

Make Your

Guinea pigs, gerbils, rats, hamsters and mice can make awesome pets. But, just like cats and dogs, different small animals suit different people.

Take our quiz to discover your small animal match! Pick the answer that best describes you. Add up the points to find your total.

1. When would you want to hang out with your pet?

- a. Almost anytime. I want a pet who can adapt to my schedule. (1 point)
- b. Only in the morning and after I come home from school. I'm a busy person and need time for sports and homework. (2 points)
- c. At bedtime - and all night long! Who needs sleep? (3 points)

2. How social would you like your pet to be?

- a. Somewhat. I don't mind not being able to hold or play with a pet all the time. (2 points)
- b. Very! I want a friendly pet I can hold and play with a lot. (1 point)

3. How often would you be willing to clean your pet's cage?

- a. Two to three times a week. I'm a cleaning machine! (1 point)
- b. Once a week. What's another chore? (3 points)
- c. Every two weeks - about as often as I clean my room! (2 points)

4. How much space do you have for your pet's home?

- a. Not too much. I could set aside the top of a dresser for a cage. (2 points)
- b. A lot. I could create a big, comfy condo for a pet. (1 point)

5. Would you want a pair or just one pet?

- a. A pair. I've got a lot of love to give! (1 point)
- b. One. I'd like to give all my attention to a single pet. (2 points)



Marvellous mice



Rad rats

Match

Making a great match means knowing what to expect from a pet - and what a pet can expect from you. Which small animal were you matched up with?

5 to 7 points: Rad rats or groovy guinea pigs



Rats are incredibly smart and affectionate. They should live with other same-sex rats. They love to climb, so a tall cage with multiple levels is best. Each rat needs at least two square feet of space. Cleaning the cage several times a week helps keep them healthy. Though naturally awake at night (nocturnal), rats easily adjust their schedule to come out for attention.

Guinea pigs are also very social animals.

They do well in same-sex pairs. Most enjoy being petted while nestled in a cozy lap. They need a large living area with at least four square feet per guinea pig. The cage should be cleaned about once a week. Guinea pigs are naturally crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk) but, like rats, can adapt their schedule.



Groovy guinea pigs



Gentle gerbils

8 or 9 points: Gentle gerbils or marvellous mice

Gerbils are busy creatures! They love to dig and chew, especially with another same-sex gerbil for company. They are most active in the morning and evening. Filled with bedding for burrowing, aquariums make great gerbil homes. Plus, they take up little space. Gerbil cages only need cleaning every two weeks. While friendly, gerbils are so energetic they can be tricky to hold.

Like gerbils, mice make fairly friendly - but fast-moving - companions. Females get along well with each other. Males can fight, so they may need to be housed on their own. Mice are naturally nocturnal but, around people, they tend to be active in the morning and evening. An aquarium with burrowing material and things to climb makes a good habitat. As with rats, cleaning the cage several times a week helps keep mice healthy.



Heartwarming hamsters

10 to 12 points: Heartwarming hamsters

Hamsters can nip, especially when they are young or grumpy from having been woken up from a nap during the day. After all, hamsters are nocturnal. But, with patience and gentle handling, they can become good-natured pets. An ideal hamster habitat is an aquarium with burrowing material and a wheel to run in. The cage should be cleaned about once a week. Hamsters are solitary in nature and need to be housed by themselves.



Small animals.



BIG responsibility

Caring for a pet - even a small one - is a big responsibility. Visit spca.bc.ca/kidspetcare to learn more about caring for small animals - including downloadable care guides for guinea pigs, gerbils, rats, hamsters and mice. Then, when your family is ready, check out bcpetsearch.com to see all BC SPCA small animals available for adoption.



ARE YOU A SMALL ANIMAL WHIZ? TAKE THE QUIZ!

Circle your answers, then flip the page to see if you were right!



Small animals have such fascinating behaviours. Do you know what they mean? Put your knowledge to the test with our petite pet puzzlers.

1. A rabbit rubs her chin on things because...

- a. she's marking them with her scent.
- b. some of the yummy banana she just ate is stuck to her fur.
- c. she's itchy.



4. Stuffing his cheeks with food means a hamster...

- a. is super-duper hungry.
- b. has no table manners whatsoever!
- c. is going to stash it all away somewhere in his cage.



Yep. Like, totally.

5. Sometimes, a rat bobs her head up and down. She's...

- a. groovin' to some music.
- b. trying to figure out how far away something is before she takes a big leap.
- c. nodding in agreement to something you've just said.



2. When a guinea pig makes a "wheek, wheek" noise, he's...

- a. warning other guinea pigs of danger.
- b. demanding his morning veggies. Like, right now!
- c. singing his little heart out.



6. A mouse gnawing on the bars of his cage over and over...

- a. is trying to escape.
- b. just really likes to chew. Have you seen those long front teeth?
- c. needs more iron in his diet.



3. A gerbil scratching madly at the corners of her cage wants to...

- a. escape.
- b. get some much-needed exercise. Aerobics, anyone?
- c. make a burrow.



Answers:

1. a. Rabbits have scent glands under their chin. They rub these glands on objects in their environment to mark their territory.
2. b. Guinea pigs make the "wheek, wheek" sound when they are hungry and looking forward to being fed.
3. c. Often, gerbils who scratch at the corners of their cage are living in habitats without enough burrowing material to dig in. They need to be able to burrow underground to feel safe.
4. c. Hamsters are hoarders! They use their large cheek pouches to carry food back to a hiding spot.
5. b. Rats have poor depth perception. Bobbing up and down helps them to judge the distance of a jump better.
6. a. Mice often chew on cage bars because they want to escape. They need to be given plenty of hiding places to feel safe and lots of interesting things to do in their cage.



