



A dwarf hamster is a smaller species of hamster, generally classified into a few different types based on their size and origin. They are popular pets due to their small size and relatively easy-care requirements. They are active, require plenty of space to run and play, and generally do well in pairs or small groups if they are of the same species and introduced properly.



HISTORY AND ORIGINS

- **Wild Origin:** Dwarf hamsters originate from various regions in Europe and Asia, depending on the species.
- **Domestication: Origins and Breeding.** Dwarf hamsters were first domesticated in the early 20th century. Breeders selected individuals with desirable traits such as a docile temperament, smaller size, and specific coat colors to produce pets with predictable behaviors and appearances.

The most common dwarf hamsters kept as pets are:

1. **Roborovski Dwarf Hamster (*Phodopus roborovskii*):** Known for their tiny size and high energy levels, they are among the smallest dwarf hamsters, usually measuring about 2 inches in length. They have a sandy or golden-brown coat with white underparts and are known for their speedy and active nature.
2. **Campbell's Dwarf Hamster (*Phodopus campbelli*):** These hamsters are slightly larger than Roborovskis, typically around 3-4 inches long. They have a more rounded appearance and can come in various colors.
3. **Russian Dwarf Hamster (*Phodopus sungorus*):** Similar in size to Campbell's dwarf hamsters, Winter Whites have a distinctive coat that changes color with the seasons, turning white in the winter and reverting to a grey-brown color in warmer months. They're known for their docile and social nature. 3-4 inches in length.
4. **Chinese Dwarf Hamster (*Cricetulus griseus*):** Although not technically a dwarf hamster by some definitions, Chinese hamsters are small, measuring around 4 inches in length. They have a slender body and a tail, which is unusual for hamsters. Their fur is usually a sandy or brown color with a white belly.

BEHAVIOR AND TEMPERAMENT

- **Solitary or Social:** Some species, like Campbell's and Russian dwarfs, can live in pairs or small groups if introduced properly, while others, like the Roborovski, are more solitary.



- **Nocturnal:** They are most active during the evening and nighttime, spending their days mostly sleeping.
- **Tameable:** With regular gentle handling, they can become quite attached to the students and enjoy being held.

HOUSING

- **Cage Size:** Dwarf hamsters need a spacious cage, bigger is always better. Multi-level cages can also be beneficial.
- **Bedding:** Dwarf hamsters need two types of bedding: absorbent substrate and nesting material. Place the absorbent substrate on the bottom of the cage. Then, provide nesting material so your hamster can make a comfortable little bed to burrow into. Use paper-based bedding or aspen shavings. Avoid pine or cedar shavings as they can be harmful.
- **Hideouts:** Provide a small house or hideout where your hamster can retreat and feel secure.
- **Wheel:** A solid-surface exercise wheel (minimum 8-12 inches in diameter) is essential for exercise.
- **Chew Toys:** Dwarf hamsters need to chew to keep their teeth healthy, so provide wooden toys or untreated wooden blocks.

DIET

Hamsters are omnivores, so they can eat both plant and animal matter but you should be careful not to give them too much. Most hamsters will carry their food to an area, usually in their bed, using their cheek pouches. When the cheek pouches are full of food, the hamsters head can easily become three times its normal width.

- **Hamster Pellets:** Provides a balanced diet. They come in many shapes, but often look like small biscuits, wafers, or cereal.
- **Lab Blocks:** Hamsters should be fed a quality lab block rodent diet to provide a complete nutritional diet. Lab blocks also help in keeping the hamster's teeth from becoming too long as they gnaw on the food.
- **Hamster Mix:** Provides a high-quality hamster mix that includes seeds, grains, and pellets.
- **Fresh Vegetables:** Offer small amounts of fresh veggies like carrots, broccoli, and cucumber. Avoid giving too much to prevent diarrhea.
- **Fruits:** Occasionally offer small pieces of fruit like apple or banana. Avoid citrus fruits.
- **Protein:** Small amounts of cooked chicken, egg, or mealworms can be given as a protein source.
- **Fresh Water:** Water bottles with a stainless-steel tube and roller ball are the most efficient and sanitary means of providing water to a hamster. They are easily cleaned and the hamster cannot foul their water with urine or feces as with a ceramic bowl. Since these bottles can be hung on



the outside of the cage, the animal cannot climb on or chew the bottle. Always change the water daily.

