

# 10 SECRETS TO RAISING A HEALTHY FERRET



1

## **SECRET #1: IS YOUR FERRET DOMESTICATED OR WILD --- AND WHY IT MATTERS!**

**Even before you choose a ferret . . .**

So, you're considering adopting a ferret. Congratulations! Ferrets make wonderful pets. Their popularity in this area has been growing too! But, did you realize (probably not if you're new to this whole ferret thing) that ferrets are actually illegal to own as pets in some cities and states.

And while in other states or cities you may legally own one as a pet, you may have to buy that little fur ball of a friend a license.

Seriously.

You see there's quite a bit of confusion when it comes to the exact status of a ferret. It's pretty sad, isn't it, when even the experts can't agree on the exact nature of this animal.

Some experts claim that the ferret is a wild animal . . . not a domesticated pet. And not only that, the ferret doesn't have the potential to be domesticated for a long, long time.

Other experts -- equally as educated, but obviously seeing things a tad differently -- say that the ferret is indeed a domesticated animal, and has been for thousands of years. So who's right? Hard to say.

It's evident that the various states and cities in this country are pretty mystified by the whole deal. And in some ways that's pretty understandable. Ferrets, it appears, go by two names. Sometimes they like to travel in cognito, I guess.

**2** Depending on how you learned about ferrets, they are known by two distinct (but similar) scientific names. Some scientists refer to the ferret as the *Mustela fura*. This makes the fuzzy little guy a species all to himself (congratulations on your independence, Fuzzy!).

Another school of scientific thought views today's ferret as a descendant of the wild European polecat whose scientific name is *Mustela putorius furo*. You can certainly see the similarity between the two names, can't you?

And in fact, the ferret is most often known by the latter name. And that's the legal leg governments stand on when they classify these guys as "wildlife." Ferrets, then, are viewed just like a raccoon.

Do yourself -- and your children -- a favor by checking first with your local government about your ability to keep ferrets as pets. Then ask the local officials where you would go to for state information. If all else fails, surf the net to see if you can discover laws that apply specifically to you and your geographic location.

## SECRET #2: CHOOSING ONE OF 4 KINDS OF FERRETS

### 4 Ferret Types?

Yes, there are four distinct types of ferrets from which you can choose for your next family member. Seems hard to believe. So, what are they? I'm so glad you asked.

Many of these are distinguished by not only the coloring of their fur but also their markings.

Look, for example, at the "Siamese Ferret." As might you may guess if you're at all familiar cat breeds, the Siamese Ferret possesses darker "points" on his face. His "mask" as it's called resembles the letter "V".

There's also a **champagne version** of the Siamese or point ferret. This particular kind has no mask, but the nose is lighter in color. Most of the time its a pink or beige and usually has a "T" outline.

**3 The Solid Ferret.** The solid ferret possesses a more concentrated coloring than the standard ferret. And in the ideal world, all of his guard hairs will be colored. It's not that he doesn't have points, mind you. You just can't distinguish them. A solid ferret, in fact, should also possess a full T-bar mask as well as a nose color that matches his coat color.

**The Standard Ferret.** The standard ferret is probably the most common type you'll find today.

The guard hairs on this little critter are no less than 90 percent the same color compared to his white guard hairs.

The body color appears light than the points on the legs and tail. This makes the points much easier to see. Standards are additionally identified by their nose colors, which should be appropriate for their body colors and their full or T-bar masks.

## **SECRET #3: BUYING A FERRET HOME**

### **Ferret Preparation Before You Adopt!**

Wait! I see everything here in your home for a ferret, but the fuzzy animal. What gives? Oh! Now I understand. You're just about ready to adopt your new member of the family. But you want everything in its place before the homecoming. Smart. Very smart!

Bringing your ferret home with conditions all ready for him to walk into reduces the stress for the little guy right from the start. But more than that, it also reduces your stress. You're not running around at the last minute -- usually at the wee hours of the morning -- trying to find appropriate accessories for your newly adopted family member.

In the meantime, you may possibly be keeping your ferret contained somewhere so things at home don't get out of hand. Oh, yeah! I know. I've been in that place too! And you can expect to have one unhappy ferret once you let him out to roam. But that goes without saying.

