**Ferret Care**

**General**

* Average life span is 5 to 8 years
* Adult females weigh about 3/4 to 1.5 pounds
* Adult males weigh about 1.5 to 3 pounds
* During the winter, ferrets can gain up to 40% of their body weight.
* Ferrets are mustelids and area related to weasels, skunks, and polecats.

**Behavior**

* Ferrets are very playful and energetic and are happiest in pairs or groups
* Ferrets sleep 16 to 20 hours a day, though this may vary
* Ferret proofing your home is very important. Check for holes in cabinets, behind the fridge, doorways, couches and especially recliner chairs and sleeper sofas! Ferrets have been crushed in the reclining/folding mechanism.
* Ferrets are like any other animal- they need to be trained not to bite. Never hit your ferret for biting, or flick them in the face. This can cause aggression and damage to their sensitive nose. A good method is to grasp the ferret by the scruff of the neck until they yawn, then release. Some ferrets respond well to 1-2 minute time outs in a small carrier.

**Care**

* Ferrets prefer a specific area, usually a corner, for toileting.
* A large square high backed pan is ideal. Adults may not be able to fit all 4 feet in a corner pan.
* Good litter choices include recycled paper litter (Yesterdays News), specialized ferret litter (Marshalls), wood pellets (such as those used for horse bedding) or old newspapers.
* **Clumping and clay cat litters should not be used because ferrets scoot their bottoms after toileting and these litter can cause a “cement effect” on a damp bottom.**
* Wood shavings should not be used as they can cause respiratory issues from the dust and oils released.
* Ferrets are generally clean animals; therefore, bathing more than 1-2 times a year is unnecessary. Over bathing can result in increased odor, due to the overcompensation of the skin oil glands. When bathing is necessary, specialized ferret shampoo or baby shampoo should be used.
* Nails should be clipped every 2 weeks or as needed, and ears cleaned the same time. Ferret ear cleaner is recommended.
* Round exercise balls or wheels should never be used- these may cause severe damage to a ferret’s back.

**Housing**

* Ferrets need playtime out of the cage at least 4 hours a day.
* A cage of a minimum of 2ft by 2ft by 3ft is needed.
* Old aquariums are not suitable; they do not provide proper ventilation.
* Wire floors and shelves are not ideal for a ferret’s sensitive feet. Toes can get caught and broken in wire mesh.
* Multi- level cages are ideal for a ferret to roam, climb, and perch.
* Old towels, sweatshirts, and blankets can be used as bedding. Most ferrets also appreciate a hammock or two, and a bed for sleeping

**Food**

* Ferrets need to eat about every 4 hours due to their fast metabolisms.
* Food and water needs to be accessible at all times. Lock on dishes can be used to deter a ferret who flips his bowl. Bottles can be used, but tend to leak and may cause dental wear.
* Kibble needs to be at least 40% protein, 20% fat and have less than 3% fiber.
* Ideally, at least 4 of the first 6 ingredients in kibble should be meat based
* Ferrets are obligate carnivores meaning all grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, milk products, and all types of sugar (molasses, corn syrup, malt syrup) should be avoided. Feeding these items can contribute to disease (Insulinoma) and blockages in your ferret.
* It is advisable to mix two or more brands of foods for variety
* Appropriate treats: cooked/ raw chicken and turkey, cooked pork or beef, cooked/raw egg, a drop of olive oil, and plain chicken baby food (no noodles or vegetables). A few drops of Ferretone/Fur-o-tone is usually well received. Beware of grains and sugars in some commercial treats.

**Spaying & Neutering**

* All pet store ferrets have already been spayed/neutered and descented. Two black dots (tattoos) in a ferret’s ear means it has been fixed and descented by Marshall Farms. Path Valley farm ferrets are not tattooed, but are also fixed and descented.
* In female ferrets, spaying is essential if she is not going to be bred.
* If an unspayed female goes into heat and is not bred, she could develop aplastic anemia, a very serious condition which can cause death.

**Health**

* Vet checkups are recommended at least once a year, and then more frequently as the ferret ages.
* Ferrets are susceptible to canine distemper (100% fatal if contracted) and should also be vaccinated for rabies (less fatal, but required in most areas) - both vaccines are available from a vet.
* Baby ferrets should receive distemper shots at 9, 11, and 14 weeks of age. If they are over that age, or the history is unknown, they should receive one shot, and then a second 3 weeks later.
* Baby ferrets should receive one rabies shot at 14 weeks.
* Adrenal disease, pancreatic tumors (insulinoma), and lymphoma are common in ferrets over 3 years of age.
* Most diseases can be effectively treated given early diagnosis
* Note: ferrets are most comfortable in lower temperatures and should not be kept in temps over 80\* or they risk developing heatstroke.
* During shedding season it is important to brush your ferret and give a hairball preventative such as raw egg yolk, unscented Vaseline, or plain canned pumpkin.

**Resources**

* Forum.Ferret.com
* Holistic Ferret forum
* FerretEdu.weebly.com
* Ferrets for Dummies by Kim Schilling
* Animal Planet- Ferrets