

## SHOPPING LIST:



information leaflet about gerbils/  
desert mice

- large cage, e.g. hamster house with different levels
- nest box
- heavy feeding bowl
- water bottle
- floor covering (e.g. soft wood granules + straw or natural bedding)
- hamster litter
- hay (rich in herbs, dry, dust-free)
- dried herbs
- gerbil food (premium food)
- snack ball
- mineral stone, salt lick
- vitamin supplements (Vitamin C + Ascorbic Acid)
- wood for gnawing on (hardwood gnawing block, wicker bridge)
- tubes and tunnels
- root for climbing
- nibble sticks
- disinfectant/detergent for cleaning the cage
- book about gerbils

## WHAT DO I LIKE TO EAT?

Gerbils feed at all sorts of different times of the day, and in fact have around 8 feeding sessions a day, and so need to have food permanently on hand. Gerbil food (premium food), fresh hay and herbs are the most suitable for them. Gerbils love sunflower seeds and will choose these over any other food, but offer them sparingly, or else the animals will damage their stomachs and become too fat.

You should also give your gerbil bits of fresh food, like maize kernels, carrots or apples. Animal protein (e.g. mealworms) can also be offered to your pet. A mineral stone helps to keep the length of the teeth in check, since they continue to grow throughout the animal's life. Salt stone, vitamins and intestinal conditioner are extremely beneficial dietary additives and should be given regularly. Stale food must be removed from the cage immediately.

Very acidic fruit or gas-inducing vegetables should not be given at all.

Fresh water must always be available and a rodent drip feed bottle is the best option for this.

## REPRODUCTION

1. A female gerbil can become pregnant from the age of 10 weeks.
2. The average litter size is 4-5 young in total (although there could be up to 10).
3. The gestation period is 24-28 days.
4. The young can be separated from the mother after approx. 4-5 weeks.



## KEEP ME FIT AND HEALTHY

A healthy gerbil is very active, playful and extremely inquisitive, has a soft, gleaming coat, large eyes and a clean nose. Symptoms of illness include loss of appetite, diarrhoea, apathy, bristly hair and mucus or crust around the eyes or nose. Its teeth should not be visible when its mouth is shut and there should be a fine covering of hair around its ears.

If you notice any symptoms indicating that your gerbil is unwell take it to a vet immediately.

Animals who barge against the wall or bars of the cage out of boredom can end up with painful wounds around the nose or mouth. Change the material of the cage and/or place a few toys and objects that can be moved around, such as a tunnel and twigs, into the cage. If the wounds don't heal it is essential that you find a vet and have your gerbil examined.



## My gerbil/my desert mouse

Everything you need to know about gerbils/desert mice as pets



Everything for your pet

[www.maxizoo.ie](http://www.maxizoo.ie)

For more tips and further information on gerbils visit our website at [www.maxizoo.ie](http://www.maxizoo.ie)



## AM I THE RIGHT PET FOR YOU?

Gerbils are very active, inquisitive and entertaining pets for slightly older children.

Gerbils are desert animals and therefore pass very little urine or droppings. Their average life expectancy ranges from 3-5 years.

## WHERE DO I ORIGINATE FROM?

The gerbils that we keep originate from 20 breeding pairs that were caught in Mongolia in 1935. First of all, they were bred in Japan and then arrived in Europe via America.



## WHERE'S THE BEST PLACE FOR ME TO LIVE?

Gerbils can be kept in multi-level containers or one of the larger hamster homes. However, make sure that you remove rodent exercise wheels, for gerbils could injure their feet or tails on them (the only suitable exercise wheels are ones with a jute running surface). The floor of the cage should be covered with wood shavings. Provide enough straw for its bed and replace it with clean straw regularly. A sand bath (e.g. chinchilla sand) should be supplied for coat cleaning.

The distance between the bars shouldn't be too wide, otherwise the animals could force their way through them.



In their natural habitat, gerbils live in warrens or burrows. You can also construct a similar type of burrow or warren in your own home by filling a well-ventilated terrarium with a layer of bedding 10 cm deep (e.g. soft wood granules).

You should still add extra hay or wood wool that can be used as nesting material. Also place a few stones into the terrarium for them to use for supporting the tunnel and then cover the entire container with a wire mesh guard. Help the "construction" along a bit with a few little twigs and toys or even some cardboard tubes as a tunnel substitute. The ferret castles available at Maxi Zoo also provide lots of diversity.

A lot of thought needs to go into the location of the cage, too. Since these animals are active during the day and night, a child's room or bedroom is only an option if the person occupying the room doesn't sleep very lightly. Cooking smells and the often increased humidity make the kitchen equally unsuitable.

If the gerbil's home is going to be in the living room, then you will have to forgo the pleasure of listening to music, often played at a loud volume, since it is not so much fun for rodents with their tiny, sensitive ears.

It goes without saying that the cage should always be kept clean, since droppings, urine and stale food don't just smell unpleasant to human beings, but can also damage the animal's delicate lungs and make it ill. Gerbils normally choose themselves a specific place in their home for use as a toilet area. This should be cleaned daily. A hamster toilet relieves the burden of cleaning.

## HEALTH CHECKLIST

### A healthy gerbil

- moves nimbly and quickly,
- has clean fur especially around the nose, mouth, eyes and anus area,
- has a thick and shiny coat without any crusting
- breathes without making an audible noise,
- has a straight back,
- has no open wounds or encrustations.



## HOW I SHOULD BE HANDLED?

Let your new gerbil get used to its surrounding for a few days before you start to try and tame it. Speak to it and put your hand carefully into "the cage" so that it can sniff at it. If you are holding something to nibble (it should be a special, rodent treat, like those available at Maxi Zoo) your hand will be of much greater interest. If you would like to stroke your gerbil, make sure that it is awake and lift it carefully, yet right up out of the cage, by cupping both hands around it.

Never pick the gerbil up by the tail because this could cause its skin to peel off. Occasionally, a gerbil can have a fit when it is being handled. If this occurs, put it straight back into its cage so that it can recover. Once they have been tamed, gerbils will really enjoy being stroked by you.

## DO I LIKE COMPANY?

Gerbils are sociable animals and are much more active and content in themselves if they are kept in the company of other gerbils or a have a mate. They need to feel the warmth of other gerbils and love a friendly nibble as well as frenzied chases. If possible, put a group of young animals together (10 weeks or less), because animals any older than this find it very difficult to get used to one another.

