



Hamsters

In the wild, hamsters live in underground burrows where they sleep, stash food, raise families and hide from predators. They are most active at night, travelling long distances to gather foods such as seeds and insects in their stretchy cheek pouches.

Though there are many types of hamsters in the wild, only five species are commonly kept as pets. There's the popular **Syrian**, and the less common dwarf hamsters: the **Campbell's Russian**, **winter white Russian**, **Roborovski** and **Chinese**. These small Asian rodents have only been around as companion animals for less than a century.

Roborovski hamster



Syrian hamster



Syrian hamsters are the largest and easiest to handle of all the pet hamsters. Though they can be jumpy as youngsters, most mature into calm and patient pets. Syrians come in a variety of colours and patterns such as dark chocolate brown and tortoiseshell. They can also have different hair styles, including short, long and curly. Syrian hamsters are solitary and should be housed alone. They usually live for about two years.

Dwarf hamsters are small and fast moving, and can be difficult to handle. They have not been kept as pets for as long as Syrians, and are not found in as many colours, patterns and hair styles.

Dwarf hamsters are social and should be housed in same-sexed pairs or small groups. They also have a lifespan of about two years.

Syrian hamster



What's in a name?

Over the years, hamsters – especially Syrians – have earned a number of nicknames. There are teddy bears (longhaired Syrians), black bears (black-coated Syrians), panda bears (black-and-white Syrians) and Hershey bears (chocolate-coloured Syrians), just to name a few.

When adding a hamster to your family, choose one who suits your personality and lifestyle – regardless of name!

Hamster-rific



Hamsters are engaging pets, requiring patient, attentive care. Here are just some of the care and welfare needs of hamsters. The pet care

section of the BC SPCA website – spca.bc.ca – has more hamster care tips.



dwarf hamsters

Single or social?

Syrian hamsters like living on their own and should be housed by themselves. Otherwise they will fight.

Dwarf hamsters are social. Two or more can live together provided they are the same sex and have a large habitat. To help prevent squabbles, dwarf hamsters kept in pairs or small groups should come from the same litter or be introduced to each other when they are very young.

When's your bedtime?

Hamsters are nocturnal. They like to be active at night and asleep during the day. So your hamster may be just getting up when you're heading for bed. You need to be able to stay up late enough to care for him. Disturbing your hamster during the day may cause him to get upset and bite.



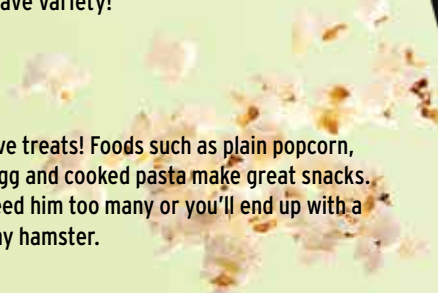
Chow down

Being omnivores, hamsters eat both plant and animal foods. Feed your hamster a

staple diet of hamster pellets or blocks. Hamster pellets are a complete, balanced diet and should be available to her all the time. Provide a small amount of vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds every day, too. Hamsters crave variety!

Snacks

Hamsters love treats! Foods such as plain popcorn, scrambled egg and cooked pasta make great snacks. Just don't feed him too many or you'll end up with a fat, unhealthy hamster.



Working out

Hamsters require daily exercise and will happily explore a playpen made just for them. A wading pool or a bathtub (drain closed!) lined with a towel works well. Fill with safe objects to climb on, over and through to keep your hamster busy and interested. Paper bags, cereal boxes, paper cups, toilet paper rolls and untreated wood are good choices. Always supervise playtime.

Drink up!

Hamsters need water available to them all the time. Fill your hamster's sipper bottle with clean, fresh water every day. Once a week, clean the bottle using soap and water. Avoid water dishes. Hamsters tend to bury them as they dig, creating a soggy mess.

