



The ferret (*Mustela furo*) is a small, domesticated species belonging to the family Mustelidae. Ferrets are quiet, curious, and playful and normally live between 5 and 9 years. A neutered male ferrets (gib) will reach an average length of 15 inches while a spayed female ferret (sprite) will have an average length of 13.5 inches. Full-grown males tend to weigh about 2.5 to 3 pounds when neutered and full-grown spayed female ferrets weigh about 1.75 to 2 pounds, as females are significantly smaller.



HOUSING

The habitat should be at least 36 inches wide by 36 inches deep by 36 inches high to provide sufficient space for one or two ferrets. This will give your ferret(s) plenty of room to move about without feeling too confined, and space to explore too. Include feeding and watering bowls that are securely attached to the cage as ferrets will often tip over them during play. Ferrets can be taught to use a litter box as they prefer to urinate and defecate in the same spot, away from sleeping and eating areas. Paper cat litter can be used in ferret litter boxes. Most ferrets prefer to sleep in a relatively small, confined space, and a cardboard or plastic box is ideal. For bedding, a clean towel or small blanket works well. Remove waste from the litter box daily, and completely change the bedding weekly.

ENVIRONMENT

Before you bring a ferret into your classroom, check on local laws. If you live in California, Hawaii, Washington D.C., or New York City, for instance, you'll find that ferrets are banned from those cities and states. If you are in one of these areas, it is best to get another kind of pet.

Generally, ferrets are very social and enjoy human contact and/or the companionship of other ferrets. If you decide to get more than one ferret, you'll need to watch them closely together over several days as they acclimate to one another before leaving them alone. Also ensure that each ferret has equal access to food, toys, and hiding and sleeping places, so that they don't fight over resources.

Ferret cages must be sturdy and secure to prevent intrusive and inventive attempts to escape. Most ferrets will benefit from having the company of another ferret, with both having their own spaces in the home. If this is not possible or you choose to have only one ferret, you will need to make sure that your ferret is given lots of attention and company from yourself. Ferrets love to curl up and sleep in warm spots and will like to sleep in your lap, but when not napping, they love to run, jump and play.

Ferrets need several hours of supervised exercise and play outside of their cage each day. They are very playful but can be quite mischievous and sometimes destructive as they go about exploring. They will chew and dig on things they find and can bite through electric cords and become electrocuted if allowed



to run loose around appliances. It is common for them to nip children's feet or ankles, as gentle play-biting is typical for ferrets. It is when the ferret bites hard that something is wrong, always monitor children's handling of your classroom pet.

Ferret owners should be aware that although ferrets can make good pets, they can sometimes carry germs that can make children sick. Ferrets are also not recommended for classrooms with children under 5 years of age because of the increased risk of injury from bites from rough play. Although rare, germs from ferrets can cause a variety of illnesses in people, ranging from minor skin infections to serious illnesses. Always after handling the classroom ferret thoroughly wash your hands with running water and soap. It is recommended to wear disposable gloves when cleaning their habitat and food and water bowls.

CARE

What should you feed your ferret? Ferrets are obligate carnivores (require eating meat to thrive). Food passes through their digestive system quickly, so they need to eat frequently (usually every couple of hours). They should always have food and water available. Dry foods are the most convenient choice for ferrets as they can be left out 24 hours a day without concern of spoilage. A good quality ferret diet should contain 32-40% protein and 10-15% fat, there are several good commercial dry foods for ferrets available at pet stores. Ferrets also lack the ability to obtain nutrition from plant matter. For this reason, a ferret diet must be high in animal protein, high in fat, and low in fiber.

Ferrets are born with scent glands at the base of their tails that cause them to smell musky. Ferrets from pet stores typically are already de-scented, although you may still notice a slightly musky odor. To minimize odor, keep the cage and litter box clean, spot cleaning waste from the litter box daily. Periodically bathing your ferret with a ferret shampoo will help remove odors. You might want to spend some time around a ferret to be sure you can tolerate the smell before choosing a ferret as a pet

DAILY

- Food bowls should be cleaned daily, and the water bottle filled with dechlorinated water.
- Spot clean the litter box, removing waste/debris.
- Visually check your ferret, making sure it is alert and eating.
- Check for normal looking feces, which should be brown and smooth in structure.
- Unhealthy/illness signs to watch for:
 - Weight loss
 - Coughing
 - Discharge from the eyes or nose
 - Hind limb weakness



- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Bloody stools
- Abdominal swelling
- Difficulty breathing
- Swollen vulvas in females

Consult your pet store or veterinarian if you notice a change in normal behavior or if your ferret is not eating or has a decreased appetite.

WEEKLY

- Completely change the litter weekly. You will need to remove your ferret, gently picking it up and placing it in a suitable container. Always wear disposable gloves when cleaning the habitat and kitty litter.
- The outer ears should be cleaned to remove waxy debris using a cotton ball and ferret ear-cleaning solution as needed. Gerbils are omnivores, so they can eat both plant and animal matter but you should be careful not to give them too much.

MONTHLY

- Ferrets will groom themselves daily. They can be bathed monthly with a ferret shampoo to help keep them clean and reduce odor. They should not be bathed more frequently than monthly, or their skin may dry out. They have a natural musky odor that bathing cannot totally remove.
- Ferrets need their nails trimmed on a regular basis. When their nails become long or sharp, they can get them caught in bedding, which will injure toes, feet, and legs.
- Thoroughly clean the habitat monthly. Scrub the habitat with a mixture of 10% bleach and 90% hot water, or distilled vinegar 50% and water 50%. Clean food bowls and water bottles with the same solution. Rinse the habitat two to three times with tap water to completely remove any cleaning residue. Wipe the habitat and décor dry with paper towels. Add a clean towel or blanket to the habitat sleeping area. Return your ferret back into its habitat.

Your ferret will need to return to the vet once a year for a physical exam and for vaccine booster shots. It is also recommended to have your ferret checked for internal parasites (a fecal exam) and ear mites (an ear smear). Because ferrets are potential carriers of infectious diseases such as flu viruses, salmonella, giardia parasites, and campylobacter bacteria, always have your students wash their hands before and after handling the ferret or cleaning the ferret's habitat, to help prevent the potential spread of disease.



pets in the
classroom

CARE SHEET FERRET

HELPFUL LINKS

Healthy Diet Recommendations:

<https://oxbowanimalhealth.com/product/essentials-ferret-food/>

<https://www.marshallferrets.com/store/product/premium-ferret-diet-4-lb/>

Healthcare Recommendations:

<https://www.marshallferrets.com/store/product/probiotic/>

Ferret Litter Recommendations:

<https://www.marshallferrets.com/store/product/premium-litter-10-lb-bag/>

<https://www.marshallferrets.com/store/product/fresh-clean-litter/>

Odor Control:

<https://www.marshallferrets.com/store/product/goodbye-odor-for-ferrets-8-oz/>

Ferret Supplements:

<https://www.marshallferrets.com/store/product/probiotic/>

<https://www.marshallferrets.com/store/product/ferret-rx/>