

Hamsters

Hamsters are cute little pets who don't require a lot of care. Watching a hamster stuff food into its cheek pouches is a lot of fun, as well as seeing a hamster climb through a series of tubes and run on its exercise wheel.

There are two types of hamsters commonly sold as pets, the better known species called the Syrian hamster, about 6-8" long, and the dwarf hamsters, never larger than 4" long. The Syrian hamster comes in many different colors and coat types, including the longhaired teddy bear hamster.

Young hamsters can be shy and need to be tamed, so they make good pets for adults and older children.

One hamster, or more?

Syrian hamsters are solitary animals and can only be kept one to a cage. Dwarf hamsters are more social, and can live in groups as long as they are introduced when young, and the cage is large enough.

Feeding

The basic hamster diet should be a fortified grain mix along with commercial rodent blocks. You can also give hamsters small amounts of veggies and other healthy foods. Treats are great for training and strengthening the bond between you and your hamsters and can comprise 10% of their diet.

Housing

A hamster cage can be made of wire, plastic, or glass. It is probably best to choose a combination of wire and plastic for the best ventilation. Some hamsters have a tendency to chew on plastic, and all hamsters have a tendency to try to escape their cage, so make sure it is secure. For bedding you can choose from aspen shavings or pet litter of recycled paper or organic pellets. Do not use clay litter or cedar shavings. Some hamsters will use a special hamster litter box.

Accessories

Hamsters need a water bottle and a small food dish. For their bed choose from plastic, wood, or grass houses and/or a hammock or sleeping bag. They need an exercise wheel, and also enjoy tubes, climbing toys such as ladders, ropes, and branches, and chew toys.

Sanitation

Clean the cage and accessories weekly. Be sure to remove all stored food and scrub all parts of the water bottle and replace the bottle every six months.

Health care

With proper care and diet, hamsters tend to be healthy animals. Bad smelling diarrhea or wetness under the tail are usually signs of a serious problem. Veterinary Pet Insurance (www.petinsurance.com) now offers health insurance policies for hamsters.

Special needs

Hamsters need more time than most small pets to socialize to people. Syrian hamsters are very nocturnal and do not like to be disturbed during the day. Very cold temperatures can cause a hamster to hibernate, which can cause it to appear dead.

Life cycle

Syrian hamsters live an average of 2-3 years, although it's possible for them to live 5 years. Hamsters can breed as early as 3 weeks of age but should not until 4 months. The gestation period is 16 days and the average litter size is 6-8. Baby hamsters open their eyes at 18 days and can be weaned at 4 weeks.

Dwarf hamsters live an average of 2 years, although it's possible for them to live 3 years. They can breed as early as 4-5 weeks of age but should not until 3 months. The gestation period is 18-21 days and the average litter size is 5-6. The babies open their eyes at 12 days and can be weaned at 4-5 weeks.

Expert Help

If you have questions about your hamster, do not hesitate to contact us. We will be happy to help you choose a hamster care book for more complete information.

Supplies Checklist

Cage
Bedding and/or litter
Water bottle
Moist Food dish
Hamster food

Treats
Litter box (optional)
Bed
Exercise wheel
Activity toys
Chew toys

