

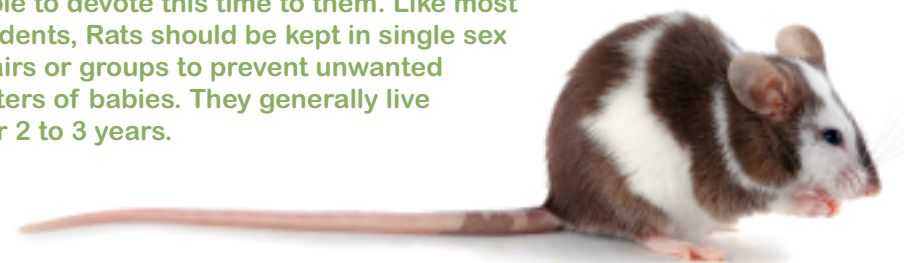
 Notes:

Keeping Rats As Pets



Rats:

Domestic Rats are clean, highly intelligent social animals that enjoy human company and make wonderful family pets. They should not be confused with the wild Rat, although they belong to the same species. As long as they are handled correctly from birth, they can share your home quite safely, with no risk of disease or aggression. They need companionship and at least an hour of exercise each day outside their cage – so make sure you are able to devote this time to them. Like most rodents, Rats should be kept in single sex pairs or groups to prevent unwanted litters of babies. They generally live for 2 to 3 years.



Duty of Care:

Every owner has a duty of care towards their animal. People should not take on the responsibility of keeping a pet unless they have the means to provide it with appropriate care and attention. This includes providing specialist treatment in the case of sickness or injury to prevent unnecessary suffering. Owners should arrange for their animal to be taken to a vet as soon as it becomes ill and be prepared to pay for any treatment themselves.

Housing

Rats are very active and love to climb, so the larger and taller their cage, the better. A good cage size for a pair of Rats would be 50cm x 80cm with around 50cm depth. The floor should be solid to avoid injury to the Rat's feet and plenty of litter should be put on the floor to absorb ammonia from the animal's droppings. Note, an aquarium style glass cage is not suitable for Rats as it will not give enough ventilation.

Your Rat's home should be kept away from draughts and out of direct sunlight, although a little sunlight each day does help them absorb vitamin D which helps prevent malnutrition problems. A nesting box filled with shredded paper should be provided, along with wood shavings or sawdust for the floor – fluffy bedding should not be used. The cage should be cleaned at least once a week - a litter tray can be provided to help keep the environment clean for your Rats.

Types of Rat

There are many varieties of Rat with different combinations of coat and eye colours. These include white with dark or pink eyes, cinnamon, blue, and other colours.

Feeding

A good quality Rat mix makes an ideal core diet for your pet. This can be supplemented with small pieces of fresh fruit and vegetables. Dry dog food makes a good source of protein. Be careful not to overfeed as Rats can soon become fat. Avoid giving your Rats sunflower seeds or peanuts. Fresh drinking water should always be available, usually in a gravity bottle although a small heavy bowl can be used instead. Like all rodents, a Rat's front teeth grow continuously, so provide them with something to gnaw on.

Looking after your Rat

Exercise & Entertainment:

Rats need at least an hour a day to play outside their cage so it's important to 'Rat-proof' the room - Rats can squeeze through tiny gaps. Houseplants and cables should be kept out of the way too. Rats like playing with toys, but avoid spoked wheels which can cause injury.

Handling:

Rats enjoy human contact provided they have been handled correctly from birth. Rats should never be picked up by the tail; instead gently place your hand underneath its chest behind the front legs, supporting the hindquarters with your other hand. Children will enjoy handling Rats, but should be supervised.

Breeding:

Rats can breed extremely quickly from 5 weeks old, producing a litter of 8 or more young every 4 or 5 weeks! You should therefore seek expert advice before considering keeping a breeding pair and only if you're certain you can find good homes for the babies.

Tips for a happy healthy Rat

Community:

Social creatures, Rats naturally live in groups so you should always keep more than one. A same sex pair or small group from the same litter should get on well. Rats are one of the cleanest pets you can own and pose no threat to people or to other animals.

Health:

Rats are generally healthy creatures but as with all pets, if you are worried about any aspect of your Rat's health, seek veterinary advice. They can be prone to respiratory diseases which are contagious to other Rats (although not to humans). For a healthy life, your Rat needs the following:

- Time and attention – at least one hour per day
- Daily exercise outside of their cage
- A good balanced diet - no overfeeding
- Clean dry housing, cleaned once a week with a mild disinfectant
- No extreme or sudden changes in temperature
- Water bottle and feed bowls cleaned daily
- Gnawing block or fruit tree branch to help wear their continually growing teeth

