Things to Consider Before Buying a Ferret: Is a Ferret the Right Pet for You?

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Ferrets have become the third most popular house pet in the USA, and their owners now represent a large cross-section of America. Most pet ferret owners are upper middle class or professional people who work all day. Frequently they are single women or childless couples over 30 years of age. Generally, ferrets are pets of adults, not children.

What do people like about ferrets?

Ferrets are very playful animals that act silly and express their love of life in a way that many of us find totally enchanting. They explode out of their cages at play time, leaping and twisting and scampering, with an obvious joy that is contagious to the people observing them. They have a distinctive, bouncing movement that is often referred to as a 'weasel war-dance,' because they often open their mouths and hiss as they jump around. People who have never seen this before may feel that they are going to be attacked, but it is just an expression of the ferret's exuberance. A group of ferrets released to play together are more entertaining to a ferret-lover than an Oscar-winning action feature, and ferrets work for free and do their own stunts. In the excitement, they often accidentally run into walls or furniture, and apparently do not notice the pain that these collisions must cause. Young ferrets have enormous energy, and are usually not interested in being held for even a moment, struggling to be off again as soon as they are picked up. A ferret endears itself to its owner just by its way of moving, rather like a large, furry inchworm.

Whatever ferrets see you doing, they want to do it with you. They think everything in the house is for their amusement. They steal keys and hide them in inaccessible places. They collect socks, and sometimes even shoes, never in pairs. They can't pass a wastebasket without overturning it. They climb inside chairs or couches and tear holes in the stuffing to make a comfortable napping place. They can't resist nibbling bare toes. They always do a dance of joy when let out to play, or when approached by their person of significance.

Ferrets like to take naps in unexpected places – in a bureau drawer, in a basket full of laundry, under a sweater dropped on the rug – leaving a few whiskers or a limp paw visible to charm their owners. When awakened suddenly from a sound sleep, most ferrets will immediately begin to play. As they grow older, they often become very affectionate and enjoy being picked up and cuddled, and may even fall asleep in your lap.

Mature pet ferrets almost never bite, even when accidentally stepped on or hurt. The odd one that does is usually tolerated because of other things about him or her that make an occasional nip just part of the animal's appeal.

Ferrets make good pets

Ferrets require neither human nor ferret company for security or amusement most of the time. They are not nocturnal, but go to sleep when nothing exciting is happening, and wake up whenever a human comes to entertain them (or to be entertained by them). Ferrets do not become neurotic as some other house pets do when left alone for long periods of time. They are excellent pets for people who go to work early in the morning and don't get home until evening. They require little out-of-cage exercise and no out-of-doors exercise, and are much safer when kept inside a ferret-proofed house.

Because they can be caged, ferrets can be prevented from damaging the house while their owners are away. Apartment landlords often accept a ferret as a cage-dweller like a hamster or guinea pig even if she really spends most of her time free in the house when the owner is at home.

Ferrets are quiet. They make very few sounds after they are 6 or 8 weeks old. Neighbors in an apartment nearby would not hear any vocalization, although the ferrets might rattle the door of their cage when they hear their owner returning home.

A single pet ferret may be very happy with only human company, and becomes devoted to the major person in its life. However, most young ferrets are compatible, multiple housing is feasible, and groups of ferrets are great fun to watch. They usually prefer to sleep together and readily share their food. Ferret-watching becomes a regular and favorite pastime for the owners. Ferrets do not require as much human attention when they are allowed to play together and amuse each other. However, they also do not bond as firmly to their owner as single ferrets do.

Ferrets can be litter or paper trained, with some patience. Although they are not as reliable as cats, they will usually use a litter box in their cage. When free in the house, ferrets select a few corners as toilet areas, and will train you to put litter boxes or paper in those spots.

How much care does a ferret need?

A ferret requires very little special care to be comfortable. He must have food and fresh water constantly available. He prefers a snug nest to sleep in. He needs a litter box, which should be cleaned at least once daily, or some other toilet arrangement that requires cleaning, such as papers on the floor. Caged ferrets need to be allowed out to play for at least an hour or two every day in a room that has been ferret-proofed. Young, healthy ferrets can be left alone for a weekend with a dependable water source and enough food to last the time they are unobserved, but it is safer to have someone check on them daily.

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