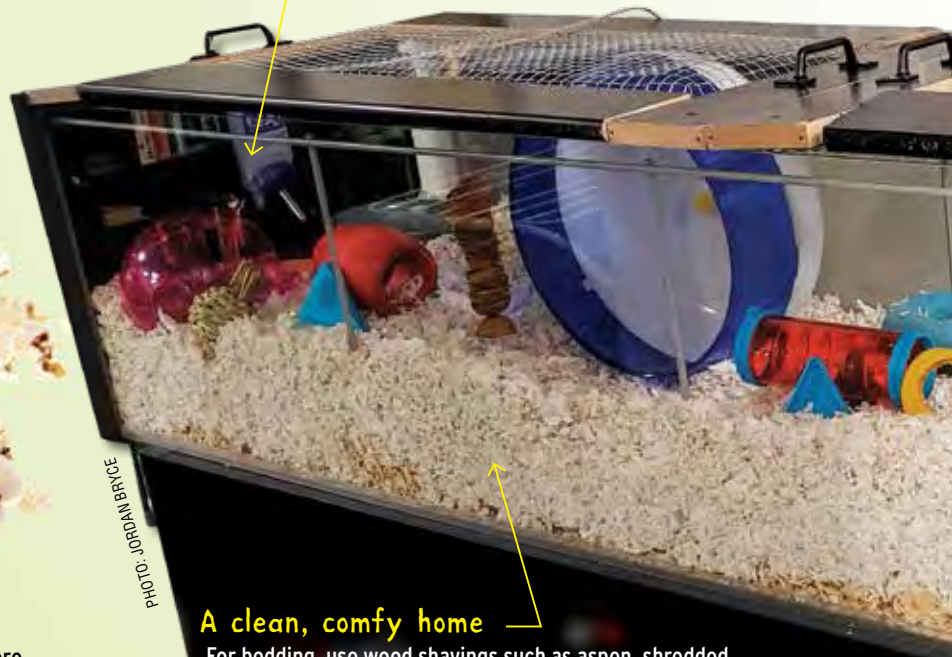


PHOTO: JENNIFER HARRIS

A clean, comfy home

For bedding, use wood shavings such as aspen, shredded paper or carefresh® (bedding made from recycled paper). Do not use cedar or pine shavings because they can cause health problems. Provide a deep layer of bedding to allow your hamster to burrow. Clean toilet areas every other day and the entire cage once a week. Keep the cage in an area protected from cold drafts and direct sunlight, as well as loud noises and bright lights.

Guardian Guide



Hundreds of hamsters

Never keep male and female hamsters together, even for a short period. Hamsters multiply at an amazing rate. Females can have up to 10 litters in just one year, with anywhere from four to 12 young per litter.

My, what big teeth you have!

To help wear down his ever-growing front teeth, provide your hamster with chewing items such as cardboard, wooden toys and apple or aspen branches. Make sure the branches come from trees that haven't been treated with any chemicals.

Handle with care

You can pick up your hamster by putting cupped hands near him and letting him crawl into your hands. Be careful not to squeeze! Hold your hamster while sitting on the floor. Not all hamsters enjoy being held and he may try to leap from your hands.



Healthy, happy hamsters

Spending time with your hamster will show you how she normally looks and behaves. When you notice something unusual – like diarrhea or reluctance to move – you'll know to take her to the veterinarian right away!



Check out those cheeks!

Interior decorating

Adding small houses, hanging toys, ramps, tunnels, tubes and a solid (not slatted) exercise wheel provides stimulation and places to hide and sleep. Swap items in and out to keep your hamster's cage interesting. Scatter or hang nesting material – like toilet paper – for your hamster to gather.



Toilet training

Most hamsters will use one corner or area as a toilet area. You can buy a hamster-sized litter box at a pet supply store, or use an appropriately sized glass jar turned on its side. Place some soiled bedding in the litter box to encourage your hamster to use it.

Hamster haven

Hamsters are active animals requiring a large habitat. The more space, the better! Hamsters like to burrow so a deep enclosure with a solid bottom is best. A 40 gallon aquarium with a wire mesh lid works well for a single Syrian or a pair of dwarf hamsters. Aquariums are secure and can easily be filled with burrowing material. Other options include do-it-yourself cages made from large, clear plastic storage bins or glass IKEA® cabinets (pictured here).

Hoarders

Hamsters hoard their food, so be sure to look for hidden stashes. Take away any uneaten fresh food the next day so it doesn't spoil and make her sick.

On the loose!



TRGOWANLOCK/ISTOCK

Hamsters are excellent escape artists! And, once they're out, they usually don't return to their cage on their own. So, should your hamster run away, try setting up a hamster trap to catch him.

