



## P & K Pets Info Sheet #08

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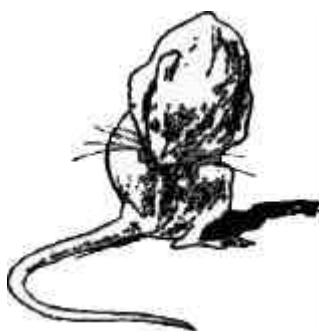
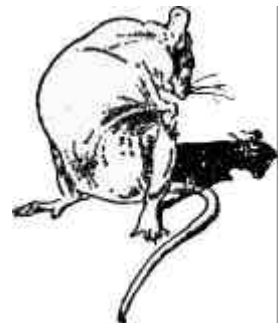
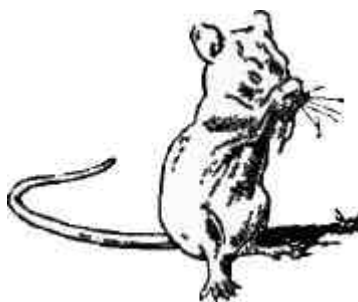
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INFORMATION

# RATS CARE





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### **INTRODUCTION**

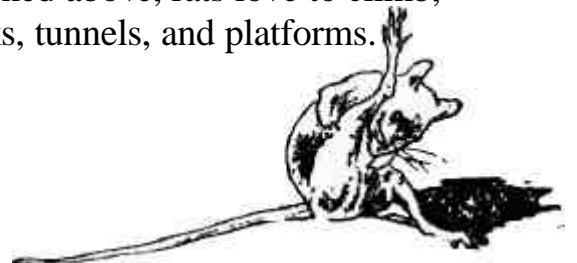
Let's face it, wild rats have had a bad reputation. They have been disease carrying pests who lived in dirty places and continuously caused problems.

Nowadays, more and more people are discovering the joys of owning their own pet rat. Domestic rats are a different species to wild rats and our baby rats have been specially bred as pets. They have been well handled and enjoy human contact. They are sociable pets that don't bite, and get friendlier the more time you spend with them. A pet rat can get as attached to its owner as a dog to its master. They are cute little animals that are excellent pets for people of all ages. They are ideal children's pets as they enjoy being handled and are easy to care for. They have simple requirements of fresh food and water and clean bedding.

### **HOUSING**

Rats can be housed in wire cages or aquariums which have been fitted with a wire or mesh top screen. Keep in mind that plastic is chewable and wood is unhygienic. Rats are active rodents, so it's most important that you provide adequate space for your new pet. The larger living area you give your animal, the happier it will be. Also, since rats are clean animals, they are happiest when their living environment is cleaned on a regular basis. Cages should be cleaned every 3 days and waste matter should be removed daily. Bedding will be used as a comfort measure for your pet and also, as a litter. Appropriate rat beddings include shredded papers and clothing. While wood shavings are an effective bedding material for other rodents, they tend to irritate a rat's sensitive lungs and can cause serious heart problems. If wood shavings must be used, be sure they are dust free, these are available from most pet shops.

A nest box should be provided, and can be store-bought or home made. A cardboard box makes a good nest box, although it may need to be replaced often. Other possibilities include a flowerpot or ice cream container, or a section of PVC drain pipe (perhaps cover one end). As mentioned above, rats love to climb, and will make good use of ladders, ropes, hammocks, tunnels, and platforms.





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Toys should be provided as well. Blocks of wood for chewing, cardboard tubes, and toys designed for ferrets or parrots are good choices.

The cage should ideally be placed in a relatively quiet location but still near the social activity in the home. Placing the cage on a table or stand will help the rats feel more secure. The cage should not be placed in direct sunlight or in drafty locations. Limit access to the cage by other household pets, as a rat will understandably feel threatened by a cat or dog hovering outside the cage.

Water should always be available in the form of a drip/sip bottle. Water kept in bowls will become soiled far too quickly and is not recommended. However, from time to time you can put a shallow bowl of water in the cage for your rat to play in.

### **FEEDING**

Pelleted or block type diets are available for rats, and are formulated to be nutritionally complete, but rats will eat just about anything. Ensure they only eat healthy food and not; sugar or junk food. When cooking, cut off bite sized portions for your rat to try. You will soon discover what your rat prefers. When introducing new foods, do so gradually in small portions so as not to upset your rat's stomach. They can snack on anything you have around, but keep it healthy. You can give them cereals (but not sugary ones), egg shells, mushrooms, bones, dog chews, rice crackers, grains, seeds, biscuits, pellets, fresh fruit and vegies. Give a balanced variety of dry foods, fresh fruit and vegies. Fresh food should be given daily, and always remove uneaten food.



