



Ferrets

Mustela putorius furo
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Ferrets have been domesticated for at least 2,500 years, and possibly as long as 3,500 years, about as long as the domestic cat. They were raised to hunt rabbits or for their fur throughout this history. Most ferrets live 5-7 years, but some can live up to 11 years. Male ferrets weigh 2-4lb, and females 1-2lb. Intact males are called hobs. Neutered males are called gibbs. Intact females are called jills. Spayed females are called sprites. Baby ferrets are called kits. Over 80% of ferrets in the US come from Marshall Farms. Blue tattoo dots in the right ear indicate a ferret came from Marshall farms. One dot means the animal is spayed or neutered. A second dot means it has also been de-scented. Ferrets that have not been de-scented may musk when upset, emitting a foul smelling substance. Ferrets are illegal to own in some states including California and Hawaii.

Health care: Ferrets can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend annual exams, including blood CBC and chemistry, urinalysis and fecal float to make sure your pet is healthy, before 5 years of age. After 5 years of age, ferrets are considered geriatric and diagnostics are recommended every 6 months. These diagnostics are especially important in ferrets over 3 years old as significant health problems, primarily cancers, are common after this age and are more easily managed if caught early. Females that are not going to be bred should be spayed, as not doing so will lead to a serious health problem, which can be fatal! Neutering helps prevent reproductive tumors, unexpected pregnancies, odor, and can be helpful with behavior modification. New ferrets should be screened for ear mites as it is a very common but easily treatable condition. Common health problems in ferrets include cancer: insulinoma, lymphoma and adrenal carcinoma; GI disease due to inappropriate diet or eating non-digestible objects; and dental disease. Remember, the sooner we see a problem, the easier it is to treat!

Vaccines and preventative medication:

- Rabies vaccines are required for ferrets in most areas. The 1st vaccine should be given at 12 weeks old. Rabies vaccines should then be boosted yearly.
- Distemper: 1st vaccine at 6 weeks old (most Marshall Farms ferrets have already received their 1st distemper), 2nd vaccine at 8-10 weeks old, 3rd vaccine at 12 weeks old, and yearly boosters.
- Ferrets that go outside should be given heartworm preventative.

Diet: Ferrets are complete carnivores. They do not digest fiber or carbohydrates well. Their diets should contain as much protein as possible, at least 35% protein and 15% fat. At least the first ingredient, and preferably the first 3 ingredients, should be some kind of meat. A dry ferret diet (Wysong [the dry food diets not the raw diet], Zupreem, or Mazuri brands) or high quality kitten food (Royal Canin, Hills, Iams, Waltham brands). Avoid grain free diets which contain peas, as these can cause the formation of urinary stones in ferrets. Raw meat is not recommended as it may contain bacteria or other pathogens that could make your pet or you sick. Offer dishes of dry food free choice (as much as the ferret wants to eat). Give ½ inch strip of laxatone supplement per day for hair-balls. No treats are recommended other than linatone fatty acid supplement: ½ teaspoon per day.

More on the back!

Husbandry concerns: Ferrets are very curious animals. They will climb on, squeeze under or crawl into just about anywhere they can. Ferrets should always be supervised when they are outside their cage. Giving ferrets free roam of the house is not recommended. Ferret-proofing rooms they have access to when outside their cage, even when supervised is very important to keep them from becoming injured. Ferrets of all ages, though particularly young ones, will eat non-edible things like rubber, cloth, plastic and wood chips, which can become stuck in their stomach or intestines and require surgical removal! Ferrets are also very attracted to sweet tasting things that can be toxic to them, like household cleaners or anti-freeze. If your ferret has ingested something it should not have, please contact your veterinarian as soon as possible! Ferret cages should be wire sided for good ventilation, but ferrets should not be standing on bare wire as it may hurt their feet. Use shredded paper, newspaper or pelleted paper bedding. Do not use wood chip bedding as ferrets may eat it. Do not use pine or cedar bedding as the oils and strong smell in the wood can be irritating. Ferrets are sensitive to high temperatures and should be kept between 55-68F. Ferrets can be litter box trained. This is most easily done by placing the litter box where the ferret goes to the bathroom most often, and then gradually moving it to a more convenient location, once they start using it. Nail trims can be done every 10-14 days using human or small dog nail clippers while avoiding the quick of the nail. This can be done by a veterinarian, if the ferret is not cooperative for nail trims at home. Ferrets can be bathed using baby shampoo.

Seasonality: Ferrets have a seasonal pelting cycle with shorter hair in the summer and longer hair in the winter. The pattern of their mask may change between seasons. This change is often less dramatic in neutered ferrets. Ferrets' weight tends to change with the seasons as well. Their weight is typically at its lowest in the summer and highest in the winter. There can be a 40% weight difference between the winter and summer.

Coloration: Ferrets come in over 30 color varieties: Fitch is the wild color type with a black mask, guard hairs, feet and tail and a cream colored undercoat.

- Albino: all white with pink eyes
- Silver: white or silver fur with black eyes and white feet
- Pastel or cream: light colored mask with dark eyes
- Cinnamon: reddish guard hairs
- Siamese: brown guard hairs
- Panda*: white head down to the shoulders
- Blaze*: white stripe from face over head and neck

*Research has shown that ferrets with prominent white on the head and face, such as blaze or pandas, are much more likely to be partially or completely deaf. This is a congenital condition known as Waardenburg syndrome. There is no treatment, but ferrets do not rely heavily on their sense of hearing and affected animals are still good pets, though they should not be bred. However, they may seem like bullies when playing with other ferrets, as they do not react to distress calls when their playmate has had enough.

