



Mice and Rats



Mice and rats are rodents. Some people have a bad attitude toward the tame ones because of wild mice and rats. They are fast becoming a popular “pocket pet”, because they are smart, easy to tame, come in many assorted colours, cost little to feed, require a small amount of space, and are fun to watch. Most of all, they are affectionate little animals.

Mice are one of the smallest of the rodent family. Pet mice have a very wide variety of coat colours. They are active animals which enjoy playing in a cage filled with obstacles. They do like to bite so be careful. The mouse produces more odour than other rodents. Fancy Rats are larger than mice and also have a wide variety of coat colours. They are intelligent and affectionate as well as active.

Domesticated mice and rats have been valuable to our society in all kinds of psychological, biological, medical, and nutritional studies.

The first thing required to have one of these affectionate little animals for a “pocket pet”, is to get your parents to agree to it.

People who have cared for and observed these intelligent animals have come to love them. Since rats are more intelligent than mice, they are easier to tame.

Selection

Tame mice or rats can be purchased at a pet store or some school biology labs that sell offspring. It is better to purchase a young animal that was just weaned or about one month old. Look for a smooth coat, bright eyes and perked ears; an animal that is lively and alert.

There are many different varieties and colours to choose from.

Most mice are not homozygotic (purebred) so a breeding pair can produce a variety of colours. Some colours include fawn, sable, white blue, black, brown and cinnamon.

Facilities

Rats and mice cannot be caged together because they are natural enemies.

Mice or rats may be caged in a wire or metal cage. If the cage has a wire floor, provide a solid platform for the pet to rest on. A solid removable bottom underneath the wire makes it easier to clean the cage. Rats require a larger cage than mice. Small rodents may also be housed in an aquarium. An aquarium can be better than a cage because the rodent cannot dig and scratch bedding out of it.

As well, rodents housed in cages will often spend hours chewing the bars of the cage and making noise. An aquarium is warmer for the rodent.

Keep the cage in a well-lit, dry, ventilated place with temperatures ranging from 16-21°C. Cover the cage floor with fresh hay, sawdust, cedar wood shavings, paper towels, or some type of commercial cat litter. Add a small amount of litter daily. Do not use a newspaper for litter, because printers ink will rub off on the animals' fur.

Equipment

Mice require a nesting box, but rats do not.

They often like tunnels, wheels, etc to play in within their cage.

Automatic water bottles and feeders should be in the cage.

Mice and rats are gnawing animals and should be provided a piece of wood to keep their teeth in good condition.

Feeding

Mice and rats eat the same type of food. Food for small rodents is available at a pet store. It will have small seeds, sunflower seeds and pelleted grain. Rodents also enjoy a bit of hay to munch on. Dry dog food and water also is a balanced diet for them. They will also eat seeds, nuts, bread, cereals, rice, leafy foods, raw potatoes, and meats.

Fresh water must always be provided. To keep the cage dry, use a dispenser for water.

Feed your pet at about the same time each day. Perishable foods should be fed at night and leftovers removed the next morning.

Management

Grooming

Grooming is not necessary as they spend a great deal of time grooming themselves.

Handling

Mice or rats should be handled every day, or at least three to four times a week. Make sure the animal sees your hand before you touch the rodent. Disturbing a rodent when it is sleeping may cause it to bite at you.

Mice can be picked up by it by grasping the base of the tail—this does not hurt it. Pick it up by the tail, and place it on your hand. While it is in the palm of your hand, stroke it on its head and back.

Pet rodents can also be taught to climb onto your hand and remain calm as you pick them up. Rats and mice often like to ride around on your shoulder or arm once they have been picked up. Move slowly and smoothly to avoid jarring the animal loose as your pet could be hurt from the fall.

Exercise

Rodents aren't usually trained to do tricks. However, it is fun to watch mice and rats natural behaviour by supplying them with a tread wheel, tubes, etc. Mice and rats can quickly learn their way through mazes if they know there is a treat waiting. These activities, also, provide your pets with exercise.

General Maintenance

Cages should be kept bedded down with a thick (2.5 cm) layer of fresh, clean shavings. Every week (or twice a week) clean the cage out completely with hot water and some type of mild detergent or disinfectant.

Health Care

With proper health care, rats and mice should live a full life span of about 3 years.

Health Rules:

- Cleanliness is a must.
- Isolate sick animals.
- Use cat flea or tick powder for lice, fleas, and mites.
- In case of diarrhea, stop feeding greens and fruits.
- For cuts or bites, use a medicated cat ointment.
- Feed a proper diet.

Breeding

It is no problem to breed rats or mice.

- They will breed at 2 to 3 months of age.
- Gestation period is around 21 days.
- Average litter of 6 to 10 babies.
- After a rat is 18 months of age, they cannot conceive.
- There is no season for breeding rats and mice.
- Separate pregnant females.
- Separate male from litter until they are 3 weeks old.
- Feed pregnant animal plenty of milk through the gravity flow dispenser.

Economics

Mice and rats are economical pets. If you plan to breed them, be sure to have made arrangements for new homes for the babies. Potential pet owners, pet stores or laboratories are potential purchasers of mice and rats.

Project Resources



Pinterest – The Visual Discovery Tool

Pinterest is a social media bulletin board for you to virtually pin pictures of things that interest you to your own personal boards – Pin-Explore-Discover! 4-H Manitoba has a Pinterest account. Each project series has a board full of fun and interesting ideas. There are also boards for 4-H Awesome, Community Service, Volunteers, Communications and Building Blocks.

Check it out at www.pinterest.com/4hmanitoba/.

When you are doing a search for rat and mice information on the internet be sure to be specific about what you want to find out - just entering "rat" or even "pet rat" will yield too many results for you to check and not all of them will relate to what you want to know. For example, try pet rat diet instead of rat diet.

The following links may be of interest:

<http://www.afrma.org/caresheet.htm> American Fancy Rat and Mouse Association

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fancy_rat

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mouse>

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