

Gerbil care

Owning and caring for gerbils is great fun and very rewarding, but it is a big responsibility and a long-term commitment. Did you know gerbils can live on average 3 – 5 years?

Getting your gerbil's diet and environment correct is the best way of ensuring a long and healthy life. Here are some guidelines for offering your gerbil the best care:

- **Gerbils are highly social animals** and should live in same sex pairs or groups, depending on tank size. Gerbils “thump” by pounding both hind legs on the ground when they are excited or stressed. Groups of gerbils will simultaneously express “thumping” behaviour.
- **Gerbils are very active, inquisitive creatures.** Like their wild ancestors, gerbils love to burrow. They are excellent at tunnelling underground, making new tunnels and compartments. They should be housed in a **glass tank with suitable substrate and furnishings:**
 - **An ideal substrate** for gerbils is a mixture of peat, chinchilla sand and shredded newspaper, filling at least three quarters of the tank. Wood shavings should be avoided as chemicals in the shavings can be the cause of fungal skin problems.
 - **Add furnishings to the tank to provide enrichment** for the gerbils. Plastic tubing, cardboard tubes and a bed in one corner are ideal. Any heavy furnishings, such as rocks and clay plant pots, must be placed in the tank before the substrate. This is to prevent items falling onto or trapping the gerbils while they dig/burrow. Gerbils are fascinating to watch, mesmerizing you for hours.
- **Gerbils need to chew** so provide apple or willow twigs. Without this, their teeth can be badly affected.
- **Handling gerbils:**
 - They are not that easy to handle; they move fast and are prone to jumping from hands. A fall may cause serious injury. For this reason, **gerbils are not usually the best pets for younger children.**
 - Before handling, slowly rub your hand in the bedding to collect its scent.
 - Handle your gerbil very carefully. During handling, any gerbil can become stressed and will bite. Always cup your gerbil in your hands, never hold or squeeze. Always hold them close to your body.
- **Check your gerbils for signs of injury and illness every day.**
 - Check teeth are not becoming overgrown – seek veterinary advice if necessary.
 - Check the coat and skin for signs of mites, bald patches or sores. Seek veterinary advice immediately.

Diet

- **Hay** is essential as gerbils' teeth grow continuously. Hay helps to wear down the teeth as they grow.
- **The bulk of a gerbil's diet is a specially formulated mix** containing wheat, oats, barley, sunflower seeds, corn, pumpkin seeds and dried grass pellets.
- **Sunflower seeds must be given sparingly** as they can cause stomach upsets and obesity.
- **Fresh water**, available at all times. This should be in a bottle as bowls quickly become dirtied by peat.
- **Treats:** if treats are given avoid commercial treats which are high in sugars. Instead, provide small quantities of fruit and vegetables such as cabbage, celery, carrot, apple and turnip.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN ADOPTING RAYSTEDE GERBILS



Adoption Fees: **£5**

(Average daily cost of care for all small animals at Raystede is in excess of £300)

Rehoming gerbils

We aim to find the best forever homes for the gerbils that end up in our care, so we have several **rehoming requirements** to guarantee each gerbil finds the right home:

- **Gerbils should live in same sex pairs or groups**, depending on the size of tank provided.
- **A tank at least 120 x 30 x 30cm / 4' x 12" x 12"** for a pair of gerbils. Larger for a group

Gerbils are burrowing animals and so a cage is not a suitable enclosure.

The tank should be secure with a wire mesh lid for ventilation. Ensure they have plenty of toys and stimulating equipment such as branches, tunnels, tubes and toys.

Gerbils will always live happily in a tank that is too big, never in one that is too small.

We take particular care where there are children under 7 years to ensure we will find the right match.

Raystede gerbils are:

- Health checked by a vet
- Follow up advice available

Applying to adopt Raystede gerbils

Having read this Gerbil Care Guide, if you are still interested in adopting a Raystede gerbil and feel you can provide the necessary care, please complete an application form.

Before your application is approved, the Small Animals team must approve your gerbil's accommodation via photos clearly showing their accommodation. Please email photos to smallanimals1@raystede.org or bring to Customer Services.

If you reserve an animal, we will honour this reserve for up to 2 weeks (excluding exceptional circumstances at staff discretion).

Thank you for your interest and support. We hope we can help you find some new companions.