



BACKGROUND

LENGTH: Syrian hamsters, 6 inches; dwarf hamsters, 2-3 inches

LIFESPAN: 1½ to 2 years

COST PER YEAR: \$300

GOOD WITH KIDS?: Because of their nocturnal nature and tendency to nip, not appropriate for families with small children; kids over 6 should be supervised by an adult when handling.

FUN FACT: Watch your hamster stuff his face (literally!) and then empty out his pouch for late-night snacking.

WHERE TO GET A HAMSTER: There are many pet hamsters available for adoption at animal shelters and small-animal rescue groups. Call your local shelter and visit websites like www.petfinder.com for hamsters in need of loving homes.

FOOD

- A high-quality rodent chow (also called rat blocks) should be available to your pet at all times. Supplement this with hamster mix, made up of pellets, grains, seeds and dried veggies.
- Fresh, clean water should be available 24/7. A water bottle with a drinking tube that attaches to the cage is the best way to go.
- Offer small, bite-sized bits of fresh veggies and fruits (every 2-3 days).
 - >> **Recommended:** spinach, lettuce, carrots, apples
 - >> **Avoid:** chocolate, candy, junk food, onions, uncooked beans
- Your hamster may enjoy bits of sugarless cereals and whole wheat bread as a treat.

CAGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Syrian hamsters, also known as golden or teddy bear hamsters, **MUST** be kept alone. One Syrian hamster per cage—no exceptions! Dwarf species like to live in pairs. Do not house male and female dwarf hamsters together, as hamsters breed quickly—and often—with large litters.
- Keep your Syrian hamster in a solid-bottom wire cage or aquarium with a wire mesh top (10 gallon minimum). Try to get the biggest cage you can afford—your pet will appreciate the extra space. Dwarf hamsters can be kept in a cage made for mice.
- Set up the cage indoors, away from drafts and direct sunlight, and away from other pets such as dogs and cats.
- Line cage with at least 2 inches of bedding (see Supply Checklist for recommendations). Don't use cedar or pine chips, as the fumes can be harmful. Provide paper towels or tissue so your pets can make nests.
- Your pet needs a cave for sleeping, such as a flowerpot or box.

BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

- Hamsters are nocturnal by nature, so it's normal for them to play and eat at night. They tend to nip if awakened during the day, so take care not to bother your pet while he's sleeping.
- Once your hamster is hand-tamed, allow him outside of the cage for a supervised period of time every day. Keep him in one room or screened-off area that's been secured so he can't escape or get lost. Hamsters don't have good eyesight, so take care that he doesn't fall or otherwise hurt himself. And remove all electrical cords from the area, please!

EXERCISE & TOYS

- Hamsters are big on exercise, so make sure yours has a wheel for running. Your pet will love tunneling through tubes, which can be home-made (empty cardboard tubes from paper towels and toilet paper) or bought from a pet supply store.
- Give your hamster appropriate chew toys to help wear down his teeth, which grow continuously.
 - >> **Recommended:** unpainted, untreated wood or twig, hard dog biscuits

DAILY CARE

- Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale/uneaten food daily. Clean and refill the water bottle every day.
- Clean cage completely once a week by replacing dirty bedding and scrubbing down the cage with warm, soapy water.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Bring your hamster to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly appointment if you think your pet is sick—seek help immediately. Common signs that something isn't right include dull-looking eyes, overgrown teeth, matted fur, weight loss, shaking, runny nose and diarrhea.
- Hamsters are susceptible to respiratory problems, including bacterial pneumonia, which they can catch from humans.

IF YOU THINK THAT YOUR PET MAY HAVE INGESTED A POTENTIALLY POISONOUS SUBSTANCE, CALL THE ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL CENTER AT (888) 426-4435

A \$65 consultation fee may be applied to your credit card

HAMSTER SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Solid-bottom wire cage or aquarium (10-gallon minimum) with mesh top
- ✓ Rodent chow (rat blocks) and hamster mix
- ✓ Timothy hay, aspen shavings, processed corn cob or pelleted bedding
- ✓ Small boxes or flower pots
- ✓ Exercise wheel
- ✓ Cardboard tubes (recycle from paper towel and toilet paper rolls)
- ✓ Attachable water bottle with drinking tube
- ✓ Unpainted, untreated piece of wood or twig, hard dog biscuit or safe chew toy



The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®

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