**4**

What's it going to be? We have a beautiful large two-story condo over here you might be interested in. Plenty of floor space for you. Or would you prefer a quiet bungalow like this one we have here.

What am I doing? Why I'm house hunting for the new ferret that I'll be bringing home soon. What does it look like I'm doing?

And if you're planning on adopting a ferret (or two) you should probably plan on doing this in your near future as well.

Your ferret's accommodations can be as simple as a cage or as elaborate as a multi-level condo specifically designed for ferret's . . . or some individuals simply "ferret-proof" a spare small bedroom in the house for him.

Most people opt for some type of cage or condo-like structure. As you browse your pet store, you'll be amazed at the wide variety from which you have to choose.

And if you don't like any of those (or they should be slightly out of your price range) then it's time to take mouse in hand and search the internet. You may find something here that works for you.

**SECRET #4:  
GOODNIGHT SWEET FERRET!  
CHOOSING THE PROPER BEDDING FOR YOUR FERRET**

**No Wood Chips Here!**

Ferrets may be best known for being balls of furry non-stop energy. But, believe it or not sooner or later they do get tired! And when they get tired they really do appreciate a soft bed.

Surprisingly, there aren't really fussy about what constitutes a bed. The main criteria they look for is softness and burrowing potential. If it's soft and they can wrap themselves up in it, you've got a ferret who will sleep away.

By the way, just to let you know. Even though you may think "energy" when you think ferret, they tend to sleep 15 to 20 hours a day. I tell you, that four to nine hours of unadulterated vibrancy is tough to maintain!

So if you think your ferret is sleeping a lot. He probably is. But his metabolism needs all this sleep. So please don't wake him up so you can play with him. (Even though he may do that do you!)

**5**

Keep this in mind while you're accessorizing his cage even before you bring him home. Ferrets are notorious for loving hammocks (it probably has something to do with how their bodies are shaped!), as well as sleep sacks, sleep cubes, and beds.

Heck, if you have nothing else for them, they'll even appreciate a T-shirt or some fleece. Ferrets love nothing better than to burrow into their bedding in their sleep (You've heard of sleep walking? Ferrets sleep burrow. Go figure!)

Many people -- as well intended as they are -- try to substitute wood chips for bedding. This isn't a great idea for several reasons. The first is that it may cause your sensitive ferret to develop respiratory problems.

But let's face it, you wouldn't want to sleep on stiff, hard, uncomfortable (to say the least) wood chips. But more than that, ferrets have very sensitive feet. Wood chips may injure those feet.

**SECRET #5:  
IT'S TRUE! A FERRET CAN NEVER HAVE TOO MANY TOYS!**

**Your Ferret Has How Many Toys?**

One thing you're about to learn when it comes to ferrets is that they love their toys. While a human baby may have too many toys. And certainly you may think your 10-year-old may have too many.

But most ferret owners agree: Ferrets can never have too many toys. It's just a fact of ferret life.

And if you're thinking about adopting a ferret, you're smart to think about bringing at least a few toys home before you bring your ferret home. There's nothing like a welcoming gift or gifts for your new family member.

And I see you now, standing in the pet store wondering exactly what you should be purchasing for your new pet. Let me give you a clue: ferrets have been known to play with just about anything.

**6** But as a parent who doesn't have a bottomless pocket of money to spend on toys, I have a second clue for you: buy durable toys.

There are two fundamental factors that should determine any purchase when it comes to toys for your ferret. Durable undoubtedly is one of them. The other word is safety. That's right!

Having a ferret playing with toys is like having a toddler around the house. You have to be very careful that the toys don't have parts and pieces small enough the ferret can swallow. As a ferret parent, it's your responsibility to check the toys occasionally, just as you would for your children.

If you have found some toys you deem unsafe, simply throw them away. Don't worry, you're not being wasteful. You may, indeed, be saving the life of your ferret by doing this!

If as you browse through the pet shop you find few toys marked specifically for ferret play, I'm not surprised. Many a ferret owner improvises when it comes to this area. Actually, just about any toy marked as being for cats are perfect for your ferret, believe it or not!

**SECRET #6:  
A HARNESS: YOUR FERRET'S BEST FRIEND**

**Every Ferret Needs a Collar!**

Keeping either a collar or a harness on your pet ferret is an excellent habit to get into. If they should "escape", then the collar easily identifies your ferret as a pet, not just some lost feral animal.

