

# Ferret Nature & Ferret Proofing Your Home

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Hopefully, you will be reading this article before you have selected a ferret and taken it home. It is not safe for either the animal or the dwelling to turn a ferret loose in the average home without some ferret-proofing. This list of ferret characteristics is universally true. Take the advice seriously to protect your pet and your home.

## Ferret characteristics

- Ferrets are curious: They will inspect small spaces that you might not ordinarily be aware of and crawl into them. They can get under kitchen cabinets and appliances and get stuck, or chew electrical wires and electrocute themselves or suffer severe, debilitating electrical burns in their mouths.
- Ferrets are burrowing animals: They like to find snug dark areas to sleep in. They may sleep very soundly and don't wake up even when you call loudly.
- Ferrets are very persistent: When they find something they want to do, it is nearly impossible to discourage them from continuing to do it, even if it is dangerous. The only way to stop them is to remove access to the area of interest.
- Ferrets are agile: Unless they are obese, they can fit their bodies through any space where their heads will go. They can bend and twist to get through very small spaces and won't come out until they are ready.
- Ferrets are almost fearless: Until they learn about heights, they will walk off the edges of tables and furniture without hesitation. If they have no reason to fear other animals, they will walk right up to a dog or cat that may immediately grab and injure, or even kill them. Ferrets can swim, but if they fall into a pail or pool and cannot get out, they will eventually drown. Some ferrets will try to jump across distances that they estimate poorly, and fall onto hard surfaces. Some climb to the top of a piece of furniture and then don't know how to climb down. It has been claimed that ferrets are poor climbers, but in fact they climb up very well. They just don't know how to climb down, and often fall or jump.

## Dangers in the home

Knowing the nature of ferrets, you can now identify dangerous areas in the average household that could seriously hurt or kill a ferret. These include, but are not limited to:

- Furniture – ferrets like to climb inside chairs and couches and tear out the stuffing. They also get behind heavy furniture to take a nap and will not wake up or come out even when you call them. Many ferrets have been smothered under chair cushions or killed by rocking chairs or recliners when someone unaware of the ferret's presence sits down or changes the position of the chair, catching the ferret in the mechanism.
- Appliances – ferrets can get into areas of washers, dryers, stoves, and fridges that expose the animal to moving parts or electrical wires, or they may get stuck on projections and be unable to get back out. This is particularly dangerous for ferrets that wear collars.
- Open dryers – ferrets like to get into piles of clothes, and if put into a dryer (e.g., by a child) may go to sleep and be trapped there if it is turned on. The heat will kill them in minutes. They also like to crawl into clothes baskets and may be dumped into the machine with the wash by someone unaware of their presence.
- Windows – Ferrets can crawl up onto window sills from nearby furniture and fall out if the window is left open. Ferrets are immensely strong for their size, and may be able to open unlatched sliding screens, or tear holes in stationary screens.
- Air ducts – if the ferret can get access to a duct, he will travel wherever it goes and may not find a way out. Eventually he will become dehydrated and die. If you live in an apartment building, he may come out in the home of a stranger who may take him to a shelter or pound instead of looking for the owner within the building. Some people mistake ferrets for rats or squirrels, and wandering pets have been chased outside or beaten to death. Extermination chemicals intended for other creatures will kill ferrets.
- Open doors – ferrets that get outside move quickly and are rarely able to find their way home. They carelessly cross streets and get run over by vehicles. They are often killed by dogs, or by people who don't like them or don't recognize them as pets. They may be picked up by municipal animal pounds and destroyed without a waiting period, as this is the policy for ferrets in some cities. They are very unlikely to survive in a hot climate even if they can find food, and there is rarely a source of food available in the city. If lost in a rural area, they will kill domestic fowl if they find them, and then are likely to be killed by the owner of the birds.

**Never let your ferret run loose outside on purpose and do everything necessary to prevent accidental escapes.**

As you can see, ferret-proofing your home is essential if you want a safe environment for your new pet. Take the time to ferret-proof your home **before** acquiring a ferret.