

# Gerbil Care



## Background

Length: 4 inches, not including tail

Lifespan: 3-5 years

Cost per year: \$300

Good with kids?: Great for families with children 5 & up, but young caretakers should be supervised by an adult.

Fun fact: These desert dwellers don't urinate that much, so they produce less odor than other pet rodents.

## Food

- Gerbil mix, made up of pellets, grains, seeds and dried veggies, should be available to your pets at all times. Some gerbils tend to pick out the tasty, high-fat sunflower seeds first, so you may wish to pick them out and feed them to your pets as treats. You may also feed gerbils a high-quality rodent chow (called rat blocks).
- Fresh, clean water should be available to your gerbils 24/7. A water bottle with a drinking tube that attaches to the cage is the best way to go.
- Offer small, bite-sized bits of fresh veggies (daily) and fruits (every other day).
  - >> Recommended: peas, broccoli, carrots, apples, bananas
  - >> Avoid: chocolate, candy, junk food, onions, uncooked beans
- Your gerbils may enjoy small bits of sugarless breakfast cereals and whole wheat bread as a treat.

## Cage & Environment

- Gerbils are social, so it's a good idea to get at least two. If possible, try to get gerbils from the same litter. Don't keep males and females together, as they will breed.
- Keep your gerbils in a wire cage or aquarium with a wire mesh top (10 gallon minimum for 2 gerbils). Try to get the biggest cage you can afford—your pets will appreciate the extra space.
- Keep the cage indoors, away from drafts and extreme temperatures, in an environment maintained at 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

- Keep the cage indoors, away from drafts and direct sunlight.
- Line the cage with at least 2 inches of bedding (see Supply Checklist for recommendations). Do not use cedar or pine chips, which contain oils that are dangerous to gerbils. Provide shredded paper towels or tissue paper so your pets can make nests.
- Your gerbils will need a cave for sleeping and resting, such as a small flower pot or box. A smooth, clean stone or rock makes a great lookout point for your curious pets.

## Behavior & Handling

- Gerbils are friendly by nature and rarely bite, but you'll need to get your pets used to you—and used to being handled. Start by feeding them small treats. When they're comfortable with that, scoop them into your hand. Never pick up a gerbil by the tail, as this can cause injury.
- Once your gerbils are hand-tamed, allow them outside of their cage for a supervised period of time every day. Keep them in one room or screened-off area that's been secured so they can't escape or get lost. Gerbils don't have good eyesight, so take extra care that they don't fall or otherwise hurt themselves. And remove all electrical cords from the area, please!

## Exercise & Toys

- Gerbils LOVE to play! Provide your pets with plenty of extra bedding, hay or shredded paper towels for digging, and PVC pipes and cardboard tubes from paper towel and toilet paper rolls for tunneling. Your pets like toys, too, but avoid anything made of soft plastic—it will almost certainly be chewed to bits!
- Give your pets appropriate chew toys to help wear down their teeth, which grow continuously.
  - >> Recommended: unpainted, untreated wood or twig, hard dog biscuits

## Daily Care

- Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale/uneaten food daily. Clean and refill the water bottle every day.
- Clean cage completely once a week by replacing dirty bedding and scrubbing down the cage with warm, soapy water.

## Signs of Illness

- Bring your gerbils to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly appointment if you think one of your pets is sick—seek help immediately. Common signs that something isn't right include sneezing, lethargy, diarrhea and difficulty breathing.
- Gerbils are susceptible to external parasites such as fleas and lice. If you think your pets are infested, consult a veterinarian.

## Gerbil Supply Checklist

- 10-gallon aquarium (minimum for 2 gerbils) with wire cover or wire cage
- Gerbil mix or rodent chow (rat blocks)
- Aspen or hardwood shavings or processed corn cob bedding
- Hay, extra shavings or shredded paper towels for digging
- Small boxes or flower pots
- Exercise wheel (solid, no rungs)
- Cardboard tubes (recycle from paper towel and toilet paper rolls) or PVC tubes
- Attachable water bottle with drinking tube
- Unpainted, untreated piece of wood or twig, hard dog biscuit or safe chew toy

Source: [ASPCA Gerbil Care](#)