You will need:

- ✓ A bucket
- ✓ A ramp (a piece of wood or a staircase made of books)
- ✓ Two towels
- ✓ Your hamster's favourite treat

What to do:

- 1 Lean the ramp against the bucket. Wrap the ramp in a towel to help provide grip.
- 2 Place treats leading up to the top.
- 3 Line the bucket with another towel – just not too close to the top or else your hamster will climb out.
- 4 Put some more treats in the bucket.
- 5 Leave the trap overnight.

Likely, your hungry hamster will follow the trail of treats up the ramp, and then drop into the bucket to hoard more food. In the morning, he will be waiting for you!

To help prevent escapes, remember to regularly check your hamster's cage for any weak spots or holes. Hamsters have strong teeth and can gnaw through wood, plastic and even soft metals. Make sure any lids are secure, doors are latched and tubes are tightly connected.



Do your hammy homework!

This booklet provides basic care information. Please visit spca.bc.ca/petcare for more hamster care tips. You can also expand your "gnaw-ledge" with these other great hamster resources:

Hamster: A Practical Guide to Caring for Your Hamster

By Mark Evans

Published by DK Publishing, Inc.

Hamster: Your Happy Healthy Pet

By Betsy Sikora Siino

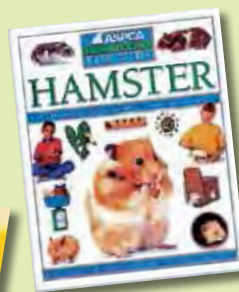
Published by Wiley Publishing, Inc.

California Hamster Association

californiahamsterassociation.com

Hamsterific

hamsterific.com



The hamster guardian pledge

As their guardian, you are responsible for your hamsters' health and well-being. You should make sure:

1. They never go hungry or thirsty;
2. They are taken to the vet when they are sick or injured;
3. They are not afraid all the time;
4. They are comfortable in their surroundings;
5. They are free to behave like hamsters!

For more information on providing these "Five Freedoms," check out spca.bc.ca/petcare.

Make the **BCSPCA** your first adoption option! Visit spca.bc.ca to view all adoptable hamsters.



Hamster habitat Makeover

Meeting your hamster's instinctive behaviours

Hi I'm Doc!
 I am a Syrian hamster. I used to live in the wire cage that you see below - it was ok, it provided me with my BASIC needs, but I recently moved into my fabulous new **HAMMY TERRARIUM!** It's full of stuff that helps meet my five freedoms [see page 11]...

A good book about caring for hamsters



THE WORD "HAMSTER" COMES FROM THE GERMAN WORD HAMSTERN, which means to hoard or store food. A hoarder is one who stores food for later use.



Pretty good description of a hamster wouldn't you agree? By nature, hamsters have large cheek pouches and are hoarders, regardless of how much food is available to them. Storing food provides your hammy with a sense of security.

