

# Where Can I Get a Ferret?

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There are three main sources for ferrets:

- Pet shops
- Private breeders
- Ferret shelters and rescue organizations

## Pet shop ferrets

Professional breeders supply pet shops with 7-week-old ferrets that have been spayed or neutered and [descended](#), sparing you the responsibility and expense of having this done later.

Pet shop ferrets come in a great variety of [coat colors](#) and usually have been bred for good temperaments.

Many large chains of pet shops have very knowledgeable personnel who can give good advice on nutrition, housing, and health, and have access to more expert help when necessary. They usually keep a range of ferret food, toys, and other equipment that you can see in use and purchase at the same time as the kit.

There are disadvantages to buying a kit from a pet shop. You have no idea what the kit's parents were like. Some pet shop employees do not take the time or have the knowledge to explain how to care for a ferret or what to expect from her. It depends very much on the individual pet shop what the quality of care and knowledge will be.

Some people believe that early [spaying and neutering](#) of kits makes them more susceptible to [adrenal gland tumors](#) later. This may be so, but both unspayed and unneutered ferrets and those altered when more mature are also affected by adrenal gland tumors.

Possibly the greatest disadvantage of buying a pet shop kit is that inexperienced people will not realize how fast ferret kits mature and change - the fluffy, cuddly baby you take home this week will become, in less than a month, a juvenile with seemingly endless energy and an apparent determination to destroy all your belongings. Some families are simply not able or willing to adapt their lifestyle to include a juvenile ferret.

## Private ferret breeders

Private ferret breeders keep a few jills, raise one or two litters a year from each, and may attend [ferret shows](#), specializing in a particular coat color or pattern. They usually sell kits a little older than those available in pet shops, and they are rarely spayed, neutered, or descended when you buy them. Sometimes they will sell a jill that has been retired from breeding, if you want to start with a more experienced ferret. Retired jills may be hard to [litter train](#), depending on their caging as breeders, but they are usually more settled in their attitude than juveniles, possibly because they have matured with the responsibility of raising a family, and they are used to being handled.

If you buy a kit from a private breeder, you can probably see the parents of the ferret you are getting. There is no guarantee that the kits will be exactly like their parents, but personalities tend to be similar, especially those of the jill and her kits.

Most people who raise ferrets are quite knowledgeable, and are eager to supply the new owner with information. Some small breeders have pet theories that are not based on facts, or that are partial truths limited by the extent of their experience. New ferret owners who believe everything one person tells them without looking for other sources of information may be misled, and the disadvantage may be to their ferret.

However, private breeders will almost certainly be concerned about the kits they sell, and will be able to show the new owner at least one way of managing ferrets. Read, and talk to other ferret owners, to expand your knowledge. Kits are usually available from small breeders only in the natural breeding season, which is spring and early summer. Commercial ferret producers keep their breeding colony under artificial lighting, which makes it possible to raise kits year round. Most small breeders have their ferrets in their homes where it is not so easy to control lighting for the animals.

## Ferret shelters

Ferret shelters rescue and offer for adoption ferrets that have been lost, abandoned, or for some reason given up by the original owner. Some are brought in from areas where ferrets are illegal and the owner was given the option of sending the ferret out of state instead of surrendering it and having it destroyed. Some have behavior problems that the first owners could not tolerate and were unable to deal with. Some have health problems that the owners did not want to spend money on. Many are older ferrets with a short life expectancy. Most ferrets in a shelter are at the end of the line.

Ferret shelters exist for the benefit of the ferrets. The adoption fee is usually very low, barely enough to cover the cost of maintaining a normal ferret. Shelters depend on donations of food, litter, toys, and money to survive, and are run by ferret enthusiasts who sacrifice their own time and money to make sure each ferret gets a fair trial and, if possible, a good home. Sick or 'bad' ferrets are often kept for long periods of time for rehabilitation. Shelter staff are willing to counsel new owners and may refuse to allow certain ferrets to go to a particular owner because their experience tells them it would not be a good

relationship. They are usually willing to take back ferrets that don't work out in the new home.

One of the advantages of adopting your first ferret from a shelter is that most are adults with well-defined personalities, already socialized and litter trained. First time owners can be 'trained' by adopting one of these experienced ferrets. Animals are usually neutered or spayed and properly vaccinated before leaving the shelter.

The serious disadvantage associated with acquiring a ferret from a shelter is that many shelter ferrets carry a very contagious viral disease called "[ECE](#)" that causes severe diarrhea in mature ferrets. If you have no other ferrets at home, this poses no problem for you. If you have ferrets already, and they have not previously been exposed to ECE, adopting a shelter ferret may be the beginning of a long struggle to regain health in your original pets. Only about 10% of properly treated affected ferrets die, but the energy and expense involved in trying to save their lives can be significant. The most responsible shelters refuse to adopt out ferrets to people who already own ferrets, to avoid any possibility of causing an outbreak of this disease.

For a list of ferret shelters see <http://www.ferret.org/links/shelters.html>