

Caring for your gerbil

**How to keep pet gerbils
healthy and happy**



Notcutts

GARDEN INSPIRATION SINCE 1897

Caring for your gerbil



Are gerbils right for me?

Gerbils are inquisitive, friendly little animals that are hardy, clean and easy to care for. Gerbils have lots of energy and are best kept in pairs or small groups.

Gerbils make a great first pet and are suitable for families, provided children are always supervised when gerbils are handled. Gerbils will form a strong bond with you and if cared for properly, can live up to five years.

Gerbils need regular cleaning and feeding and should be handled as often as possible.

Choosing a new pet gerbil

When selecting your gerbil, check these signs that he is healthy:

- Alert and interested in his surroundings
- Actively and freely moves around
- Clean, dry nose
- Bright, clear eyes
- Healthy appetite
- Clean bottom

The first few days

It is important that your gerbil suffers minimal stress when being introduced to their new home. Their gerbilarium should already be set up with bedding, water and food, ready for your gerbil's arrival.

When you first take your new gerbil home it is best to put him in his new gerbilarium in a quiet room and leave him to settle in. This may take up to a week.

Once they have explored their new home, you can open the gerbilarium and rub your hands in the sawdust – this will take any unfamiliar smell off your hands.

When you first handle your gerbil, place your hand flat on top of the sawdust in his gerbilarium and because he is inquisitive, he will come and walk over your hand. Keep your hand very still which will encourage him to sit on your hand, then you can very gently stroke him. Soon you will be able to pick him up.

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Creating a happy home

In the wild, a gerbil would live in underground tunnels that have lots of entry points and chambers. The best way to make your gerbil feel at home is to keep them in a large tank or gerbilarium with a secure wire mesh lid. It's important that your gerbil lives in as interesting an environment as possible which means having lots of opportunity to dig and tunnel.

A gerbilarium (a purpose-built home for gerbils) is a great option. Please talk to our pet team for help choosing one.

The gerbilarium floor should be covered with a deep layer of sawdust to allow the gerbils to dig, along with a handful of bedding. Place some sturdy cardboard tubes under the sawdust and pat it down quite firmly. Add some straw and more tubes on the top as gerbils love gnawing and will make fine bedding out of the straw.

Toys and a wheel with solid walls are good to have but as gerbils love to chew, don't be surprised that these may become damaged.

A drinking bottle is better than a water dish as this will quickly disappear under sawdust.

A constant temperature is needed for your gerbil's home so choose a spot in a warm room that stays at average room temperature. Window sills should be avoided as they can become very hot in the afternoon and cold at night.

A healthy diet and treats

Gerbils are omnivores and enjoy a small amount of animal protein. Clean, fresh water should be available at all times.

A healthy, varied diet would be:

- Basic gerbil mix of flaked maize, crushed oats, corn, and grain. Sunflower seeds and peanuts should only be fed as a treat every now and again.
- A little fresh clean fruit and vegetables, e.g. apple, carrot, cabbage, celery, swede, raisins, grapes (avoid citrus fruits).
- Hard food e.g. cabbage stalks or a wooden chew will help wear down your gerbil's teeth.
- A mineral lickstone provides essential salts and minerals and should be available at all times.

Treat them now and then with a little protein, e.g. boiled egg, nuts, cheese, chopped meat or wholemeal bread.

Getting to know you

Regular handling will keep your gerbil well socialised. Gerbils are active and curious by nature and will appreciate spending time outside their cage, daily if possible.

A gerbil should never be grabbed or picked up by their tail. Their tails are delicate and could deglove as a defence mechanism if picked up by their tail.

Hold out your hand and the gerbil will readily approach you. Once he's happy, then you can pick him up by cupping your hands round him.

If you need to prevent your gerbil from escaping, he can be gently held with one finger each side of his head and the rest of his body cupped in your hand.

Exercise your gerbil needs

Gerbils love to burrow and having plenty of woodchips in their gerbilarium will allow them to do this.

They will run through anything resembling a tunnel so cardboard tubes, such as toilet rolls, are ideal.

Gerbils also like fruit tree branches to climb on and, if you put a flat rock in the tank, they may use it as a lookout point.

Wheels should have solid walls to prevent their tail from getting caught up in the wheel.

Gerbils and other pets

Gerbils prefer to live in pairs or in small single-sex groups. They should be introduced as young as possible and at the same time. Litter mates are ideal.

Older gerbils will not accept any new gerbils in their home. We advise against later introductions as the gerbils will fight and become injured.

Gerbils will often groom themselves and one another. As well as the benefits to their coats, this is an important part of their social interaction. They also appreciate chinchilla sand as a dust bath. They will roll and play in the sand, which helps clean their fur.

Gerbil gender

Please ask a member of our team to confirm the sex of your gerbil before buying.

Potential health issues with gerbils

Colds

Gerbils may produce a discharge from the nose and eyes and even sneeze. Ensure they are not cold or in a draught. If the problem persists, seek veterinary advice.

Oily skin/fur

Gerbils secrete an oil which they groom into their coat. This will evaporate naturally, however, if your gerbil's coat appears greasy it is usually because the atmosphere is too humid which prevents the oil from evaporating.



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Try relocating the gerbilarium or reduce the humidity level of the room if possible. A small pot of chinchilla sand can be added for them to bathe in and soak up the oil.

Overgrown teeth

Your gerbils' teeth are very important to their health and should be checked regularly to ensure they are not overgrown. It can be hard to tell just by looking so if you are unsure, offer your gerbil some of their favourite food and if they seem unable to eat it then take him to a vet to be examined.

Pet insurance for your gerbil

Gerbils can be insured under plans for small mammals, however, it may not be possible to find an insurance plan specifically tailored to gerbils.

Your new pet checklist

- ☐ Gerbilarium
- ☐ Wood gnaws
- ☐ Woodchips
- ☐ Cage disinfectant
- ☐ Gerbil bedding
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Food bowl
- ☐ Vitamins
- ☐ Water bottle
- ☐ Wheel or tubes
- ☐ Mineral lickstone
- ☐ Treats
- ☐ Small holder for your gerbil while his cage is being cleaned



Help and further advice

If you have any questions about caring for your pet, our fully trained team are happy to help if they can, or advise on where to find more specialist information.

Whilst there is a wealth of information available online, only a professional will be able to correctly answer your query. If in doubt, call your local vet for an appointment.

It is against the law to release, or allow to escape, non-native animals or birds. If you have trouble caring for any animals contact our team for advice.



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