CLEANING

- **Spot Cleaning:** Remove soiled bedding and waste daily.
- **Full Cleaning:** Once a week, replace all the bedding and clean the cage with mild soap and water. Avoid using harsh chemicals.

HEALTH

- **Common Issues:** Watch for signs of wet tail, respiratory issues, or overgrown teeth. If you notice anything unusual, consult a veterinarian who specializes in small animals.
- **Nail Care:** Occasionally, their nails may need trimming if they grow too long.

ENRICHMENT

- **Toys and Activities:** Provide tunnels, tubes, and other toys to keep your hamster mentally stimulated. A hamster ball is a great way to allow your pet to exercise safely outside of the cage.
- **Safe Exploration:** Allow your hamster some time outside the cage in a safe, enclosed area or playpen. Students should sit on the floor quietly, allowing the hamster to move from one student to the other.

HANDLING

Holding a dwarf hamster requires a gentle and patient approach, especially because they are small, delicate, and can be easily startled.

- **Preparation:** Have the students wash their hands before they handle their dwarf hamster. This will remove chemicals or residues that might make the dwarf hamster nervous or cause them to bite.
- **Calm Setting:** Choose a quiet, distraction-free area for handling the dwarf hamster to help them feel secure. Have the students sit quietly in a circle on the floor and allow the hamster to sniff their hands before allowing them to pick the hamster up. Have them avoid sudden movements, always have the student move slowly, quick movements can startle the hamster and may lead to them becoming scared.
- **How to Pick Up The Hamster:** Use both hands and gently scoop the hamster up using both hands. Place one hand underneath the hamster and the other over their back. Avoid grabbing too tightly or squeezing. Make sure to support the hamster's entire body, including their legs, to make them feel safe and secure. Once the hamster is comfortable with being held, have the student cradle them in their cupped hands and hold them close to their body.



- **Handling Time:** Have the students only hold the hamster for a short period of time, usually a minute or two. Watch for stress signs, if the hamster becomes scared or begins struggling, place the hamster back into their cage gently.
- **Exercise:** Provide the hamster with a hamster ball and exercise wheel in their cage. Hamster balls and exercise wheels provide essential physical activity that helps maintain their health and well-being. Hamsters are naturally active and need regular exercise to stay healthy. Regular exercise helps prevent obesity, which can lead to health problems and shorten life span.

HELPFUL LINKS

Recommended Diets:

<http://usa.hagen.com/Small-Animal/Nutrition/Basic/H1004>

<https://www.kaytee.com/all-products/small-animal/forti-diet-pro-health-dental-hamster-gerbil>

<https://www.kaytee.com/all-products/small-animal/natures-harvest-hamster-and-gerbil-food>

Chew Treats:

<https://www.kaytee.com/all-products/small-animal/carousel-chew-toy-apple-small>

<https://www.kaytee.com/all-products/small-animal/superfood-treat-stick>

<http://usa.hagen.com/Small-Animal/Toys/Chew/61318>

<http://usa.hagen.com/Small-Animal/Toys/Chew/61467>

Bedding & Nesting:

<https://www.kaytee.com/all-products/small-animal/aspens-bedding>

<https://www.kaytee.com/all-products/small-animal/kaytee-bamboo-nesting-material>

<http://usa.hagen.com/Small-Animal/Bedding/Premium/61263>

<http://usa.hagen.com/Small-Animal/Bedding/Natural/61276>

Exercise:

<http://usa.hagen.com/Small-Animal/Toys/Misc./61720>

<http://usa.hagen.com/Small-Animal/Toys/Misc./61706>

Deodorizer:

<https://www.kaytee.com/all-products/small-animal/clean-cage-spray>