



A Basic Rat Starter Guide

- Practices we recommend and use at Frankie's World Rat Rescue

Firstly, we would recommend if you have social media, to follow us on Instagram @frankiesworldrescue , this is one of the best ways to improve your knowledge of Rat care and health. We have hundreds of rats in our care at all times, lots with health issues, and on our stories daily we try our best to explain things and teach about various conditions and what to watch for, how to treat them, etc, as well as lots of tips for all things related to Rat care!

Here are some of our suggested resources/materials that we recommend based on our experiences with rats:

NOT SURE WHERE TO START OR WHO TO TRUST?

In general, we always encourage and recommend that people reach out to us first if they have any questions or concerns. We have a wealth of knowledge and experience when it comes to Rats and their care, and we love nothing more than to help others with their rats, whether they've adopted from us or not! We know that good resources for Rats, including good veterinary resources for Rats, are very hard if not impossible to come by, so we commit to always being accessible to anyone who needs us. If you do reach out to us, and it's something that you would need to see a vet for, we can help point you in the direction of ones that are good with Rats, and we can help give you recommendations on what to ask for/about, and how to advocate for your Rats to make sure they get the care they need.

The best way to get in touch with us if you have urgent questions, is to send a WhatsApp message to Mariah (Founder/President) at 647-237-9354. If Mariah does not answer a phone call, please also text, and she usually responds within an hour max. If she is not available for some reason, or if it's less urgent, you can send an email with the subject line "URGENT", and we will get back to you within a couple hours max.

We have started a YouTube series on our channel called "Facts with Franks", where we post educational videos about key topics in Rat health. Have a look, and please feel free to suggest any topics that you think might be helpful, and we can make these in the future!

<https://youtube.com/@frankiesworldrescue?si=yTFMOzqOXWY9y8Dm>



CAGE SIZE/TYPE

This is VERY IMPORTANT!!! It is very rare that a pet store will recommend, or even carry in stock, appropriate cages for rats. They sell very small, inappropriate enclosures, based on lack of knowledge about rats and their needs. Rats need a lot of space, the more the better, but they require a minimum of 2 square feet per rat, with a mix of horizontal running space, AND vertical climbing space.

The absolute minimum we recommend for 2 rats (keeping a rat solo is rare and not recommended except in unique circumstances) would be a cage with the following dimensions:

Length: 28 inches

Depth/width: 18 inches

Height: 30 inches

The “All living things Rat starter kit” is these exact dimensions, and the minimum size needed. No more than 2 rats should be housed in something of this size.

[Here are some examples of cages that are NOT APPROPRIATE even though they say they're for rats:](#)

https://www.amazon.ca/Living-World-30-7-Inch-18-9-Inch-12-2-Inch/dp/B00IKBYBKG/?ref=asc_df_B00IKBYBKG/?tag=googleshopc0c-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=706745947114&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=11848548990020558720&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvgmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9215980&hvtargid=pla-435742173248&pssc=1&mcid=6242580323c8363ca063482a32fec6fe&gad_source=1

https://www.petland.ca/products/living-world-rat-starter-kit?srsId=AfmBOorf6FEi_AlpLXMtKnerBYWwxHUAqgmQdwDsHiWgKrG70mdYnjnb

https://www.wayfair.ca/Tucker-Murphy-Pet™--Caspian-Universal-Small-Animal-Cage-w-Wire-Spacing-X115652482-L1314-K~C002752871.html?refid=GX717689745500-C002752871&device=c&ptid=304108496873&targetid=pla-304108496873&network=g&ireid=44195776&gad_source=1&gbraid=0AAAAADfP7h1RXo8DTiCshM91u--nkhPyW&gclid=CjwKCAjwyfe4BhAWEiwAkIL8sOF1ntGhNfYP32_m2jqvHafk6AAGascxvpqP6pkPea9kCJgns_FLUBoCpGoQAvD_BwE

<https://www.petsmart.ca/small-pet/cages-habitats-and-hutches/cages/full-cheeksandtrade-rat-starter-kit-82228.html>

<https://www.bluebarn.shop/product/ware-chew-proof-4-story-cage/?srsId=AfmBOorJ-2z-1XMyFlxsiigzkcjQvTAtF0-sTdoTkM9JVN9qZRaEt6-mVUo>



The following has some good info on cage types:

