The Cost of Owning a Ferret

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

The smallest expense that will be incurred by the owner of a ferret is the purchase price, whether the ferret is acquired as a baby from a pet shop or private breeder, or as an adult from a shelter. Responsible pet ownership does not depend on the monetary value of the animal, measured by the purchase price. It is fulfillment of an unwritten contract you enter when you decide to own a living creature that will depend entirely on you for its well-being. This is true of any pet.

Your responsibility includes providing adequate housing, food, exercise, and veterinary care, and making sure the animal is physically protected from infectious diseases, and harmful substances, activities, people, or other animals. It is also your legal responsibility to confine your pet as necessary to prevent harm to other people or their property.

- Food: Feeding ferrets is not a large expense, but they require good quality food for health, and this should not be an area to save money. Generic cat foods cause several kinds of health problems, and ferrets will die in a short time if fed only dog food. The best ferret foods will be available in pet shops.
- Neutering: Pet ferrets need to be spayed or neutered. Descenting is an option that many people choose. The cost of these surgical procedures varies from place to place. Most pet shops sell kits that have already been spayed or neutered and descented.
- Housing and environment: Special toys and elaborate cages are not really necessary for the ferret's comfort. A ferret that is allowed out to play for several hours every day can tolerate a very small cage as a place to eat, sleep and use a litter box. A guinea pig cage will suffice if it serves as just a bedroom and the pet gets adequate exercise in a larger area. Fancy sleeping tubes and hammocks are not required, but may provide much comfort to the ferret and satisfaction to the owner.

  Left to choose for themselves, ferrets will select very small simple nests such as a winter hat or a paper bag. Many ferrets prefer an old sweatshirt to a relatively expensive sleeping tube. If you keep your pets in a prominent place in your living area, it is desirable to have professionally built ferret cages and equipment.
- Veterinary expenses: Pet ferret owners must be prepared for veterinary expenses. Ferrets do not suffer from many serious diseases early in life, but canine distemper is deadly. Ferrets require yearly vaccination: unvaccinated ferrets die if infected with canine distemper virus. Rabies vaccination is necessary to protect your family as well as your ferret.

  Older ferrets become susceptible to several types of cancer that may be treatable by surgical and/or medical means, although these can be expensive. The life span of the ferret is only 6 or 7 years, but people become devoted to their pet in a short time and are usually willing to provide the necessary care, whatever the cost may be. Someone who owns several ferrets over 5 years old may have sizeable veterinary bills.
- Licenses: Some states and municipal areas require licenses for ferrets kept as pets. Some states (California and Hawaii) forbid the keeping of ferrets as pets and there are stiff penalties for defying the law. The ferret often pays the stiffest penalty: it may be seized and killed by the authorities.

  The American Veterinary Medical Association lists the ferret in the same category as dogs and cats, i.e., instead of immediate euthanasia and rabies testing in the event that a vaccinated pet ferret bites or scratches someone, the animal may be quarantined for 10 days. However, local authorities do not necessarily know about or agree with this decision and continue to carry out their own policies.

  Although there is an effective rabies vaccine for ferrets, public health departments may not recognize the ferret as a domestic animal. In many municipalities, if a vaccinated ferret bites or scratches someone who makes a complaint or seeks medical attention, the animal is killed and tested for rabies, the same as a wild animal. Ferret owners have fought the seizure of their pet in court and won, but lawyers' fees and other legal costs have taken their life savings and everything they owned. This is an avoidable expense if you prevent your ferret from contacting strangers.

Editor's Note: The table below provides estimates of the yearly costs of caring for your ferret.

Product/Service	Cost 1st Year	Yearly Cost 1-3 Years of Age	Yearly Cost Over 3 Years of Age
Purchase Price	100-200	---	---
Cage	60-150	0	0

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Litter Pan	5-8	0	0
Feed Bowls and Waterers	6-10	1	1
Harness and Leash	7-14	2	1
Pet Carrier	14-30	0	0
Grooming supplies, e.g.; brush, shampoo, deodorizing spray	10-20	10	10
Toys	18-40	3	3
Accessories, e.g.; hammock, sleeping tube	10-50	3	3
Litter	15-50	25-50	25-50
Food	50-60	50-60	50-60
Routine veterinary care and vaccinations	75-150	50-70	50-70
Other veterinary care, e.g.; dental cleaning, blood screening test, chronic illness	---	90	100-300
Heartworm and flea prevention/control	20-200	50-200	50-200
Medications and supplements, e.g.; nutritional, fatty acids, hair ball remedies, ear mite medication	12-50	12-50	12-50
Treats	10-40	10-40	10-40

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Totals	**$412.00-$1072.00**	**$306.00-$579.00**	**$315.00-$788.00**

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