To ensure your rat gets all the nutrition it needs, you can add a multi-vitamin and mineral supplement to their drinking water or food.

Hard things for your rat to chew on are essential in maintaining healthy teeth. Rat pellets are extra crunchy for their teeth, and dog bones are also good. Try some wood chews from a pet store.





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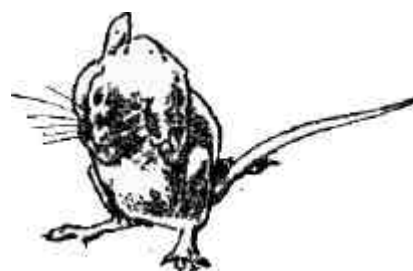
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### **HANDLING**

Pet rats love to come out of their house and play with you. Baby rats tend to be a bit wriggly at first, so make sure you help your new baby feel safe by snuggling it close to your body with your hands around it so it can hide. A little rat is a very curious creature and before long they will be discovering how much fun it is to ride on your shoulder or get carried around in your arms. Always be friendly and calm with your rat. They can sense fear, and that makes them scared, so make sure your little pet feels safe and secure. Talking softly to your rat reassures it that it can trust you. Soon you will have a friend who will know you and enjoy your company. As rats mature they become less wriggly and easier to handle. Continue to love and talk to your rat and it will become your best friend, getting friendlier the more you handle it.

### **TRAINING**

If you have a baby rat who doesn't like to be held, remember that baby rats tend to be very active and often don't want to hold still to be held. Instead they want to run around and play and explore. See if your rat wants to play a game with you instead of being held. Then, wait until it is feeling sleepy to hold it. When rats are feeling sleepy, they are more willing to be held. If a rat still doesn't like being held or acts scared of people, it's probably because it hasn't been properly socialized. Some rats just naturally have a more fearful personality too. You can help it learn to trust you by using food. It works best to use soft foods, such as baby foods and yoghurt, because you can offer them on a spoon and the rat can't grab the food and run away. Use the same method to reward good behaviour. For instance, use the food to lead the rat out of the cage and onto your hand, arm, or lap. Then reward it with the food. You have to do it little by little, just small steps at a time. Just give your rat a little taste each time and gradually make it come out further and further each time. As the rat learns that it gets good treats for being with you, it will be more willing to come out, be with you, and be held. If this rat is a single rat, it is recommended you get another rat as a companion. Single rats often feel very insecure. With another rat friend, your rat will be more likely to trust you.





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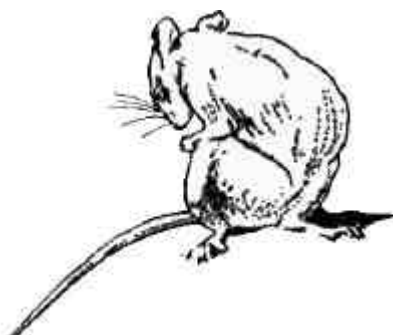
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### GENERAL

Beyond providing the basics in food and housing, rats do not require much else except your attention and free time outside of the cage. Make sure that the area you allow your rats out in is rat proof - especially against their chewing. Most importantly, make sure electrical wires are out of reach or encase in plastic tubing. Also make sure the rats cannot access anything that is toxic, including some plants, and that anything you do not want them to chew on is out of reach. Rats also tend to scent mark as they roam, leaving little drops of urine. The odor is not offensive, but you may want to cover furniture with a throw while they are out. They will also do this to their owners, so be prepared!

Your rats' nails may need to be trimmed - check them monthly. Use a pair of human nail clippers and trim a little off the tip if needed (avoiding the pink part that is visible inside the nail, as this is a blood vessel and sensitive area). If you do happen to nick the blood vessel, a little styptic powder applied to the nail tip should stop any bleeding. At the same time you check the nails, try to get a glimpse of the teeth to make sure they are not getting overgrown. Make sure you provide lots of opportunity (through wood blocks and toys) for your rats to chew and keep their teeth healthy.

Rats live for approximately 2½ years. They are hardy pets, but they can catch lice or have problems with mites. This is easily treated with a mite & lice spray or a gentle flea powder. However, take your rat to the vet if they have any serious problems or there have been major changes to their behaviour.



**Enjoy your new  
Friend!**