You don't have to put a lot of "fashion" thought into buy a collar for your new ferret though. When you go searching for one for your ferret, ignore going for glamour. Instead base your purchase on functionality with your little friend foremost in mind.

You'll want to buy a collar that is, before all else, lightweight, preferably one made of nylon, soft leather or suede.

If the collar is too heavy your little friend will end up on a mission to see if he can remove it from his neck. You will also want to get a small bell that attaches to the collar. In this way, you'll be able to tell where that little guy is during the day. (And you will learn how to worry when you don't hear the bell.)

**7**

If you decide to buy a harness, you'll soon discover that you can teach your ferret to walk along right with you on a lead. If you do this, though, make sure you buy the correct harness. Don't try to make one from an old dog lead.

Your ferret will slip out of that one so fast . . .

You'll want to get a harness especially for a ferret. It will undoubtedly be a full body harness, by the way. This is for their own good and actually helps to ensure their safety. Don't worry that anyone will think you're being mean. You're not. You're being a good parent by being careful.

Give your ferret some time to get used to the idea of a harness before you attempt to go for a walk with him. Don't hurry him. I guarantee you, he will get used to it.

But, remember to only use this when you're walking him. Once you two are inside, take it off of him.

If you have any questions when you purchase the equipment ask the clerk at the pet store where you bought it. Hopefully, he or she is knowledgeable enough to answer your questions and assuage your doubts.

## **SECRET #7: WELCOMING THE NEW FERRET MEMBER OF THE FAMILY**

### **Interacting with your Ferret!**

Yes, just about everyone in the family looks pretty happy now. The new little guy must be here . . . somewhere. Don't worry, he'll learn to love you guys. You've just got to give him some time.

And while you're waiting for him to get adjusted, here is some sage advice on several aspects of ferret ownership! I hope they help you adjust to your relationship with your new family member.

If you've never had a ferret before, it might be a good idea for you to look over some of these suggestions for handling your furry ball of energy. They'll help you to bond quickly with your new friend. And they'll help put him at ease at the same time.

First, always speak in a soft, friendly tone to the little guy before you pick him up. If for no other reason, just to let him know what you're planning on doing.

**8**

Don't handle your ferret immediately upon his waking up either from a deep sleep or a nap. This I suggest not only out of courtesy to him, but for your own sense of being comfortable with him. Allow him to wake up, perhaps eat a little bit and definitely go to the litter box.

Treat your ferret occasionally when you pick him up. You don't want to offer him a treat on every occurrence -- just often enough to keep him hoping that something great lies in his future.

While we're on the topic of picking up your ferret, let's talk for a moment about putting him down. Many owners make the mistake of allowing the pet decide when it's time to squirm down out of their arms.

Don't be one of them. Don't put him down when he wants down. Instead, decide, right from the start that you're going to train him. (Otherwise, he's going to train you!)

If you starts to put his teeth into you, indicating he wants down (cats will do this as well!) then give it a sharp "No!" If he doesn't listen, then add a slight thump on the nose and give him a second, stern-sounding "No!" That should give him a clear enough message.

**SECRET #8:  
PLAYING -- THE FERRET WAY!**

**Teaching your ferret to play nicely!**

You and your ferret are built differently. Yes, I'm sure you already noticed this. And to some extent I'm sure your ferret does as well. Ferrets, for one thing, have extremely tough skins. Much tougher than ours. And both the adult ferret as well as the baby play pretty tough with each other. And it's fine, because they each have that tough ferret skin.

But this level of play is also something that causes more than a few problems when your ferret views you as an oversized version of himself. He doesn't realize that your skin isn't as tough as his.

Your ferret has already learned how to play with his mother, brother and sisters without harming them. And he'd like nothing better than to play with you on this same rough-and-tough scale. But she really needs to learn just how rough-and-tough she can be with you.

**9** Don't allow a situation to occur in which your ferret plays with you and actually (though unintentionally) hurts you or a family member. Your new ferret can learn the acceptable bounds of playing with humans. But you need to teach this to him.

