

Caring For a Hamster



Hamsters make delightful family pets. They sleep during the day and become active in the evening, ideal for many family schedules. Most hamsters, including Syrian hamsters, are solitary and must be kept alone. Occasionally, dwarf hamsters may be social and prefer to live in pairs or groups, however you should have an extra cage available in case they need to be separated.

General

Most hamsters are easy to handle once they learn to trust you. Allow your new pet a few days to settle into its new home before picking it up. Offering food from your hand helps to build confidence. Regular exercise in a safe area outside the cage is important, but wait for your hamster to wake up on its own, have a snack, and go to the bathroom before you take it out of its cage. Never wake a sleeping hamster as it may become irritable and bite.

Housing

Syrian hamsters need a cage of about 24 x 16 x 12 in, with a solid bottom and a wire top. An easy way to provide adequate space is to connect several smaller cages with Habitrail type tunnels. Add a sleeping house, filled with nesting material like shredded paper or hay, and choose toys such as a solid wheel (no open rungs), ladders, and ramps. Hamsters love burrowing in a deep layer of safe bedding such as Aspen shavings, or Carefresh. Avoid aromatic cedar and pine beddings. Dwarf hamsters are safer in a large aquarium or specially designed cage, as they may squeeze through regular cage bars.

Diet

A healthy diet is based on dry food consisting of pellets and a small amount of seeds, both freely available at all times. Use lab blocks designed for hamsters rather than pellets to provide an especially nutritious diet. Provide a handful of fresh vegetables and fruit each evening. Hamsters are omnivores and though most people keep them on a vegetarian diet, they can also eat foods such as nuts, mealworms, yogurt, cottage cheese, tofu and lean cooked meat. Fresh water should always be available in a sipper bottle.

Cleaning

Spot-clean soiled areas daily and wash the cage bottoms, food dishes and water bottles weekly. Always rinse and dry well before adding fresh bedding. Reusing some of the old nesting material will help your hamster will feel comfy and at home.

Fertility

Separate Syrian hamsters according to their sex by 3 weeks of age to avoid health risks and unwanted babies. Dwarf hamsters can produce babies every 3 weeks if males and females are not kept apart.

Health

Be alert and consult a vet if you notice signs of illness or injury such as: lack of droppings or soft droppings; excessive drinking or urinating; dirty, wet or patchy fur; sneezing, wheezing or runny nose; limping, cuts or bumps, bleeding from any opening.

Warnings

'Fluffy' nesting materials can cause fatal injuries to hamsters and should never be used.

More Info

Hamsters: A Complete Pet Owner's Manual, by Otto von Frisch

The Complete Guide to Hamsters: www.geocities.com/pets_hamsters/index.html