnatural for them to live alone. Rats should always be kept in at least pairs, either the same gender or spayed and neutered. Rats enjoy grooming together, eating together, playing together, curling up to sleep together, and just being together. Introductions between single rats can be successful if handled properly and patiently. For more information about introducing rats, check out:

<http://www.rmca.org/Resources/aintro.txt>
<http://www.ratfanclub.org/newrat.html>
http://ratguide.com/care/behavior/introducing_rats.php

HOUSING

There is no such thing as a habitat that is too big. Your rats will be spending a majority of their time in their cage, so it should be as big as possible. It should be safe, roomy, comfortable and interesting. The cage should provide a minimum of two and a half cubic feet of space per rat housed in the cage.

Any levels in the cage should be solid, not wire. Animals should never be made to stand on wire. Standing on wire is extremely painful and will cause wounds, sores, foot deformities and arthritis. Wire levels can be made safe by covering them with Magic Mats (available in pet stores), ceramic or vinyl tiles, cardboard (like cereal boxes), coroplast, plexiglass, grass mats or other similar materials.

We recommend Martin's Cages. The website is www.martinscages.com. They are located in PA and ship quickly. We require at least a R-680 Rat Lodge or R-685 Rat Retreat. Powder coated cages last longer than galvanized cages and are nicer on little rat paws. (Although, the levels should be covered.) The Midwest Critter Nation 162 is also a very nice habitat. (Not to be confused with the Ferret Nation.) The Critter Nation is available from several online retailers and prices vary. Check out "The Grotto" at <http://www.dapper.com.au/grotto.htm> for the ultimate in rat housing inspiration!

Rats should never be kept in aquariums. Aquariums are not large enough. They do not provide proper ventilation, do not allow for adequate enrichment items and they isolate your rats from their environment.

Use the Rat Cage Calculator to figure out how many rats a habitat will house. Remember to click on 2.5 cubic feet and Imperial (inches). <http://www.rattycorner.com/odds/calc.shtml>

Make sure to clean your rats' habitat at least twice a week.

BEDDING

Use Carefresh Bedding. It is the safest and healthiest bedding choice for your rats. 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 are poisonous to all animals! We usually have 50 Liter bags of Carefresh bedding available for purchase at our adoption events.

HIDE-AWAY

Rats enjoy a cozy space for sleeping and relaxation. Provide a plastic igloo or other similar hide-away. If your rats chew excessively on their plastic igloo, you will need to remove it and provide a different hide-away. Wooden hide-aways are not recommended for rats. They can be difficult to clean and can hold odor. Use paper towels or old t-shirts/sheets for nesting material. Do not use the commercial "fluff" from the store. It is unsafe. Commercial fluff can become wrapped around limbs and/or bind up in an animal's intestines if swallowed.

Rats LOVE hammocks and cubes. For the best, check out...

www.dearpiehammocks.com
www.wonderrodent.com

Mention Small Angels Rescue when you order, and a donation will be made to the rescue!

WATER

Use a 16 ounce (minimum) 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. Give your rats fresh water everyday. Filtered water is strongly recommended.

FOOD

Provide a ceramic food dish. Do not use plastic. We recommend having one bowl for dry food and a separate bowl for fresh foods.

We recommend **Innova Senior dog food** as a base diet for rats. (Not to be confused with Innova Senior Plus). This is the only dog food we recommend for rats. It is made with human grade ingredients and does not contain corn, wheat, chemicals or preservatives. Innova Senior is available through the rescue, and you can check out <http://www.naturapet.com/where-to-buy/> to find a retailer in your area.

Oxbow Regal Rat is an acceptable choice. It is one of the better commercial foods. However, we find that many rats do not like it. We are also concerned that it contains:

Soybean Meal – cheap protein filler

Soybean Hulls – cheap non-nutritional filler

Fish Meal – all fish meal not destined for human consumption must be preserved with Ethoxyquin

Menadione Sodium Bisulfite Complex – causes several health issues, see link

<http://www.dogfoodproject.com/index.php?page=menadione>

DO NOT use any Kaytee, Hartz, L&M or Nutriphase products. They contain a controversial antioxidant preservative called Ethoxyquin which is linked to cancer, organ damage, birth defects and other serious health problems.

