



BLUE RIDGE FERRET RESCUE

Phone: (937)-478-1520

Email: blueridgeferretrescue@gmail.com

www.blueridgeferretrescue.org

BRFR Ferret Facts – Nutrition, Habitat and Health

About:

Ferrets live an average lifespan of 5-8 years however, can live more in some circumstances. Ferrets are part of the weasel family and with more than one, are known as a business. We recommend on adopting a pair together as single ferrets can become severely lonely if not played with enough. They are very sociable pets and are great for families as long as you start training at a young age if around small children. Ferrets can bite and have a hunting instinct. With this, biting does occur, however can be trained to prevent.

They are however, super playful and can get along with dogs and cats. With their playful and energetic personalities, they are actually higher maintenance than people think. Ferrets require an owner who understand and will be willing to give them a lot of attention, exercise, and playtime. They need at least several hours of supervised play outside of their cage.

Ferret Proofing/Room Care: Ferrets are master escape artists and can squeeze through the smallest of spaces, even ones you think they cannot get through. This is why supervised playtime is necessary, or else they can potentially hurt themselves, get stuck, or escape. They should not be given a collar as they can get stuck on items and cause potential harm. Harnesses are only to be worn while supervised. While ferrets are extremely smart, it is important to “ferret proofing” your home before acquiring a ferret(s). It is important to get on the level of your ferrets and remind yourself they can climb and dig. Block all holes and open spaces including, under the fridge, washing machines/dryers, dish washer, cupboards, under cabinets, open windows, vents, etc. In the potential occurrence you cannot find your ferret, this is a good time to train your ferret to come to you when they hear a squeaky toy or as I personally like, clapping your hands.

Chewing is very common with ferrets as well. It is important to cover/hide cords, soft rubber, foam or other unsuitable objects. A lot of our toys are cat toys. Some ferrets will chew and swallow fabric. If this occurs, it is important to act fast, as their small stomachs and intestines can be obstructed. (*See Health for more information*). Ferrets are very susceptible to heat stroke or stress. It is important to keep your ferrets away from heat above 78 degrees F. We like to keep our rooms at 70 or less.

Habitat: Ferret cage size will depend on the number of ferrets in your business. We highly recommend the double Critter or Ferret Nation cages, for a maximum of 2 ferrets. These cages are metal and cannot be bent. Other cages are not recommended due to wide bar spacing, bendable cage/clasps, etc. Cages should have at least 2 or more levels with stairs or ramps for climbing and exercise. Keeping the bottom cage for litterbox is what we like to do. The bottoms of these cages have a plastic easy to clean tray for easier cleaning. Cages are recommended to have bedding, hammocks, and cage liners. Having soft blankets and liners are better on their pads. Avoid wood flooring or litter, newspaper, or paper towels.

There are many options for litter choices, and everyone will have pros and cons for everything. At BRFR we either use Horse bedding pine pellets (easily found in farm stores, ex: Tractor Supply) or Equistat Naturals Paper Pellet Litter. If you have a question on a different type, please do not hesitate to ask!

Adding enrichment for your ferrets is also important. As stated above, ferrets are hunters and having enough proper toys is important! Adding tubes and cat trees are great enrichment items. Ferret tubes to use can be found from Chewy, or hard-plastic/bendable tubing from hardware stores like Lowes or Home Depot.

Diet:

Kibble Fed -

A ferret's diet is recommended to be raw if possible. We understand some ferrets will refuse raw and if that is the case, we highly recommend using Wysong Epigen 90. You may also mix in wet/dry cat food, however you will want to stay away from those that include plant-based proteins. Please avoid any human food, as it can be harmful to their digestive system. If you would like to add extra protein, you can also try high meat content baby food. For this food type, we keep the ferret(s) food bowls full and fill them when they get low, as kibble fed ferrets need to have access to food 24/7 in order to keep their blood sugar and energy levels up.

