
One of the allures of owning a ferret is that it is comprehended to be a low maintenance pet. This is true ONLY if you do the initial training up front, like teaching the ferret not to nip and to use a litter box. The number one mistake most people are told or assume is that ferrets are like cats and will naturally use the litter box. This is not true.

Ferrets are caged and separated from their mothers very early at the ferret farms. Because of this, they miss the important stage of mom teaching them to use a "latrine."

First off, remember, a ferret is NOT a cat. Yes, they can eat dry cat food and can receive a rabies shot, but they do not return to the box every time to relieve themselves. Ferrets have to have several boxes in a confined area and then at best, a 90% hit ratio can be achieved. The good news about ferret accidents is that they are small, do not permeate the carpet or floor, and if left



to dry, their stools are odorless and dry in 24 hours. A ferret's philosophy is this, "Oh - I see a litter box, do I have to go potty? Yes, then I will use the box." OR "Oh - I need to go potty - I don't see a box. I guess this corner will do just fine." Fortunately, very few ferrets leave presents in the middle of the floor.

Like a small kitten, the ferret needs to get used to a small area, and get good at using the box, before expanding their play and roam areas.

1. Use a dust free litter like Scamp, pine pellets, Cat Works, recycled newspaper, etc. Avoid clumping sand and scented litters, at least until the digging stage is over. Place a little bit of soiled litter back into the clean pan to discourage kits from using the litter box as a sand or play box. **DO NOT USE CEDAR OR WOOD SHAVINGS IN A FERRET'S CAGE.**

2. Use a litter box in the cage that covers at least two corners, and secure it in place so the ferret can not rearrange its location or tip it over.

3. Make sure the ferrets are using their potty in the cage well before giving them free run of a room. Place litter boxes in their chosen corners or use newspaper in the hard to reach or smaller areas.

4. When you get them out to play, wake them up and cuddle with them for 5 minutes, put them BACK into the cage and insist that they use the potty. Watch carefully - sometimes ferrets will go through the motions and not really do anything in a hurry to get allowed out.

5. Allow free run time to be in two hour stages. Put them back in their cage to rest and use the facilities, then let them out again if you wish.

6. Use newspaper where litter boxes won't work (under furniture, beds, behind doors, etc.) Paper training your ferret is a little easier than box training outside the cage, and it is easy to pick up and dispose of in a jiffy.

7. If you have a cat in the house, try paper training outside the cage for the ferrets. Otherwise, the cat will use the ferret boxes and you will have more to clean up in more places. Furthermore, ferrets won't always use a box after a cat has blessed it. Cats usually won't use paper.

8. Clean the litter boxes with dish washing detergent - nothing harsh! Always save a little old litter to put back in a clean box if the ferret is still in the digging stage.

The diet of a ferret will pass from intake to output in about three to four hours. The higher the meat protein is in the ferret's diet, the less waste it will produce. A ferret can not process vegetable protein, hence, feeding low grade foods will just result in larger bowel movements. You need to buy ferret or cat diets with chicken as the first ingredient and that have a minimum of 32% protein. Avoid ferret diets containing fish meal - it results in smelly stools.

Traditional training aids for cats and dogs do not work with ferrets. Rewarding the ferret with some run time or a treat is the best way to reinforce good litter habits.

For more information, contact Pam Grant at starferet@aol.com or: STAR* Ferrets, P.O. Box 1714, Springfield, VA 22151-0714

For more information, contact:
The Ferret Lady
Melanee Ellis
364-3169
ferlady@pobox.alaska.net

Potty Training Ferrets

by Pam Grant