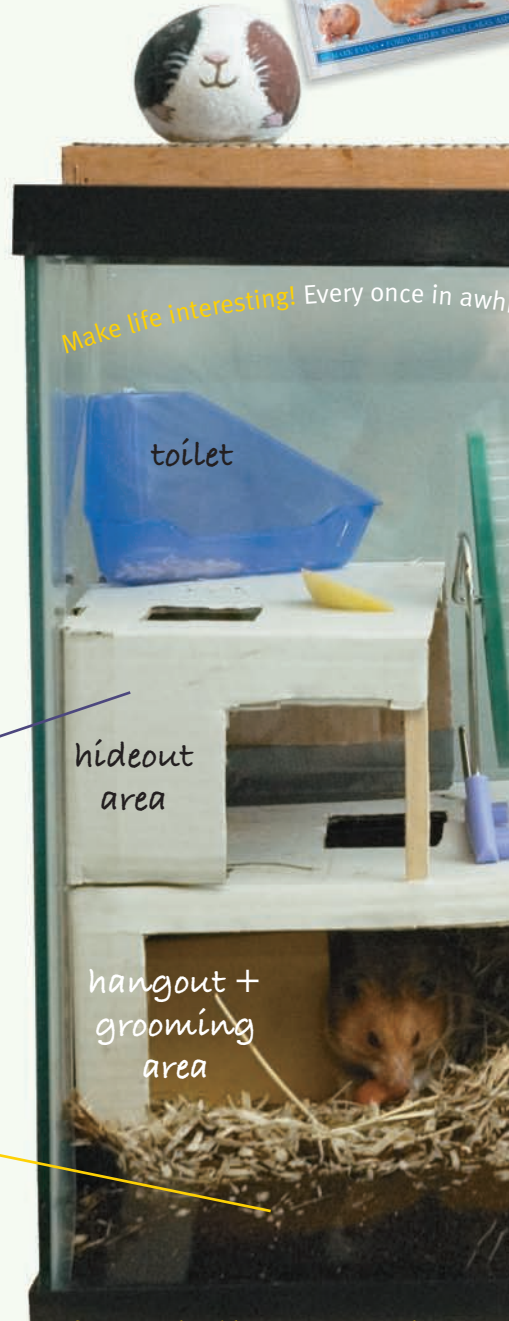


Standard cages



Provide a house or hideout for your hamster. Remember, hamsters are nocturnal (sleep during the day and awake at night) and need a quiet place to rest and retreat.

Hamsters in the wild live in underground tunnels and therefore are natural burrowers. Provide them with substrate to burrow in. This can be made from a combination of **peat moss, hay and wood shavings.**



Make life interesting! Every once in a while

toilet

hideout area

hangout + grooming area

A fantastic, healthy Hamster Penthouse!

If your family is thinking of adopting a hamster, the SPCA recommends:

1. First Adoption Option: visit your local SPCA or animal shelter – there is always a wide selection of hamsters for adoption.
2. A Syrian hamster over a Dwarf hamster. Dwarf hamsters are distant cousins to the Syrian breed and are smaller, much quicker and more prone to nip.
3. If you **MUST** go to a pet store, keep in mind that most stores will keep several immature hamsters together in one cage. This doesn't mean you can buy more than one per cage. Syrian hamsters are strictly solitary animals – once they mature, two adults will fight! **DO NOT** adopt two Syrian hamsters together in the same cage.

In the wild, hamsters will run for kilometers in a night to forage for food and nesting materials. So make sure that your hamster has a **good sturdy wheel to run in.**

fitted wood-frame wire mesh top

...ile, change things in your cage, your hammy will enjoy the new surroundings!

exercise wheel

water bottle

hang fruit/veg.

food dish

toilet

Hang bits of veggies or dried fruit from the top of the cage using paper clips, string or pipe cleaners.

Tip: Don't throw out all the bedding materials – saving some of the old bedding will provide your hammy with some familiarity and make him feel at home.

Make his cage adventurous so he can find bits of food and nesting material throughout.

Provide optional areas for toilets – an appropriate size jar is an excellent option or you can buy a hammy size litter box at your local pet supply store.

Remember: your hamster's cage needs to be cleaned out at least once a week.

HAMMIE SUPPLIES RECEIPT

*Aquarium at a garage sale	\$15.00
Peat moss	\$4.99
Aspen shavings	\$6.99
*Free-standing wheel	\$7.99
*Litter pan	\$2.99
CDN CASH	\$37.96
*one-time costs	

Hamster Traps!

Hamsters are excellent escape artists! Here's a little trick to find a lost hammy.

What you need:

1. A bucket
2. A ramp (a piece of wood or book)
3. Two towels
4. Your hammy's favourite treat

Set up the bucket and ramp as seen in the picture. Wrap your ramp in a towel to provide grip. Place treats leading up to the top. Line the bucket with another towel and put some more treats in the bucket. Leave the trap overnight. Your hamster will follow the treats up the ramp and then drop in the bucket to hoard more treats. In the morning, your hammy will be waiting for you!



Rodent **GNAW**ledge

Is a rodent the right pet for you?

There are lots of rodents to choose from at the SPCA and we're shining the spotlight on a few of the ones we think make great pets.

What is a Rodent? A mammal (mostly small) having large front teeth used for gnawing. The teeth grow throughout the animal's life, and are kept from getting too long by chewing.

HAMSTERS

There are two types of hamsters: Syrian (also called Golden hamsters or Teddy Bear hamsters) and Dwarf hamsters.

Life Span: two to three years

Pros:

- Clean, will use one area of their habitat as a toilet.
- Can be tamed and accustomed to handling.

Cons:

- Clean, but their pee can start to smell! You should clean out their toilet area twice a week and the entire cage every week.
- Hamsters are nocturnal – meaning they are most active at night. They are known to stay up very late running in their wheels and finding ways to escape! In order to get a good night's sleep, it's best not to keep a hamster habitat in your bedroom.

Did you know? Hamster comes from the German word "hamstern" which means to hoard.

