



Hamster Care Sheet

Hamsters are one of the most common small pets. They are crepuscular, meaning that they are most often awake at dawn and dusk. During this time, they can be extremely active and entertaining.



5 things to know about your hamster

- 1) Wild burrows can extend up to two feet underground
- 2) There are five domesticated species of hamster
- 3) In 2020, around 20 million US households had hamsters
- 4) Hamsters have poor vision and are near-sighted
- 5) A healthy hamster's teeth will be a yellow or orange color - no "pearly whites" for them!



Setting up your Hamster's Enclosure

Hamsters originate from steppes, sand dunes, and deserts - they love a warm, dry environment. They are burrowing animals and require bedding that is inches deep to build tunnels. While you have many options for your enclosure, you should ensure that your chosen enclosure provides over 600 inches of continuous floor space.

Types of Enclosures: You have many types of enclosures that are appropriate for your hamster to choose from. Two of our favorites are glass or acrylics tanks with mesh lids. You will want at least a 40 gallon breeder (36" x 18" x 18") or above. However, these can be too pricey for some hamster owners. If this is the case, a bin cage is an excellent DIY option.

To make a bin cage, you will want to purchase a 50 gallon storage tote. Using a hot knife or other suitable tool, you can cut ventilation in the lid or in the bin itself. You can then cover the areas you cut out with 1/2 centimeter hardware mesh. Use zip ties to secure the mesh to the bin.

Substrate: There are two types of main substrate that you will be able to use: wood and paper bedding. You can use one or both in your enclosure. Which ever you use, you will want to provide at least 8 inches of bedding in at least half of the enclosure.

Wood bedding is more affordable than paper bedding, however, you will want to be sure to only use aspen bedding. Pine and other softwood beddings are much too dusty for any small animal. Too much dust means that your hamster will be at risk for a respiratory infections.

Paper bedding is also a popular option. With paper bedding, there are many different brands and colors to choose from. While majority of these options are safe for your hamster, you will want to avoid anything that is scented, as these can be harmful to your hamster.

A great rule of thumb is "when in doubt - leave it out."

Safe:



Not Safe:





Enrichment: Perhaps one of the most exciting parts of setting up your hamster's enclosure is providing enrichment for them. Hamsters benefit from new and exciting toys regularly provided. Not only are these fun for you - they mimic natural behaviors and conditions found in the wild.

When setting up your hamster's enclosure, keep in mind that a crowded enclosure is more enriching for your hamster. Do not worry about clutter - you want to pack as many exciting things in your enclosure as possible.

Necessities:

- at least one hide.
- appropriately sized wheel
 - 12" for Syrians, 8"+ for dwarfs.
- food and water.
- chew toys

Fun extras:

- Bendy bridges
- above and below ground tunnels
- hammocks or hanging coconuts

It is important to remember that not everything sold in pet stores will be safe for your hamster. Be sure to do your own research if you are unsure.





Feeding your Hamster

While often mistaken as herbivores, hamsters are omnivores. It is important that they have a balanced diet. The easiest way to achieve this is by providing both a seed mix as well as a “lab block.” These lab blocks are what will provide the correct amount of protein. Here at Critter Corner Rescue, we like to use Higgin’s Sunburst Hamster and Gerbil seed mix combined with Mazuri Rat and Mouse Block. While the exact brand are ultimately up to you, ensure that in combination, your hamster is receive it 15-18% protein, 6-12% fats, and 10-15% fibers.

As a treat, there are some “people foods” that are safe for your hamster. However, these should be given only as a treat and should not be making up a majority of their diet. The most accurate source of wether or not a food is safe for your hamster is The Ontario Hamster Club’s Hamster Food Safety. Even still, here are some foods that you should NEVER feed your hamster:

Clove Bud Oil



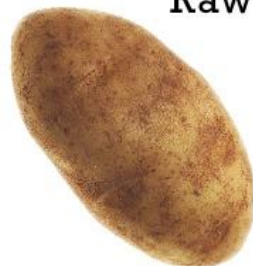
Kidney Beans



Eggplant



Rhubarb



Raw Potato



Deli Meats

Ultimately, every hamster will differ on how much food they should be fed. Most hamsters are okay being feed 2 tablespoons of seed mix and 3-4 lab blocks two or three times a week. Do not panic if you see their food bowl is empty shortly after filling it; hamsters are hoarders and will most likely move their food back to their burrows. You will know if you are feeding too much when you find a large stash of food in their bedding while cleaning.



Handling your Hamster

One of the fun things about owning a hamster is the ability to bond with them. Not all hamsters will love being handled right off the bat. As prey animals, their main instinct is to seek shelter. However, with time and patience, you will be able to “tame” your hamster.

There are many methods to taming your hamster, but generally, your goal is to build their trust in you. Start by offering treats from your fingers. Once they are comfortable, place the treat on the palm of your hand and encourage them to climb into your hand to retrieve the treat. From here, you can build up trust until they are comfortable being handled - and may even want you to handle them.

Safety of things like hamster balls are wildly debated. We will leave that up to you to decide.

Cleaning your Hamster's Enclosure

You will need to perform cage maintenance daily, weekly, and monthly. Each day, you should spot clean your hamster's tank and remove any poop or pee you may find. You will find that your hamster likes to potty in one particular spot, making it easier for you to clean. Additionally, water bowls or bottles should be cleaned and replaced at least once a day to prevent bacterial growth. Once a month, you should fully clean your hamster's entire enclosure. To do this, replace only 1/3rd of the bedding with new bedding. This will ensure that your hamster's scent remains in the cage and they will not get stressed. Once a month, but at a different time than bedding changes, you should clean the toys in the enclosure. Many small pet owners use a vinegar and water mixture. At Critter Corner Rescue, we like a 50/50 mix for monthly maintenance.

However, if your hamster has recently been ill, or you are reusing supplies from a previous animal for your new friend, using 90% vinegar and 10% water is a good way to ensure that you will not pass any bacteria from your first pet to your new one.

It is important to remember to NEVER clean with your hamster inside the enclosure. This will cause undue stress on your hamster and could lead to illness.





Keeping your Hamster Healthy

It is always a good idea to have a veterinarian examine your hamster in an annual physical exam. During this exam, be sure to mention any changes you may have recently seen in your Hamster. It is also important to perform regular health checks on your hamster to make sure there is nothing out of the ordinary. Hamsters, like all prey animals, are good at hiding signs of illness. If you can, purchase a kitchen scale and keep track of your hamster's weight in grams, to be sure that there is nothing going on.

The following behaviors may indicate illness:

- Hiding more than usual
- Eating or drinking less
- Weight loss
- Swollen joints
- Abnormalities with the eyes, nose, or mouth
- Discolored skin and hair loss
- Runny or abnormal droppings for more than two days
- Lack of droppings for an extended period of time.

Remember that all animals can potentially carry viral, bacterial, fungal, and parasitic diseases that are contagious to other animals and humans. You should thoroughly wash your hands with warm, soapy water before and after contact with your pet or their habitat - especially if you are about to interact with another animal.

Bringing home your New Critter

Congratulations on your new little friend! We hope that you enjoy them as much as we did in their time with us. Here are a few things to keep in mind when bringing them home:

- Do not be alarmed if they do not want to eat for a day or so. It is not uncommon while your hamster is adjusting to their new environment.
- You won't want to handle them for the first 5-7 days. Though its tempting, stress weakens their immune system and makes them extra vulnerable to disease.
- Keep an eye out for any signs of illness. With a weakened immune system, they are more susceptible to illnesses such as wet tail, which is common in Syrian hamsters.