Rats need and benefit from a widely varied diet that includes daily fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and protein sources.

Rats enjoy a variety of fresh vegetables. Rats often enjoy, among other things, asparagus, avocado, basil, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, corn (fresh) cucumber, green pepper, okra, parsley, peas, red pepper, spinach, sprouts, squash, sweet potato (cooked) and tomatoes.

Fresh fruit can be used as a treat. Rats often enjoy, among other things, apples, bananas, blueberries, cherries (pitted), cranberries, grapes, kiwi, melon, papaya, peaches, pears, pineapple, plums and strawberries.

Rats may also enjoy whole oats, spray millet, cooked brown rice, cooked pasta, whole wheat bread, coconut, pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, sesame seeds, tofu (packaged) and hard boiled or scrambled egg.

AVOID: wild insects, dairy products, iceberg lettuce, dried corn, raw dry beans, potato eyes, green potato, raw potato, raw sweet potato, green parts of tomatoes, green bananas, rhubarb, onion, garlic, bulk tofu (packaged is fine), chocolate, peanuts, peanut butter, carbonated drinks, processed foods and any sugary or salty foods. Male rats should not have citrus fruits/products.

Use common sense when feeding your rats, and introduce new foods slowly. (Rats can not burp or throw up.)

For more in-depth diet information check out:

<http://glutenfreevegan.wordpress.com/2007/12/03/rat-diet/>

www.ratfanclub.org/diet.html

<http://www.ratsrule.com/diet.html>

http://www.petratscanada.com/forbidden_foods.htm

Do not give your rats 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 rats natural wood chews that have not been artificially colored and/or apple branches from apple trees that have been dried at least three months and have not been sprayed with pesticides.

EXERCISE and PLAY

Some rats will use an exercise wheel and some will not. If you choose to provide a wheel, it should be at least 12 inches in diameter.....15 inches in diameter for large rats. It should provide a solid running surface. Never use an exercise wheel with metal or plastic bars/rungs.

Their feet, legs and/or tail can slip between the rungs, get caught and break. We recommend the Wobust Wodent Wheel, the Giant Comfort Wheel, the Giant Silent Spinner or the Chin Spin. All of the wheels are available on-line, and Comfort Wheels and Silent Spinners can be found in some pet stores.

Rats need and enjoy time out of their habitat everyday to run around. They should get at least an hour out of their cage everyday, but more is better. You can let them run around a rat proofed room. The "Grrreat Wall" is a good playpen for rats and can be ordered on-line. Rats can easily get out of the fence-type playpens. Rats are very curious and smart. A busy rat is a happy rat. A bored rat will become depressed. Rats enjoy tunnels, hammocks, bird toys, dig boxes, nest boxes, ladders, paper bags, ropes, towel tents, stray socks, chew toys and more. For lots of fun toy and activity ideas, visit www.dapper.com.au/toys.htm.

NEVER put your rats in an exercise ball. Exercise balls are dangerous and stressful for all animals. Rodents have poor eyesight. In a ball their vision is even more limited. They always run into furniture and walls, which they don't see coming. It's like a car crash for them. They back up to try and get away and end up crashing into something else. It's very stressful. In addition, paws can get pinched/broken in the air slits. Animals can become over-heated. If they go to the bathroom in the ball, they have to run in their own waste. Furthermore, their great joy in life is exploring and checking things out with their paws and noses. They can't do that in a plastic bubble. Provide a large, safe play area for your rats and trash the ball!

HANDLING

Before you pick your rats up, make sure you have clean hands that do not smell like food. Make sure your rats are fully awake and aware of your presence. Scoop your rats up gently using both hands. **NEVER** pick your rats 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 rats?

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

Websites:

www.dapper.com.au www.petrats.org www.ratbehavior.org
www.ratfanclub.org www.rmca.org www.ratsrule.com
www.goosemoose.com www.herorat.org www.itsaratsworld.com