Raw Fed -

Raw feeding is our favorite method and as they are hunters, is also good enrichment. Feeding your ferret raw soup is a good way to get them to start on raw while mixing with their dry food. Raw chicken breasts with skin, and salmon oil blended with water is a good start. Once they start eating this, you can transition into more textures. This includes minced boneless meat such as duck, rabbit, chicken, turkey, lamb or beef. Once they are eating the minced, you can start cutting back on their kibble until they are no longer on it. With raw food, you will only need to raw feed adults twice a day.

As your ferrets start eating raw full time, you can start adding heart meat, necks, liver, and other organs, as well as crushed ground eggshell. Our ferrets love raw egg. We recommend giving 1 whisked egg per week. Raw feeding is not for everyone, however is the best and most recommended for all ferrets. Raw diet includes or is referred to the 80/10/10 or 80% meat, 10% bones and 10% organs. Here are the appropriate raw foods to feed:

- Turkey
- Beef
- Pork

- Salmon
- Egg & Egg Shells
- Heart meat (ex. Chicken & Duck)
- Chicken & duck feet
- Lamb
- Rabbit
- Game birds
- All of these can include on the bone, liver, kidney, heart, wings, necks, etc.

To learn more and look at example raw fed meals per week, we recommend taking a look at www.fairoakferrets.co.uk/raw-feeding. They explain great in detail what their raw meals look like and how to start. Every ferret owner will start differently and feed their ferrets differently. With treats, we recommend staying away from FerretVite, and those brands! Those treats contain high concentrated sugars which can cause your ferrets to gain adrenal and other cancers faster. We love to use all-natural salmon oil with their food, or create raw soup for treats. Salmon oil is also great for skin and coat. We understand changing water is something we can forget at times. Making sure your ferret has fresh, clean water everyday is important to their health. Leaving water in can create bacteria, or other harmful germs that can potentially cause your ferret to get sick.

Health:

Ferrets have their own set of potential health concerns and issues and should have regular vet checkups. It is recommended to have annual check ups up to the age of 5 and then every 6 months after that. Ferrets' ears have a natural tendency to become waxy and create buildup. It is important to make sure you clean their ears at least once a month or more depending on the amount of buildup with a pet-friendly ear cleaner. Ferret's nails are also important to watch, as they grow very fast. You will want to trim their nails at least every couple of weeks to prevent their nails getting caught on bedding, carpet, toys, etc.

As stated, ferrets have their own health concerns. This includes physical injuries to their legs from jumping off of high areas, adrenal disease, insulinoma, skin tumors, human influenza, intestinal blockages, Green Slime disease, heart disease, and other cancers. The most common are insulinoma or adrenal. Insulinoma causes seizures, weight loss, loss of appetite and hydration, lack of play and walking, stumbling of the back legs/weakness. Adrenal causes hair loss, weakness, increased sexual aggression, vulva swelling for females, enlarged prostate for males, lethargy, and thinning of the skin. It is recommended to speak to your veterinarian to learn more about them and what to look out for and if you come across your ferret acting strange or having any of those symptoms.

As you may have noticed, your ferrets are often seen cleaning themselves, however seem to still have a musky smell? Ferrets even "descented" will still have that musky smell and comes with every ferret. This smell, new ferret owners will often get used to after a while, however most extreme ferret odors come from an unclean cage. Since ferrets have a short digestive and intestinal tract, they urinate and poop very often. At BRFR we clean our cages twice a day as we recommend. With this, bathing your ferrets should not be a common occurrence, and actually very little to rarely. We will only bathe ours at a maximum of once a month if even that. Bathing your ferrets too often will strip their skin and coat of

their natural oils and can dry out their skin. If you do need to bathe your ferret at any point of time, you will want to make sure to use luke-warm water and natural oats. We like to fill our tub where ours can still walk, you do not want it to the point to where they are actually swimming. Once filled, grab an old sock and fill halfway with oats used for oatmeal. We use Quaker Quick-1-minute oats. *Make sure not to grab any that is flavored.* Tie your sock tightly and toss into the tub to let the oats soak. We like to squeeze and massage the sock to get the oats to release the natural starch, etc. into the water. Your tub should start to become cloudy. We soak the sock for about 10 minutes and then add our ferrets. The oats is gentle on their skin and does not cause rashes. If your ferret is severely dirty, you may use a pet/ferret-friendly soap.