

that are made just for ferrets, but really your ferret will be just as happy with an old t-shirt. Some favorite types of bedding include hammocks, snuggle sacks, or cuddle cups, which can be made at home or purchased in a store.

The bottom of the cage can remain uncovered, however if it is made of wire mesh it may be easier on the ferret's feet if it is covered. Some materials that can be used to cover the bottom of any ferret cage are old carpet remnants, a fitted piece of linoleum or Plexiglas, a thick piece of fleece or any other creative covering. You can give your fuzzy just about any kind of material to sleep in/on, however many ferrets will actually eat certain types of material or plastics which could cause blockages. This means that no matter what you put in your ferret's cage, you should inspect it regularly to make sure he or she doesn't think it is a snack!

TOYS

Ferrets love to play! Many people think of them as two year olds that never grow up. A bored ferret is often a destructive ferret so it's in your best interest and your ferret's to always have toys available. Some toys that ferrets like are tunnels, boxes with shredded paper, balls, squeaky toys and dirty socks/clothes. Their favorite toy will always be you so don't forget to interact with your ferret as much as possible.

They all seem to like to play with things that aren't toys and aren't safe for them. Be careful with stuffed animals, rubber toys and anything that they can pull apart and ingest. You don't want to endanger your ferret by letting him play with something that can cause a blockage. Be especially

careful to inspect the toys that you keep in their cage. Check them daily for tears or rips. If the toy is damaged, remove it and throw it away. Some other things to keep your ferrets away from are remote controls, drains, vents, cabinets, cleaning products, washing machines, dryers, dishwashers, toilets, reclining chairs and sofa beds.

Ferrets also LOVE to play even when you are not there to play with. Providing your ferret something to play with in his cage and enough space to play in while you are gone will give you a less stressed ferret in the long run. Please remember that you will not be supervising this playtime and that any toy you leave in your ferret's cage MUST be ferret proof.

ABOUT MD FERRET PAWS

MD Ferret PAWS strives to protect and improve the lives of ferrets in Maryland. We seek to improve the relationships between ferrets and humans through education and outreach. We promote legislation and research that makes life safer and healthier for all ferrets. Through our efforts the status and life of the ferret as a companion animal will be enhanced, legitimized, and more enjoyable for everyone. We need your help to accomplish these goals! Visit our website to see how you can become a member!



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FILLING YOUR CAGE (FOOD, LITTER, TOYS AND BEDDING)

Once you choose a cage you will need to fill it with bedding, at least one litter box, a supply of food and water, and something to entertain them while you are not available.

Ferrets should be given at least one litter box. You may find that your ferret wants more than one place to go the bathroom. If this is the case, you will need to add more litter boxes! The litter box should have sides that are high enough to prevent accidents but low enough on at least one side for your fuzzy to get in, even when they are in a hurry.

Your ferret will also need at least one food bowl and access to fresh water. Food bowls are prime targets for being tipped over by our mischievous little friends. One solution to this is either a heavy ceramic crock or a bowl that attaches to the side of the cage. Either of these options are fine as long as the fuzzy can reach it easily enough to eat. Water may be offered either in a bowl (again a heavy ceramic crock or bowl that attaches to the cage is preferable) or in a water bottle. Much of this decision comes down to personal preference and whether or not your fuzzy will drink from a bowl or water bottle. A couple of

things to keep in mind are that a water bowl is a great place for some ferrets to play and snorkel (leaving the cage flooded when you return) and water bottles can be noisy in the middle of the night if your ferret is close by!

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FOOD

The most important thing to remember when deciding what food and treats to provide to your ferret is that ferrets are obligate carnivores. This means that they require animal protein and cannot process vegetable protein or gain nutrients from vegetables. This is because ferrets lack a caecum, the section of intestine that helps omnivores like us process vegetables.

Also, from the time food enters the ferret's body until the time it exits is a matter of only a few hours. Because of this, ferrets need high quality food with high levels of fats and protein as the body has less time to absorb these important nutrients. In *Ferrets for Dummies (2000)*, Kim Schilling recommends that the food you feed your ferret contain at least 34% protein and 20% fat. We also recommend that when you read the ingredients on the label that the first ingredient should be an animal-based product and that at least 3-4 of the first 6 ingredients be sources of animal-based protein.

For a look at some of the recommended foods for ferrets and comparison to other foods, take a look at our FOOD CHART available on our website.

RAW/COOKED MEAT DIETS

While we don't address the issue here, there is a growing school of thought surrounding the issue of feeding raw and cooked meat diets to your ferret. There are pros and cons to this that are debated even within our board of directors. If you are considering this route, we suggest you discuss it with your vet to ensure that your ferret is getting the correct nutrition.

LITTER

There are many misconceptions about what kinds of litter should be used with ferrets. The biggest thing to consider when deciding on a litter is the health of your ferret(s). Any litter that has clay in it (e.g. traditional cat litter) is not recommended for ferrets because it can harm your ferret. First, clay litter is sticky! This can cause the clay to stick to your ferret's feet, coat or behind as it scoots after doing it's business. The litter can then be ingested as the ferret cleans him or herself or may work it's way into the anal opening and cause a block or prolapsed rectum. It can also get into the ferrets eyes, nose and ears if you ferret decides to go snorkeling in it. When you mix clay with any liquid - including urine, saliva, tears, etc - cement is formed. These chunks of cemented clay can cause a wide variety of health problems for your ferret including an intestinal blockage. Second, clay litter produces dust. Ferrets have very sensitive respiratory systems and this

dust can cause damage to the throat and lungs over a period of years. Other types of litter that are dusty are 'scoopable; kitty litters and some wood shavings. There are also other types of litter that can cause respiratory damage over time, not because they are dusty, but because they contain 'essential oils'. Cedar, pine and other wood shavings have not been processed in a way to remove the oil that occurs naturally in all wood. These oils release vapors, which then can cause the respiratory damage mentioned above.

There are many forms of litter on the market that are acceptable including corncob litter, newspaper, recycled paper litter (in various forms), and wood pellets. One word to the wise, corncob litter and plain newspaper are not very absorbent and therefore will not absorb odor well either. Really, the goal of any litter should be absorbency, which recycled paper litters and wood pellets seem to do fairly well and in a manner that is safe for your fuzzibutt! Although the most cost effective litter is wood pellets, hands down. PAWS members can get a discount on wood pellets at Little Lancaster in Baltimore.

BEDDING

Something you will notice about your ferret almost immediately is that they like to burrow under things. This is true during play and during sleep. Be sure to give your ferret plenty of things to tunnel in and sleep under as they will spend the majority of their time snuggled up and asleep while you are not with them. Ferrets can actually experience 'cage stress' if they do not have a place to hide and call their own. There are quite a number of commercially available items