

Rat Care Information

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

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:

- www.rmca.org/Resources/aintro.txt
- 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 cubic feet of space per rat housed in the cage. 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 cut cereal boxes), or other similar material. We recommend Martin's Cages (www.martinscages.com). We recommend at least a R-670 Rat Cabin (or larger) for a pair of rats. Powder-coated cages seem to last longer than galvanized cages, and powder coated cages are nicer on little rat paws. 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 isolate your rats from their environment. Clean your rats' habitat at least twice a week. Check out The Grotto at www.dapper.com.au for the ultimate in rat housing inspiration!

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 shavings are poisonous to all animals! We have 50-liter bags of Carefresh bedding available for purchase at our adoption events for \$13.99 a bag plus tax.

HIDEAWAY

Rats enjoy a cozy space for sleeping and relaxation. Provide a plastic igloo or other similar hideaway. If your rats chew excessively on their plastic igloo, remove it and provide a different type of hideaway. Wooden hideaways are not recommended for rats. They can be difficult to clean and can hold odor. Use unscented toilet paper, paper towels, or old T-shirts/fabric 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 a 16-ounce or 32-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. Give your rats fresh water everyday. Filtered water is best.

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 Oxbow Regal Rat food or Innova Senior dog food. Supreme brand Reggie Rat food is an acceptable second choice. Oxbow is available from www.oxbowhay.com, www.ferretstore.com, and a variety of other online retailers. Innova is available online. Oxbow and Innova are also available at some independent pet stores, veterinary practices, and through Small Angels Rescue. We usually have Supreme Reggie Rat food available for purchase for \$4.76 a bag plus tax and Oxbow Regal Rat for \$9.19 a bag plus tax at our adoption events. Reggie Rat 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. Rats need and benefit from a 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, cucumber, green pepper, okra, parsley, peas, red pepper, spinach, squash, and sweet potato (cooked). Fresh fruit can be used as a treat. Rats often enjoy, among other things, apples, bananas, blueberries, cherries (pitted), cranberries, grapes, kiwi, melon, peaches, pears, and strawberries. Rats may also enjoy whole oats, spray millet, cooked brown rice, cooked pasta, whole wheat bread, pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, tofu, and hardboiled or scrambled egg. Use common sense when feeding your rats, and introduce new foods slowly. (Rats cannot burp or throw up.) Avoid iceberg lettuce, dried corn, raw beans, potato eyes, green potato, green parts of tomatoes, garlic, chocolate, processed foods, and sugary or salty foods. Male rats should not have citrus fruits/products. Check out www.ratfanclub.org/diet.html for more in-depth diet information. 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 dried apple branches from apple trees that have not been sprayed with pesticides.

EXERCISE and PLAY

Some rats will use an exercise wheel and some will not. The exercise wheel should be at least 12 inches in diameter. 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 online, 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 online. Rats can easily escape 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 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.

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.