



Nibbles Rodent &
Rabbit Rescue
www.nibbles.org.uk
Reg. Charity No.
160657

Our Guide to



Gerbils

What's Awesome About Gerbils

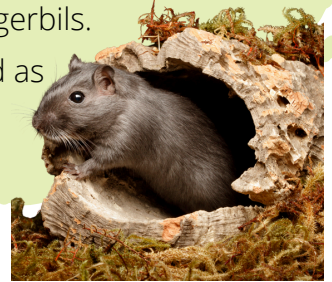
Gerbils are amazing little creatures which can bring a lot of joy to your family. These little rodents are highly active and great fun to watch as they scamper about.



Originally from desert environments these little critters are excellent diggers and create extensive burrow systems, using these as a place of safety and a way to escape the desert heat. This natural burrowing behaviour is hardwired and domestic gerbils need to be provided with the ability to create burrows of their own.

Gerbils drum their hind feet when they feel threatened or when startled to alert other members of the group to potential danger. In many cases this drumming is taken up by other gerbils.

Gerbils are generally very curious animals, and as a result can be difficult for young children to handle as they just want to explore.



Things to Think About

Of all the small rodent species gerbils have the longest lifespan of between 3-4 years, making them a longer term commitment. As social animals it is important to keep them in pairs or small groups, but it's also important to remember that gerbils can fall out. This is known as declanning, and is usually caused by over cleaning enclosures, removing the shared scent of the group from the environment. Once a week 1/4 of the substrate should be removed from the enclosure and replaced with fresh, along with spot cleaning any messy areas. Being desert dwelling animals they have evolved to conserve as much moisture as possible and therefore don't produce a lot of urine.

Gerbils are crepuscular, meaning that they are most active at dawn and dusk. They do tend to be less active during the day, but don't sleep in the same way hamsters do.



Diet

Gerbils enjoy a varied diet consisting of grains, seeds, fresh foods and meat protein.



A commercial mix containing seeds and grains is the best choice, but these can be hard to find. The next best option is a mix like Harry Hamster.

You can add to this mix with additional seeds, grains, dried flowers and dried insects such as meal worms.



Fresh veg and fruit should be offered in small amounts once or twice a week. Small amounts of carrot, broccoli and peas, along with apple, strawberries & blueberries.



For a bit of variety and a treat you can add dried fruit, dog biscuits, cold porridge and small amounts of cooked chicken.

Enrichment



Gerbils need plenty of enrichment to keep their minds and bodies active. Providing them with items to climb on, over, and under are all appreciated. Some gerbils enjoy exercise wheels, while others seem to ignore them. If you add a wheel to the enclosure, be sure it is of a suitable size. Many wheels are too small and can lead to long-term spinal damage. Wheels need to be solid and at least 28cm in diameter. A sand bath is also an important addition to help keep their fur in good condition.

Gerbils love to chew and will quickly shred small boxes, willow balls, apple branches and other suitable items. It's important to provide plenty of chewing opportunities within their environment.



Housing



Many cages available in pet shops or online do not provide enough space for gerbils to lead happy lives. The bare minimum recommended for optimal welfare is a cage which provides 100cm x

50cm of continuous floor space, ideally houses should be 120cm x 60cm. They should also be provided with a deep layer of substrate of at least 20cm to allow for natural burrowing behaviours.

Other Important Things



Chewing - Gerbils can chew all wooden and plastic cages and escape, so it is important to check cages regularly. This can be prevented by using wall tiles and covering edges with metal corner strips.

Company - Gerbils are social animals and should be kept in pairs. It is possible to neuter males to allow them to live with females,



Vet Care - Gerbils are classed as exotics within the veterinary industry and therefore owners need to carefully select a suitable vet able to treat them. We recommend Origin Vets for West Wales and Origin Vets Clinic for South Wales.