

# Housing For Ferrets

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

## Cages

A ferret cage should contain a:

- [Litter box](#) with a very low entrance
- Water bottle and a clip-on dish of water
- Food container (crook or clip-on), with the food he's accustomed to
- Sleeping tube or other nest

## Suggestions for ferret nests

When providing a sleeping container in a cage, try to approximate what the ferret would choose. Their priorities are darkness, privacy, and a soft nest with a snug fit. Ferrets are not claustrophobic: they are burrowing animals by nature, and like to feel the walls closing in around them.



Most ferrets like the commercial sleeping tubes that are available in some pet shops or in mail order or on-line catalogs. These are washable fabric tubes open at both ends so that several ferrets can get in at once, which is what they prefer to do. Sleeping tubes were inspired by, and may be economically replaced by, the sleeve of a sweatshirt or the leg of a pair of jogging pants. Some ferrets prefer sleeping in winter hats or wool socks.

Hammocks that attach to the cage wire are also popular: some of these have an imitation sheepskin lining. Some ferrets love hammocks, others don't consider them nesting material at all. If your ferret expresses no interest in a new hammock, try hanging it at different levels or varying the shape of the sleeping surface. Ferrets are not afraid to express their opinions and may flatly refuse to use the newly purchased hammock as a hammock. However, they may enjoy sleeping under the same hammock if it is put on the floor or into a sleeping container.



Small plastic storage boxes are good ferret beds. Tie, tape, or clip them to the cage wire or the ferrets will move them around and tip them over. Add some nesting material, like a T-shirt or a sweatshirt sleeve. Ferrets will also arrange an ordinary Terry hand towel over themselves to make a private nest. Fabric cat beds are also appealing ferret nests when 'covers' are added, and these cannot be tipped over.

Ferrets are gregarious by nature and like to sleep in a heap. Even when several beds are available in a cage of ferrets, they usually all sleep in one.

## Special conditions

**Hot weather:** In warm summer months, ferrets should be housed in the coolest area possible, or in an air-conditioned room. They do not tolerate heat well and will die of [heat stroke](#) if left for more than a few minutes in a very warm, unventilated area (over 90°F).

**Outdoor housing:** Ferrets tolerate very cold temperatures if they are well fed and have a warm dry nest to sleep in, preferably with group housing. Traditionally, ferrets have lived in outdoor cages raised off the ground, like rabbit hutches. This is a satisfactory arrangement if fresh water is supplied twice daily when temperatures are freezing, and their food is protected from moisture so that it stays fresh.



The major physical dangers of outdoor housing are:

- Neglect in inclement weather
- Escape of the ferret which may then be lost or killed
- Infection with [heartworms](#)

Small ferrets can escape if the cage wire is bigger than 1x1" mesh. Doors and openings for water or feed containers have to be very secure or the ferret will eventually dig his (or her) way out. Some feed hoppers meant for rabbits are so big that when the hopper is empty, a small ferret can climb into it and escape through the top opening.

In very warm weather, the cage should be in an area that is always shaded: even a few minutes in hot sun can kill a ferret.

Fresh water should be available at all times and changed twice a day in the hottest part of the summer.

Living in the garage: Many ferrets owned by children end up living in the garage because the mother of the family does not want to clean up after the ferret, and no one notices the smell of the dirty cage when it is in the garage.

What could be sadder than a healthy, energetic young animal confined 24 hours a day to a cage in a damp, dimly lit garage or basement, with nothing to look at, nowhere to play, and no one to play with? These animals are so eager to play when they are removed from the cage that they don't want to be restrained for even a second, and they then may get a reputation for biting or scratching. Like dogs left tied to a dog house in the back yard, these ferrets may eventually be driven to antisocial behavior. If the children forget to feed the ferret, no one notices, and it may be so hungry that it bites the next hand that reaches into the cage. If you don't get a good look at your ferret every day, you will not know if it is feeling sick until it is very sick or dying.

The more fortunate of the garage-dwellers end up in ferret shelters, but many more misunderstood little ferrets are sentenced for life to solitary confinement. If you intend to confine your ferret 100% of the time to a cage in the garage or basement, or even to a large exercise cage outdoors, consider a different kind of pet. Ferrets want to share your home and be involved in your life.

If you lose your ferret

Ferrets are burrowing animals by nature and like to have a dark, private, den-like nest to sleep in. In a house, the spots they select are predictable. If your ferret disappears, you will probably find him in one of these locations:

- In any box-like container
- Inside a pile of clothing
- Inside a piece of furniture (a couch, chair, box spring, or mattress – if they can't find a way in, they'll make one)
- Under a kitchen or bathroom cupboard
- In a drawer – ferrets can climb up the back of a dresser or kitchen cabinet and get into the drawers, where they make a comfortable nest in your clean clothing or dish towels