

What is a Domestic Ferret?

Ferrets are related to the European polecat. The Latin name is *Mustela Putorius Furo*. Research has shown that ferrets have been domestic for over 2000 years, and were preferred by royalty.

A domestic ferret is a small mammal weighing anywhere from 1 to 5 pounds. Domestic ferrets are not the same as wild ferrets.

Ferrets are extremely inquisitive, very intelligent and very playful animals that will enthral you with their “weasel war dance”, their chattering (what ferret fanatics call “dooking”, and their personal characteristics.

Where to they live?

Domestic ferrets should live in a cage in your home (not in a garage or outside in a shed). They should never be exposed to the extreme elements of heat or cold. Most ferret owners either have a “ferret-proofed room” or a two-three tiered cage. This is to provide separate levels or areas for eating, sleeping, and playing.

Ferrets should never be allowed to freely roam the house unsupervised. In addition, ferrets, like any other animal, should never be left unsupervised with children and other pets.

Are ferrets good pets?

There are many advantages to owning a ferret – just ask any ferret owner – however, they are very specialized and unique in their needs.

If the ferret is treated with lots of tender loving care and respect, you will have a bundle of joy to play with.

Can you litter train a ferret?

Yes, you can train a ferret to use a litter box most of the time. With lots of persistence and patience you can get your ferret to use the litter box about 90% to 95% of the time.

Educate yourself prior to acquiring a ferret.

The best way to educate yourself is to talk to other ferret owners. If you don’t know any ferret owners, then purchase one of several books written by ferret owners, or search for ferret information sites on the internet. These resources will provide tips on ferret-proofing, handling, grooming, nipping, behaviour, and many other topics. Another good source for information is your local ferret club, shelter or rescue group. These are available in most major cities and the members would be happy to assist you.

What about the ferret “odour”?

Ferrets have a slight “musky” smell that is not unpleasant. This odour is distinct for two reasons: it is used to attract the opposite sex for mating purposes and it is also used as a defence.

If you acquire a ferret that has not been de-scented, don’t panic. This does not make them have a stronger scent than a de-scented ferret. Fortunately, most ferrets from shelters, breeders and pet stores are spayed and neutered, which helps reduce the odour.

Another myth about ferrets is how often they need to be bathed. It is common belief that the ferret should be bathed weekly or monthly. **THIS IS NOT TRUE.** Ferrets should only be bathed 3 to 4 times a year – preferably during shedding seasons. Over bathing produces more oil in their skin and actually causes their odour to increase.

Ferrets and children

Children who are not familiar with any pet should **NEVER** be left unsupervised with a ferret.

Ferrets are very hyper and can become very excited when they play. Poking fingers and objects will frighten them. If they feel threatened, they will naturally defend themselves.

Teach your children how to hold and play with a ferret. Limit play periods so they can get to know one another and learn from each other.

Do ferrets require shots?

Definitely! Ferrets need both rabies and distemper shots on an annual basis. As a ferret owner, it is your responsibility to provide the necessary vaccines for your pet.

Another important item is to ensure that you find a qualified veterinarian that has had experience with ferrets and who has extensive medical knowledge to diagnose problems and recommend treatments.

What do ferrets eat?

Ferrets require a high quality source of nutrition. Wherever possible, they should be fed a good quality food that is specially formulated for ferrets. An alternative would be kitten food with a high quantity of protein and fat and a low level of fibre.

In order to keep your ferret happy and healthy, please ensure it is eating the right combination of food. If you are still unsure what to feed your ferret, call your local ferret shelter. Please note, not all “ferret foods” have the proper nutrients for ferrets.

Ferrets and other pets

All pets of a different species require constant supervision. Ferrets are very curious by nature and can play rough with each other. They might accidentally “nip” other pets too hard, which can cause the other pet to retaliate with enough force to harm the ferret. In addition, large birds can be dangerous to a ferret and rodents are a natural prey for ferrets.

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A FERRET FACT SHEET



**Domestic Ferrets are
Not Wild Animals**