

Guide to Owning a PET RAT

Rats make great pets! Rats are very intelligent, clean, sociable and interesting animals. A pet rat will give you many years of laughter, wonder and love.

- 1) Where can I get a rat? Pet rats can be purchased at pet stores, from breeders, rat clubs, internet ads, local shelters and from club rescue groups. Pet rats are specifically bred for temperament, health and color. Feeder rats are usually sold to be food for snakes and may not be as well socialized, but with love and patience any rat has the potential to become a wonderful pet.
- 2) Health: Rats should not be sneezing, wheezing, coughing, lethargic, or generally sick looking.
- 3) Male or Female: “Males are Mellow, Girls are Fun”. Males tend to get larger than females. Males make better “lap” pets. Males at times “scent mark” their territories. Females are very curious, more active and love to explore and play games. Females sometimes develop mammary tumors.
- 4) One Rat or Two: Rats are sociable animals. Consider getting a same sex pair of siblings. Rats introduced later may not get along. A male and female pair can produce up to 14 babies every month.
- 5) Age: A rat is ready for a new home around 5-6 weeks of age.
- 6) Color: Rats come in a variety of colors, markings and coat types. There are even curly haired, tailless, and hairless rats. Eyes can be red or black.
- 7) Housing: Baby rats quickly outgrow a 10 or 20 gal aquarium. They will need larger living quarters like a rabbit hutch or large ferret cage. Bottom of cage can have hardwood shavings (like Aspen). **No Pine or Cedar**. Paper based unscented catlitter is OK but do not use clay based litter. There are many other materials you can use like Carefresh, corncob pellets, and rabbit pellets. You must cover any wire mesh your rat will walk on with some type of flooring. Wire floors will irritate and damage a rat’s feet. Provide a sleeping box. Ideally, place the cage where you and your family can enjoy your new pet, but not in direct sunlight and away from drafts. Change cage often (weekly).
- 8) Food: Sturdy bowl filled with labblocks, some hamster mix, cereals and grains. Vegetarian dog kibble is OK. Offer fruit and veggies on a regular basis. Healthy people food, dog crackers, chicken bones are OK on occasion. Water provided in a hanging small animal water bottle must be changed daily. Press on the metal ball on end of bottle to make sure it is working properly.
- 9) Rats and Other Pets: Rats generally do not get along with mice, gerbils, birds, guinea pigs, hamsters, cats or dogs.
- 10) Favorite Rat Activities: Spending time with their owners, being petted, sleeping, eating, and being curious. Rats enjoy free roaming time outside their cages. Supervision and ratproofing the area is a good idea.
- 11) Toys: Rat wheel (**no wire wheels**). Ropes, ladders, multi-levels, hammocks, tubes, etc. are popular.
- 12) More information: Rat Clubs, Rat books like Rats! A Fun and Care Book by Debbie Ducommun. On the Web: search on Pet Rats. Rat & Mouse Club of America at <http://www.rmca.org/>