

Dangerous Appliances

Before starting the dishwasher, washer, dryer, etc. *always* be sure you know where all of your ferrets are. Ferrets like to sleep in piles of clothes, and may not wake up easily. Being tossed in an appliance means certain death for your pet.

If you have exposed 120 volt cords and you notice your ferret is a chewer of leather and/or rubber, coat the cords with bitter apple (found at your local pet store) to discourage chewing.

Are they destructive?

Ferrets may dig at the carpet near the doors when young. Since they're instinctual diggers, you can't scold them out of it. Preventing damage to begin with, using rectangular mesh or an office runner is most pleasant. Providing an appropriate place to dig, such as a dig box, is another solution.

How long do they live?

7-10 years.

Health Care (Please see a vet!)

Ferrets should receive yearly canine distemper (Fervac-D or Purevax) and rabies (Imrab-3) vaccinations. Vet care is similar in scope to a dog or cat care. A rainy-day fund is a wise investment.

Get your ferret spayed before 7 months or neutered before 10 months of age. If not spayed, females could die of anemia. Males will smell strongly, will mark everything in sight and will fight with other ferrets.

Clip your ferrets nails (avoiding clipping the pink vein) every week or two. If your ferret fidgets, add a little Ferretone (found at local pet stores) to his belly to distract him.

Do not bathe your ferret any more than once every two weeks. This will actually make him smell more and will dry out his fur.

Heavy brown-black earwax could indicate ear mites.

Protect your ferrets from fleas. Some flea products like Advantage or Frontline are safe to use on your ferret. Do not use flea collars as they are poisonous.

Common signs of illness include:

- Sneezing (cold or flu)
- Vomiting, lethargy, loss of appetite (obstruction, possible poisoning)
- Drooling, weakness, seizures (insulinoma)
- Frequent or difficulty urinating, hair loss (adrenal cancer)
- Constant coughing, weakness (cardio-myopathy)
- Sustained neon-green stools, soft stools (ECE; IBD; green just means a short transit time; neon is bad)

Obstruction

Keep leather and rubber away from ferrets. Do not buy toys with parts ferrets could chew off and swallow, and monitor any existing toys for loose parts. Signs of intestinal obstructions include vomiting, lethargy, constipation and an unwillingness to eat. Should your ferret display any of these symptoms, seek medical advice quickly.



Washington Ferret Rescue & Shelter

An Introduction to Ferrets & Ferret Care

Domestic Ferrets are:

Quiet	Mischievous
Joyous	Funny
Playful	Cute
Affectionate	Interesting

Domestic ferrets aren't:

Low maintenance
Rodents
Wind-up toys
Wild Animals

Domestic ferrets need:

Attention, love and gentle handling
Clean bedding, food and water
Proper training
A safe environment
Proper vet care

W A S H I N G T O N
F E R R E T R E S C U E &
S H E L T E R

Contact Information:

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The Washington Ferret Rescue and Shelter is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. WFRS is a no-kill shelter caring for ferrets in the Puget Sound area. WFRS always has ferrets ready for adoption, and will take in any ferret in need of a home.

Domestic Ferret Classification

Ferrets are in the otter and weasel family, in the Order Carnivora. The Latin name is *Mustela putorius furo*, which means "spear-shaped stinky little thief." They're related to otters, weasels, polecats, stoats, black-footed ferrets, martens, badgers, and wolverines. They are the only domesticated member of the family. Over one quarter of the 233 species of carnivores are members of the weasel and otter family.

Domestication

Almost 2000 years ago, Greek writers such as Strabo wrote of the ferret as a Southern Mediterranean shore animal, already well-domesticated and purposefully reared in homes. There are drawings from the 1300s clearly showing the ferret being fed into rabbit holes by humans to chase the rabbits from their burrows. The domestic ferret may be descended from the European Polecat, *Mustela putorius*, and in any case has the same relationship to its ancestors that a dog has to the wolf (*Canis lupus*).

The process of domestication has allowed the ferret to live alongside and become completely dependent on humans, to adapt to new situations easily, to accept other ferrets in a sort of juvenile-sibling relationship, and to be subordinate in behavior. There have been physical changes in size, skull size and shape, and in distribution and nature of fat and musculature.

Behavior

Ferrets are like kittens or puppies that never grow up. Young ferrets have 2 speeds: off and go. Middle-aged ferrets (2-4) are very active when awake, into everything, and love gentle roughhousing. Older ferrets (5+) are awake for briefer periods than young ferrets, and may become lap-ferrets. Ferrets are extremely tolerant animals, generally allowing routine maintenance such as claw clipping and occasional bathing.

Attention and Play Games

Ferrets require at least a couple of hours per day of play, attention, and exploration. Ferrets are very social animals, thriving on your attention. Never keep them in an unfrequented, lonely place.

Fun ferret games include hide and seek, ride around on the dragging blanket, tug-of-war, tickle and release, rattle around in a paper bag, and explore the outside on a leash.

Other Animals

Ferrets will likely kill (but not perhaps eat) rodents, birds and small reptiles. If you elect to own both, always keep them well apart. A cat may or may not get along with a ferret, as ferrets can be like a kitten that pesters the cat no end. Ferrets play with other ferrets by holding onto the other with their teeth and dragging them, which a recipient cat might see as an attack.

