



RATS AS PETS:

Rats make fascinating pets. They are friendly, gentle sociable little animals. The domestic rat is a very different creature from its wild relative. Pet rats have come about from years of domestic breeding.

Once you have owned a rat you will be charmed by their antics. Unlike mice, rats do not smell. They don't bark, need to be taken for walks or need obedience training. So a rat is a wonderful pet alternative to a cat or dog if you do not want such a big commitment or have the yard for a pet.

Best of all rats can be toilet trained and taught all sorts of tricks!

How long do they live?

Rats usually live for 2 to 3 years. Some have been known to live more than 4 years. Unfortunately, rats are very prone to tumours and respiratory diseases so if you notice signs of stress in your rat (e.g. blood around the nose or eyes, sneezing, weight loss or loss of appetite or lump on the body) consult your vet.

Rat Housing

Mesh cages with solid floors are the most suitable as the rat will not be able to chew through it. Walls & fittings should not be coated with toxic paint that a rat may ingest. Avoid cages with mesh floors as this will cause calluses on their feet and body. Alternatively, vinyl remnants make great 'floor coverings' for mesh shelves and floors, and they're easy to clean.

You will need to clean the cage at least once a week. Cleaning the cage involves removing old litter and washing & drying the cage using a commercial spray cage cleaner with anti bacterial agent. A mite & lice spray should also be used if the rats or cage are left outside for prolonged periods of the day.

Bedding

Shredded paper & paper-based or lucerne-based cat litter are suitable. Wood shavings are frowned upon these days as the little dust particles are known to block and damage the respiratory system.

Feeding

Rats are classified as opportunistic omnivores. That means they will eat almost anything. However to maintain a balanced diet a rat mix & rat pellets from a pet shop are ideal. Rats eat about 5grams of balanced pellets per 100grams of body weight. Food & water must be available at all times. Mixing hard & soft foods will benefit the rat's digestive system, however too many soft foods may cause diarrhoea.

Dangerous foods – Potato, rhubarb, avocado, onion, shallots, spicy foods, meat, dairy products & junk foods.

Worming

Rats require worming every three months from 12 weeks of age. The wormer comes in the form of a sweet syrup which most rats love. Administer in food, in a treat, on a spoon or with a syringe.

Teeth

Rat's teeth are always growing. To prevent dental problems provide lots of hard things to chew. Include hard fruit and vegetables, such as pumpkin, apples & carrots, as well as different flavoured, non-toxic wood chews bought from your local pet shop.

Handling

The correct way to handle a rat is to scoop it up from under the belly. Support their weight with both hands & place them either up against your chest, in your hands or in your lap. **DO NOT** pick them up by the tail as this can cause damage to their spine. Once they are used to being handled they will willingly crawl onto your hand. The more your rat is handled the quieter & more affectionate it will become. However, rats have a low tolerance to stress so it is important that your rat has some down time too. They will show you they are not happy by wriggling or biting. Supervision for children under seven or who are not used to rats is essential.

Introducing a pet rat into the home.

When you first bring your new pet home only handle it for fifteen minutes at a time in the first week (you can do this several times a day). Try putting them under your shirt or under your hair, this will allow them to get used to and recognise your scent, helping to establish a bond.

Housemates.

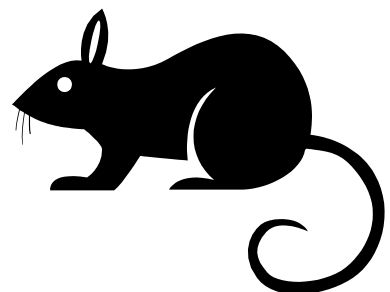
If the rat is to be left by itself for long periods of time you may consider getting two rats to keep each other company. Introducing females to each other is often easier than males. However, male rats can be desexed to help with aggression issues. **Remember to get two rats of the same sex so you don't end up with unplanned and unwanted pregnancies because they will breed all the time and you need to be able to find homes for all the babies!** If you do put a male with a female (even if the male is desexed) make sure you keep an eye on them because the male can stress the female so much that she gets very sick.

Extra tips.

Provide toys, pvc piping, toilet rolls, cubbies etc. Visit your local pet shop & see what toys & accessories are available. Be careful of extreme temperatures & other animals.

Best of all, rats are nocturnal so they'll sleep while you are at work/school and be ready and willing to play or cuddle when you are at home.

If you do decide to keep a rat as a pet you will have many hours of fun watching & playing with it.



This information is given in good faith to assist you with the care & maintenance of your pet rat.