Rodent Overload!

Make the SPCA Your First Adoption Option!

“Hey! I didn’t know the SPCA had baby mice!” SPCA staff hear this all the time from first-time shelter visitors. “People think we only have cats and dogs,” says Kim Monteith, animal welfare supervisor at the Vancouver shelter. “This week, for example, we got over twenty baby mice.”

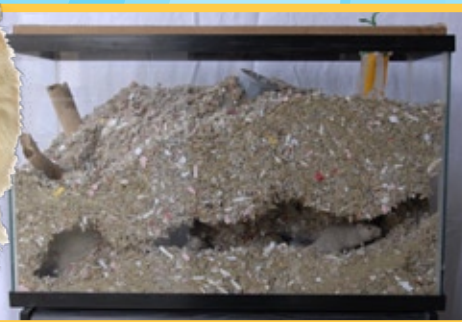
The truth is the SPCA gets lots of small animals – hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, rabbits and more! Often people surrender small animals to the SPCA because the pet store animals they bought were pregnant and they couldn’t manage all the offspring. “I wish more people would make the SPCA their first adoption option before going to a pet store for an animal like a gerbil, mouse or hamster,” says Kim.

But which pet to get? Here’s a quick guide to help pick the perfect petite pet.

Furry Hamsters

Solitary by nature, hamsters are cute and furry. But they can nip, especially when they are young or grumpy from having been woken from a nap – which is most of the daylight hours. After all, hamsters are nocturnal creatures. Asleep in the day and awake at night! Patience and gentle handling are key to preventing bites and to make your hamster more tame with people.

While hamsters live pretty short lives – two to three years – they are adorable pets for someone who lives in an apartment or wants a pet that can live in their bedroom. An ideal habitat for a hamster is not one of those small wire cages but a large aquarium habitat with lots of space and places to explore (see right).



Quick and Inquisitive Gerbils

Gerbils seem to be always busy! They love to dig tunnels and explore. If you provide them with an aquarium habitat filled with Carefresh (a recycled paper bedding material), they will make new tunnels almost every day. These energetic mouse-sized rodents live three to four years and can be kept in same-sex pairs, provided they have been paired when very young. Like all the small animals, gentle handling is required to earn their trust.

Maybe a rat would be fun?

Amazing climbers, pet rats are incredibly smart, social animals who will seek out their human companion. Once tamed and feeling safe, they will cling and climb all over you. They love treats (but go easy – they can get fat!). Since they love to scramble around to explore they need a large, tall cage outfitted with climbing tubes, ropes and ladders. Like gerbils, their life expectancy is two to three years.



Wonderful Wabbits?

Rabbits come in all sorts of sizes – from three pound dwarfs to twenty-five pound Flemish giants! While soft and adorable, rabbits are a more demanding pet than you might think. Having rabbits is definitely a whole family decision. If you are looking for a pet to cuddle, rabbits are not the right pet. Most rabbits don’t like to be held, preferring to come to their companion on their own terms from the safety and security of the floor. They do make lovable long-term companions (living up to ten years) but require tons of space – ideally a whole room or a huge cage so they can move at least three hops (in addition to daily supervised exercise outside their enclosure).



Guinea pigs too!

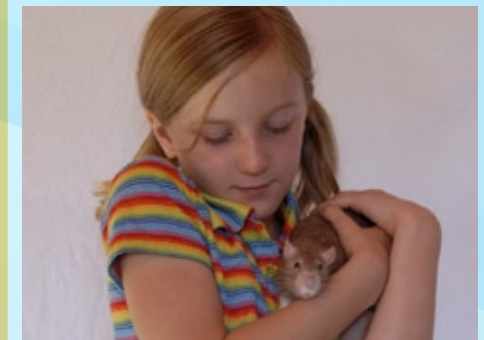
Guinea pigs greet you with a cheeping sound – especially if you come with fresh veggies in hand! Active during the day, guinea pigs are social rodents that do best when in same-sex pairs (or a neutered male and female). Most enjoy being petted while nestled on your lap. In fact, you may be rewarded with a purring-like sound when your guinea pig is feeling content from your gentle petting. Guinea pigs are very vocal making a variety of sounds – from chirps to weeps – each expressing a different emotion. Like rabbits, they need lots of space. An ideal habitat has 20 square feet for a pair – that’s about the size of a kitchen table seating six people – with tunnels and little houses for security.



Too cute! Baby mice!

Small and delicate, mice are exceedingly cute, quiet pets. Look to get two or more female mice as they are highly social. Males may be aggressive in groups unless raised together while young.

Males should have a larger habitat so if they don’t get along so well each can have their own space. Pet mice are pretty friendly with people yet they still require calm, gentle handling. They love living in an aquarium-style habitat with burrowing material and things to climb – tubes, ladders and ropes – that is at least two square feet for a pair (larger if you have more mice).



Purrfect Pet Names Contest!

What’s your favourite pet name?

At Bark! we want you to send us your favourite pet name for a rat, cat, dog, hamster and rabbit.

Pick five names – one for each type of animal. Everyone who enters will go into a draw to win one of five fabulous prize packs. We’ll tally the results for an upcoming Bark! Send your entries by March 31, 2010.

Bonus: We will use one of your pet names to name a shelter animal in your honour!

Along with your five favourite pet names, include your name, age, address and email (if you have one) to BC SPCA Bark! Pet Name Contest, 1245 East 7th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. V5T 1R1 or email your entry to kids@spca.bc.ca.