A dog may interact peacefully with a ferret if the dog doesn't have an excessive hunting ancestry. Beagles, terriers, and boxers often wish to kill ferrets immediately. Retrievers and

other large dogs may get along fine with a ferret when introduced slowly under 100% supervision, but can be a little rough and/or intimidating to the ferret. Dogs usually tolerate ferret antics, shaking them off good-naturedly. It is best, however, not to leave dogs, or any animal for that matter, and ferrets together unattended.

A ferret will usually tolerate another ferret if introduced slowly. Ferrets rarely kill other ferrets, unless both are intact males, so generally let ferrets finish their dominance battles with each other unless they are drawing blood or one is obviously not defending itself. Taking both on neutral ground, such as on a walk, may help. Ferrets that have been alone for a long time will be the most resistant to new ferret companions.

When introducing a dog, cat or ferret to a ferret, swap the other animals bedding with the ferret's frequently to help accustom all parties to each other's smell.

Litter and Litter Training

The key to litter training is beginning in a small area. Ferrets are fairly neat animals and will not soil the areas that they sleep in or eat/drink from. Position boxes in the corners of the cage and/or room. Then, to help him get the idea, place some used litter in the box & then place the ferret in the box. Remind him several times over the first few days, and then he should get the hint. When he is great in his small area, you can expand his territory.

Use dust-free litter like recycled newspaper or wood stove pellets, not clay or scoopable litters.

If your ferret is not using a box, put an old rumpled up blanket which smells of sleepy ferret or a food dish where he is going. If there is an occasional mistake, try the blanket trick, but if he has forgotten his training, reduce his territory again for a few days.

Ferrets typically use the box within 5 minutes of waking up, so pay special attention when your ferret wakes up to help him know where to go. Don't scold a ferret unless you catch him in the act of using the wrong place. A loud "No!" and swift placement in the box should suffice. It may help to give him a treat when he does it right.

Clean up any mistakes carefully with Nature's Miracle or such; smell is very important in choosing a spot to go.

Do they bite?

Ferrets which bite do so out of fear or out of exuberance as a young kit (like a puppy). If your ferret bites you hard, try one or more of these tips:

- Avoid pulling away quickly.
- Put some bitter apple of your hands to make them taste bad, or conversely cover them in Ferretone and make them taste very good, so they learn to lick and not bite.
- Gently push down as he's biting, lowering the jaw to the chest. Usually, ferrets will spit your finger right out.
- Scream "Oww!" in a high-pitched voice so he knows he has hurt you, or hold him by the scruff on the neck, and drag him along the floor gently to get your point across (never do this to an abused ferret).
- Confine him in a "boring" (empty carrier without toys)

location for a few minutes to cool him off and let him know that wasn't fun. 5 minutes is plenty! Ferrets have incredibly short attention spans, and will rapidly forget why they're there in the first place.

Food and Water

Ferrets need an animal-protein diet, preferably 33% or higher in protein, and 18-22% fat. Ferret experts feed their pets one or more of the following:

- Ferret foods such as Totally Ferret or Marshall ferret diets
- High quality kitten or cat foods such as NutroMax Kitten or Innova
- Home-made stews based around poultry (or game animals), liver and other innards, along with ferret or kitten kibble.. Some experts even add an egg or ground cartilage to their stews.

When selecting processed foods, look for chicken or other animal protein as the first few ingredients on the label. Don't feed your ferret dog food, excessive amounts of dairy products or chocolate.

Bedding, Housing, and Temperature

Good ferret bedding is soft, warm, non-snagging, clean and allows a ferret to snuggle or burrow for sleep. Use old blankets, polar fleece and/or a hammock.

Housing must be escape-proof, clean, and provide secure water, food, play and litter box amenities. You should also line the bottom with linoleum or other covering so your ferret does not have to walk on the wire floor. If you do not use a cage, it is wise to block access to outside doors or unsafe areas. You can prevent access to areas using a 2 foot high piece of paneling with a mailing tube sliced lengthwise and pushed onto the top edge.

Keep ferrets out of drafty areas and avoid temperatures over 85F degrees or under 40F. If the temperature goes over 90F, your ferret may die quickly of heat exhaustion, especially if lacking water and shade. If your ferret pants, act quickly to reduce his temperature by moving him to a cooler area and putting a cool cloth on his paw pads.

Never leave any animal in a car with the windows up!!

Do they stink?

All animals have an odor. Ferrets have a light musky smell, which you should only be able to smell when you hold them right up to your nose.

Bathing them often will actually cause them to smell even more. Soap strips the oils from their coats, which causes their oil glands to over-produce oils, making them smell.

The key to keeping them smell-free is to keep their litter box clean, feed them a good diet and to wash their bedding once a week.

Crushing

You must not step on, lie, or allow children to fall on ferrets. Recliners or sleeper-sofas are death-traps for ferrets. They may crawl up inside and fall asleep, and could potentially be crushed by one of the mechanisms or someone sitting on the couch.