

Hamster Care Information

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

Hamsters are sweet and curious animals. They live an average of two to three years. Hamsters have poor eyesight but good hearing and a good sense of smell. Hamsters are nocturnal. They prefer to sleep during the day, and they need attention and playtime in the evening. Syrian hamsters are solitary animals and should be kept by themselves. Syrian hamsters kept together will fight and injure each other or potentially kill each other. Dwarf hamsters are social and enjoy living together in same gender pairs or trios, if they have been raised together. Introductions between separate single dwarf hamsters are usually not successful.

HOUSING

There is no such thing as a habitat that is too big. Your hamster will be spending a majority of their time in the cage, so it should be as big as possible. It should be safe, roomy, comfortable, and interesting. Hamsters are well kept in a wire cage with a solid tray bottom, solid levels, and a coated wire top. We recommend the All Living Things 24" Small Animal Home or a minimum 20-gallon aquarium for Syrian hamsters. For dwarf hamsters, we recommend the All Living Things 24" Small Animal Home, a minimum 20-gallon aquarium, or the Marchioro Happy Lux III. 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 cut cereal boxes), or other similar material. If you choose to keep your hamster in an aquarium, it should be at least 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. Crittertrails, Habitrails, and/or SAM houses are not recommended. They are poorly made, break easily, do not provide proper ventilation, are very difficult to clean, and harbor odor. Clean your hamster's habitat at least once a week.

BEDDING

Use Carefresh Bedding. It is the safest and healthiest bedding choice for your hamster. 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 for \$13.99 a bag plus tax.

HIDEAWAY

Hamsters enjoy a cozy space for sleeping and relaxation. Provide a plastic igloo, a wooden nesting box, or other similar hideaway. If your hamster chews excessively on their plastic igloo, remove it and provide a different type. 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. Give your hamster fresh water everyday. Filtered water is best.

FOOD

Provide a ceramic food dish. Do not use plastic. Feed your hamster a quality mix made specifically for hamsters. We recommend Supreme brand Hazel Hamster Food. We usually have Hazel Hamster 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. Hamsters need and benefit from a varied diet that includes small amounts of fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and protein sources. Hamsters enjoy a variety of fresh vegetables every day, such as, among other things, asparagus, avocado, basil, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, green pepper, okra, parsley, peas, red pepper, spinach, and squash. Fresh fruit can be given as an occasional treat to Syrian hamsters, but not to dwarf hamsters, who are prone to diabetes. Syrian hamsters often enjoy, among other things, apples, bananas, blueberries, cherries (pitted), cranberries, grapes, kiwi, melon, peaches, pears, and strawberries. Hamsters 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 hamster, 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. See our publication on diabetic diets for dwarf hamsters for more information on what to feed dwarf hamsters. Do not give your hamster 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 hamster 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

Hamsters need and enjoy an exercise wheel. The exercise wheel should be at least eight inches in diameter. It should provide a solid running surface. Never use an exercise wheel with metal or plastic bars/rungs. Their feet/legs can slip between the rungs, get caught, and break. We recommend the Wodent Wheel or the Large Comfort Wheel for Syrian hamsters. Dwarf hamsters can use a Wodent Wheel, a Comfort Wheel, or a Silent Spinner. All of the wheels are available online, and Comfort Wheels and Silent Spinners can be found in most pet stores. Hamsters need time out of their habitat everyday. You can let them run around a hamster-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. Hamsters can easily escape fence-type playpens. Hamsters love to explore. They like anything they can climb in, on, over, under, and through. Give your hamster toilet paper tubes, little boxes, bridges, blocks, and other toys to check out and play with. **NEVER** put your hamster in an exercise ball. Exercise balls are dangerous and stressful for all animals.

DUST BATH

Dwarf hamsters often enjoy a dust bath a few times a week. The bathing dust/sand can be purchased on-line 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 cage. You can reuse the sand as long as it is clean and not soiled by urine, food, etc.

HANDLING

Before you pick your hamster up, make sure you have clean hands that do not smell like food. Make sure your hamster is fully awake and aware of your presence. Scoop your hamster up slowly and gently using both hands.

Interested in hamsters?

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