

Rat Care Information

Rats are smart, clean and engaging animals. They live an average of two and a half 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 whenever possible -- 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, Kat's Rat Mats (www.javakittie.com) 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. The wire levels of Martin's Cages need to be covered with a safe material (mentioned above).

Small Angels has Martin's R-680 Rat Lodge cages in stock and available for purchase at cost. In fact, it's cheaper than ordering yourself – as you do not have to pay shipping. Please let us know if you would like to purchase a cage from the rescue.

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.

There are other appropriate rat habitats. Please check with us before purchasing a cage. Some cages are the correct dimensions but have other problems. We are happy to assist you in choosing an appropriate habitat and can save you time, money and frustration.

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.

Not sure if your cage is big enough? Use the Rat Cage Calculator to figure out how many rats a habitat will house. Remember to click on 2.5 cubic feet and click on Imperial (inches) before calculating. <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 available at most pet stores and through Small Angels Rescue. 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 (cheaper than the pet store).

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 absorb urine, be difficult to clean and can hold odor. Use paper towels or old t-shirts/sheets for nesting material. Do not use the commercial nesting "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.

HAMMOCKS

Rats LOVE hammocks and cubes and they are a must for every rat habitat. For the best, check out...

www.dearpiehammocks.com

www.wonderrodent.com

www.javakittie.com

www.andieshammocks.webs.com

www.freewebs.com/theratstash

Mention Small Angels Rescue when you order from DearPie and WonderRodent, and a donation will be made to the rescue! JavaKittie also donates to rescue groups.

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, especially if you are on city water.

FOOD

Provide two ceramic food bowls – one bowl for dry food and a separate bowl for fresh foods. Do not use plastic bowls.

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, no ingredients from China and does not contain corn, wheat, chemicals or preservatives. Innova Senior is available for purchase 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 have found that most 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. The more natural foods incorporated into their diet, the healthier the rats.

Rats enjoy a variety of fresh vegetables. Rats often enjoy, among other things, asparagus, avocado, basil, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, corn (fresh), cucumber, 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. **Please note that male rats should not have citrus.**

Rats may also enjoy whole oats, barley, millet, kashi, spelt, quinoa, kamut, cooked brown rice,

cooked pasta (especially whole wheat pasta and vegetable pasta), coconut, pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, tofu (packaged, not bulk) and hard boiled or scrambled egg.

We also highly recommend incorporating **goji berries** and **Green Mush** into your rats' daily diet. Goji berries are considered a SuperFood. They are packed with vitamins, trace minerals, antioxidants and amino acids. They strengthen the immune system and promote longevity. Just a few a day will be a great boost for your rats' health. (Wonderful for people too!) Green Mush by HealthForce is also a SuperFood and was originally developed for a rat! It's a completely natural, highly absorbable, non-toxic, pesticide free, whole food, green plant based powder. Mix with water, juice, soft fruit (like banana) or canned pumpkin and serve for increased lifespan, stronger immune system, accelerated healing and greater energy. There is even substantial testimonial evidence that Green Mush has helped several animals with hind leg paralysis. It's great for other companion animals too – dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, ferrets, mice.

Goji berries and Green Mush are both available at www.naturalzing.com.

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. Again, 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.

Check out...

www.busybunny.com

www.forotheotherlivingthings.com

www.leithpetwerks.com

...for a variety of fun and chew-safe toys. Rotate toys every few days to keep life interesting.

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. It is important to rotate toys every few days to keep life interesting. 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. It is painful and the tail can break off or the skin can rip leaving exposed bone.

We welcome questions!

Please email rats@smallangelsrescue.org or call 301-668-0404 for more information.

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.ratguide.com

www.itsaratsworld.com

www.goosemoose.com

www.herorat.org