SYRIAN HAMSTERS VS DWARF HAMSTERS

Syrian hamsters must be kept as individuals or they will fight but are generally a little friendlier to people than Dwarf varieties. If raised together – brother or sister pairs – Dwarf hamsters can be homed together but are more prone to nip people and don't adapt to handling as well as Syrian breeds.



Syrian Hamster



Rat

RATS

Rats are amazing climbers, love people and are perhaps the smartest of the pet rodents.

Life span: three to four years

Pros:

- Extremely sociable, are easily tamed and seldom bite. Form strong bonds with their guardians much like cats and dogs do.
- Very intelligent, curious and adventurous day and night. They are naturally nocturnal but adjust to your schedule.
- Very clean, spend almost one-third of their waking life grooming!

Cons:

- Pee can get smelly. Toilet areas need to be cleaned daily.
- Require at least one hour of monitored exercise outside of their habitat every day.



Guinea Pigs

GUINEA PIGS

The largest of the pet rodents, guinea pigs are very social that call out at feeding time and make a purring noise when being petted.

Life span: five to seven years

Pros:

- Extremely sociable and most adapt well to being handled. Best kept in same sex pairs.
- Each develops a unique personality.
- Active during the day time and are generally quiet but have a fun range of calls and chatters.
- Natural composters! They love fresh hay, fruit and veggies – carrot tops and all.
- Do not climb or jump so they tend not to escape from their habitats.

Cons:

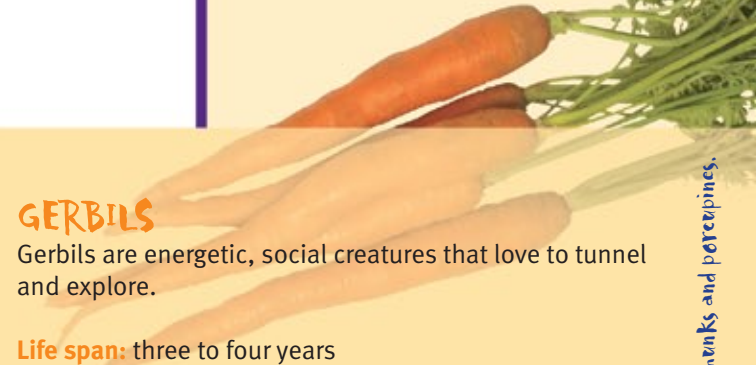
- Clean, but their pee can start to smell! Spot clean areas daily. Toilet area requires daily cleaning.
- Nails require trimming once every month or when necessary.
- Require at least one hour of monitored exercise outside of their habitat every day.



IN A NUTSHELL...

If you are looking for an easy to care for pet that you may not be able to handle as much, consider gerbils or hamsters. Keep in mind that the larger Golden and Teddy Bear hamsters tolerate more handling. Gerbils are fun to watch as they create new tunnels every day and require the least maintenance.

If you want a pet that enjoys handling and is a little larger, go for a guinea pig – pairs are ideal for not much extra work. Keep in mind they live longer and the care costs are a little higher – you need more shavings and a larger habitat. Rats require more cleaning than gerbils and hamsters but are great if you want a pet that likes to hang out with you...as long as you can get over the weirdness of that naked tail! Remember, make the SPCA your first adoption option!



GERBILS

Gerbils are energetic, social creatures that love to tunnel and explore.

Life span: three to four years

Pros:

- Can be kept in pairs if you adopt a brother or sister pair that were raised together.
- Very clean. They are desert animals and they don't pee very much = less cage cleaning.
- Very sociable and seldom bite. Gerbils are very active, curious and can be adventurous both day and night.

Cons:

- They are active in spurts throughout the day and like hamsters, they may stay up late into the night, burrowing and chewing away in their habitat – not the best bedroom pet, especially if you're a light sleeper!
- Delicate, fast movers and not all adapt well to being handled.



Gerbils

Fact: Rodents make up about half the living species of mammals.

Other notable rodents: Mice, beavers, lemmings, squirrels, chipmunks and porcupines.

RODENT HABITATS

The general rule for all rodent habitats is the bigger the better. Hamsters and gerbils do well in aquariums with plenty of materials to burrow in. Guinea pigs need lots of horizontal space to run, while rats love to climb, so vertical cages with ropes and ladders are best. Visit www.sPCA.bc.ca for more information about ideal habitats for rodents.