

OVERVIEW

The domestic ferret is a member of the weasel family. It has been selectively bred for tameness and makes a curious, energetic, funny and lovable pet. Adult females weigh an average of 1 to 3 pounds and males weigh 3 to 5 pounds. Their average life span is 5 to 8 years with proper care.

HOUSING

Ferrets must be confined to a secure and safe cage designed for their needs when they are not supervised. Ferrets are flexible and agile animals that can easily escape from inappropriate housing. They can be put in grave danger by exploring the home, and may enter tiny spaces that you will have difficulty extracting them from. Use a quality ferret cage and outfit with one or more litter boxes and a water bottle. Add a bed such as a sleeping hammock and toys for enrichment. Change litter box daily and clean and disinfect cage regularly.

FOOD & WATER

NW Zoo sells Marshall Ferrets. They were weaned onto Marshall Pet Products' Premium Ferret Diet and that is what they are fed here at NW Zoo – with one part pellets softened with three to four parts warm water by volume. Changing diet is a stressful occurrence for all animals, and we highly recommend you use Marshall's food. The use of Marshall Premium Ferret Diet is a requirement of Marshall's guarantee. If for some reason you choose to switch to another ferret food, we suggest that you make the change very gradually. Only a premium ferret food should be used, as no other animal diet including cat food is appropriate for ferret nutritional needs,

Ferrets must be fed very moist food until they are about 12-13 weeks of age. NW Zoo buys eight-week-old ferrets from Marshall Farms and therefore the ferrets you receive from NW Zoo are on average nine weeks of age. They need soft food for at least three more weeks, at which time they can be gradually weaned on to less soft food over a period of 3-4 weeks until they are eating completely dry food at about 16 weeks of age. Make fresh food twice a day and mix dry food and warm water in a ratio of 1:3 (by volume). Let it sit for about 45 minutes before offering. At this time, the wet food will have the consistency of oatmeal. Of course, fresh water must be always available, and is best provided using a ferret or guinea pig plastic water bottle with ball tip.

Protein-based treats that have little or no sugar may be used sparingly. Natural treats such as Marshall's Bandits sticks are available in different flavors and may be used as rewards.

GROOMING

Ferrets have a natural musky odor. Their anal glands have been removed, but they still have a characteristic scent. Bathing with shampoo formulated for ferrets once every several months is fine, but more frequent bathing will result in skin problems. Muskiness is best controlled by keeping bedding and litter clean and by daily use of a food supplement such as GoodBye Odor for Ferrets. Especially in warm climates, ferrets may be prone to ear mites or infection. Consult your vet for these conditions or possible flea infestations. Regular nail trimming is important.

HEALTH

Ferrets require regular comprehensive veterinary check-ups just like a dog or cat. Baby ferrets have been de-scented & spayed/neutered and have received a temporary distemper vaccination. They need additional distemper shots at 9, 12 and 16 weeks of age and then annually. Ferrets should also receive a rabies vaccination after 13 weeks of age. Annual vaccinations are necessary. Consult a veterinarian as needed at the first sign of any illness or problem.

One commonly reported issue with young ferrets is a prolapsed rectum. Very often it is merely slightly "pooched out" or distended as a result of straining during defecation, especially when dehydrated and stressed due to transit where the body is in contact with dirty bedding. It is important to provide fresh water and food moistened with 3-4 parts water. Relief can be provided with very clean conditions and Preparation H ointment. Actual prolapses should be treated by a veterinarian.