And you do this by correcting him when he gets too rough . . . not occasionally though. You correct every time he becomes too rough. You must do this consistently for it to work. And the amount of discipline isn't as much as you may imagine. Your ferret is a smart animal who really doesn't want to hurt you in the first place. Before you know it, the two of you will have reached an understanding.

Even a kit -- the baby ferret -- can occasionally nip too hard (and this is the stage the ferret is still learning his bounds). For this reason, it's recommended by all experts that a young kit and young children should never be left to play alone without some type of adult supervision.

Before you allow the two to be alone, be sure that the child is old enough -- and experienced enough -- to handle the ferret properly. Also ensure the child knows and can carry out proper ferret discipline.

**SECRET #9:  
STARTING IN ON BATHROOM CLUTTER**

**No, please don't go in . . . there! Uh-oh!**

Ah yes! You've no doubt already noticed that your ferret does have a set of nails. And yes, to answer that question that is undoubtedly on your mind, you need to trim them occasionally.

By occasionally, I mean about once every two weeks. But this schedule isn't written in stone. Just like each member of your family is an individually unique being, each ferret is an individual as well.

And areas like nail growth, for example, vary from ferret to ferret. And don't worry, you really don't need to run out to buy specific ferret nail clippers. You can use regular ones. They work just fine.

Clipping their nails is a lot like clipping a dog's nail, if you've ever performed those duties. When cutting the nail, you need to be looking for that red vein that travels through the nail. Don't clip it!

**10** It is after all, a vein. It carries blood and will bleed. If you accidentally clip it you won't know for a few initial seconds who is the more terrified -- you or your ferret.

If you're unsure of how to clip the nail, consult with your veterinarian first. He'll show you exactly how to do this. You'll feel much more comfortable that way and so will Freddie Ferret.

You need to know that in one way, your ferret is like a cat. He can get hairballs. Ugh! That can't be comfortable. But you can not only keep these to a minimum, but possibly avoid them altogether by brushing him regularly.

And make it a habit to especially brush him during the shedding season. This is when he's at his highest risk of acquiring those nasty hairballs.

**SECRET #10:  
THE ONE STEP THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR WHOLE LIFE**

**#1 Step that improves the quality of your life**

No one has developed the perfect diet for the proper -- and healthy -- feeding of the ferret. Of course, it's one of those situations in which you talk to five different ferret parents and you'll get five different "ideal" diets for the ferret.

Of course, what people feed their ferrets depend on a number of factors, among one of the primary: personal preference. Another qualifying factor in deciding how and what your ferret is going to eat is what's available to it in your area.

Before you even bring your fuzzy friend home, keep some of this information in mind. But the bottom line is this: it's a learn-as-you-go process. The more you know about your individual pet ferret, the better you'll be able to meet his individual health needs.

Now having said all that, let's learn a little about just what pleases the hungry ferret.

**11** Ferrets are classified as "obligate carnivores". You already probably recognize the "carnivore" part of this phrase as meaning "meat eating."

And the "obligate" part, is a really just as it sounds. They must eat meat! Virtually all of their nutritional needs, in fact, are supplied through a meat-based diet.

Why? Well, here's where another scientific term comes into play, but don't let it intimidate you. They must eat meat, because they are "hypercarnivores." This means that their anatomy . . . physiology . . . and even their behavior . . . have become adapted to a strict meat-eating lifestyle

But wait! It gets better. Now listen to this. Additionally, ferrets do what is known in animal husbandry as "olfactory imprint" on their foods. No it's not gross or anything like that. But it does mean that their food choices are based, in large part by the odor of the food.

Every one of us could probably identify with this to some extent. Who hasn't smelled something good cooking and known instantly that you'll like it. In the same way, how many of us have been turned off by some foul-smelling food that we even have refused to taste!

This olfactory imprint is established in large part by the time a young ferret reaches six months of age. It's finalized by the time the animal reaches a year of age. In some cases, the ferret can be as young as eight months old and have his imprint in place.

The corollary to this is that as they age, the less likely they are to be able to recognize the smell of any new foods as being good to the taste.

To learn more about ferrets, check out our comprehensive 85 page ebook, *Caring for Your Ferret: The Responsible Owner's Guide* at [www.getagripon.com/ferrets/ebook.html](http://www.getagripon.com/ferrets/ebook.html)

Have a wonderful experience with your ferret,

Dr. Arthur Young