<https://aboutpetrats.com/housing/choosing-your-pet-rats-home/>

Cages that ARE APPROPRIATE (brands will vary depending on location/ country)

https://www.wayfair.ca/Midwest-Homes-For-Pets--MidWest-Homes-for-Pets-Deluxe-Critter-Nation-Small-Animal-Cage-16-L1314-K~C007968018.html?refid=GX717689745500-C007968018_917537534&device=c&ptid=304108496873&targetid=pla-304108496873&network=g&ireid=223123191&PiID%5B%5D=917537534&gad_source=4&gbraid=0AAAAADfP7h2p649Nrvf1H0Q83VlljdOyM&gclid=CjwKCAjwyfe4BhAWEiwAkIL8sAxn7knGTqAqQ154xM5HxQprFmB47Gkhvoyqds7l_aLeZQL0x_OzBoCvPQQAvD_BwE

https://www.amazon.ca/PawHut-Rolling-Chinchilla-Platform-Removable/dp/B08BL95WCT/ref=asc_df_B08BL95WCT/?tag=googleshopc0c-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=706745947114&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=15824219844522876212&hvpone=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmld=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9215980&hvtargid=pla-944211566520&psc=1&mcid=ffbf5c91950e305e8a35c90bca3de300&gad_source=1

https://www.google.com/search?q=full+cheeks+blue+rat+cage+4+story&client=safari&sca_esv=99c798c151899129&rls=en&udm=28&biw=1256&bih=782&ei=d6geZ5rZDPKA5OMPqd226Ao&ved=0ahUKEWja8NPwuK-JAxVyAHkGHamuDa0Q4dUDCBA&uact=5&oq=full+cheeks+blue+rat+cage+4+story&gs_lp=EhInd3Mtd2l6LW1vZGVsZXNzLXNob3BwaW5nliFmdWxslGN0ZWVrcyBibHVlIHJhdCBjYWdlIDQgc3RvcnllqxhQuAVYiBZwAngBkAEAmAGAAaABtAmqAQM3LjW4AQPIAQD4AQGYAgSgAuQBwglKEAAYsAMY1gQYR8ICBBAhGAqYAwClBgQGBgiSBwMyLjKgB5QG&sclient=gws-wiz-modeless-shopping#oshoppproduct=gid:5172947796463479395,mid:576462782991996599,oid:9868904864665562776,iid:2256377802546547967,pvt:hg,pvo:3&oshop=apv&pvs=0

<https://www.petvalu.ca/product/critterware-critterware-16-5in-4-level-indoor-small-pet-hutch/SCM10683?skuid=65511>

GENERAL HEALTH INFO for Rats

This is a good general link for rat health info:

<u>A Layman's Guide to Health, Medication Use, Breeding, and Responsible Care of</u>	
--	--

The best advice we can give you is to get to know your rats. They are prey animals so hide their sickness very well, so if you feel like something is off, it probably is. The most common health issues in rats are by far respiratory infections. Odds are one of your rats will get one at some point in their life. If caught early and treated promptly, they can be treated quite easily, but can also easily progress to life threatening pneumonia so it's important to recognize them.



Signs to watch for include a red discharge from around the eyes and nose, called porphyrin, sneezing, as well as any change in their breathing pattern or effort (it will look like their chest and abdomen are moving more than they normally do), or they may be open mouth breathing/gasping. If you see those signs, reach out to us immediately and we can help guide you on what to do, and who a good vet would be to bring them to. If you're not sure if they're ok or not, feel free to reach out to us and ask if it's something to worry about, we never get annoyed with rat questions, no matter how small, so when in doubt, reach out!

The best way to prevent respiratory infections is to keep the cage clean, use bedding with good odour control, keep the room of the house they are in clean without exposure to any dirt or dust, and avoid any scents around them. Cleaning their cage with fragrance free natural soaps diluted in hot water is the best, as well as avoiding any air fresheners, incense, diffusers, perfumes, or other strong smells from their space.

We recommend that everyone purchase some enrofloxacin and doxycycline from one of these websites right away to have on hand in case any of your rats get a respiratory infection. Getting in to a vet and getting meds in time can often be challenging, early treatment is key to successful and fast recovery, so having it can be a life saver. You don't need a prescription to order from these sites, and if you ever need to use any, we are happy to help direct you on the vet recommended dosing.

https://globalpigeonsupply.com/products/enrofloxacin-liquid-100ml?_pos=3&_sid=1a513674e&_ss=r

https://globalpigeonsupply.com/products/vetafarm-doxyvet-liquid?_pos=6&_sid=e2c494e5e&_ss=r

<https://www.mikesfalconry.com/product/doxycycline-20-powder/>

You can also purchase azithromycin, which is another common antibiotic used for respiratory infections, at the following website:

<https://fishmoxfishflex.com/search?q=Azithromycin+>



BEDDING:

We recommend Hemp, or Aspen bedding for the bottom of the cage and in dig boxes. Hemp tends to control odour better, especially if you have males or a large group of rats, but Aspen is OK too. Any brand is fine, but this is the brand of hemp we use:

<https://www.amazon.ca/HEMPALTA-Premium-Bedding-Animals-Chickens/dp/B08H4DHXFQ>

In litter boxes and as a mix in part of the regular bedding as well, we use this hemp litter from [Walmart.ca](https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/hemp-sense-all-natural-hemp-kritter-bedding-10-pound-bag-quick-absorbing-odor-control/6000203324423?skuld=6000203324424&offerId=6000203324424®ion_id=202200&cmpid=SEM_CA_425_Y1RKRBNAZ2_71700000105111700_58700008243438028&utm_id=SEM_CA_425_Y1RKRBNAZ2_71700000105111700_58700008243438028&utm_medium=paid_search&utm_source=google&utm_campaign=always_on&gclid=0AAAAADv6L0TYoIBOxzTYrtMmYB7b3AQHC&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI-tW_tNXP_gIVjfXjBx1s5w-6EAQYAiABEgLIaFD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds), it's by far the best at odor control and absorbency. We order it online because it's half the price as in stores (if stores even carry it), and it's free shipping to your door! They also have a subscription program where you can get 5% off. NOT SURE ON AVAILABILITY IN OTHER COUNTRIES.

https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/hemp-sense-all-natural-hemp-kritter-bedding-10-pound-bag-quick-absorbing-odor-control/6000203324423?skuld=6000203324424&offerId=6000203324424®ion_id=202200&cmpid=SEM_CA_425_Y1RKRBNAZ2_71700000105111700_58700008243438028&utm_id=SEM_CA_425_Y1RKRBNAZ2_71700000105111700_58700008243438028&utm_medium=paid_search&utm_source=google&utm_campaign=always_on&gclid=0AAAAADv6L0TYoIBOxzTYrtMmYB7b3AQHC&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI-tW_tNXP_gIVjfXjBx1s5w-6EAQYAiABEgLIaFD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds

We DO NOT recommend using paper litter or bedding. It is technically safe for them, and many people use it especially because it's cheap, but in our experience it is quite bad for triggering respiratory infections which are common in rats to begin with. It doesn't control the urine smell as well, which bothers their breathing, and it stays wet and soggy more than the Aspen/hemp. However, if you've found in the past it works for you, then that's fine as well.

DO NOT EVER USE PINE or any wood shavings except for Aspen! The others are toxic to rats.

FOOD

In terms of food, we recommend the Oxbow adult rat, or the Mazuri pellets for food. They are the best quality of the commercial feeds available, even though commercial feeds aren't ideal. We don't recommend any seed mixes because they're more processed and not nutritionally complete. Ordering the large 20-50lb bags is way more economical in terms of cost per pound, and it'll last you up to 6 months depending on how many rats you have, so we recommend those ones that



you can order online. Pellets should not make up their entire diet, though, and even the best commercial pellets are still far higher in protein than is ideal for rats. Rats are prone to kidney disease, and high protein diets damage the kidneys. This is why we recommend using pellets a couple days a week, and the rest of the week using a mix of rat safe grains, vegetables, Fruits, herbs, nuts/seeds. Make sure to always google if a food is rat safe before giving it to them.

WHEELS/CAGE ACCESSORIES

As for wheels, we recommend any 12 inch wheel or bigger. The bigger the better to protect their spines from curving. Either of these 2 types work. We find the silent spinners are better space savers when the cage is smaller, because they can clip to the inside of the cage. The flat saucer ones are good for in play pens, but rats don't tend to like them as much in our experience. Not all rats will use wheels or like them, but most do, especially females and young rats with high energy and if they don't get out of their cage a ton.

https://www.canadianpetconnection.ca/?s=Silent+spinner&post_type=product

Rats are very active, intelligent creatures and need LOTS of enrichment. Their cages should be completely full of toys and features to keep them stimulated. It should look like complete chaos inside the cage, with baskets, ropes, hides, dig boxes, buckets, chew toys, etc. There shouldn't be any free space in the cage at all. The dollar store is a great place to get dog toy ropes, plastic baskets that you can hang from the sides and ceiling of the cage, bins to use as litter and dig boxes, etc. There's a great Facebook group called "Rat cage setups" to give you ideas, or we've created a short YouTube video with some brief ideas:

[DIY/budget ways to fill/enrich a rat cage
youtu.be](https://youtu.be/1YQzonjgvNU)

HAMMOCK SAFETY

With the items in the cage, it's always important to consider safety. Although Rats love hammocks and ropes, they tend to rip them up, which can lead to holes and dangling strings that pose a risk for strangulation. Unfortunately, we've heard of this happening to others, and we had our first experience with it this past year. We have stopped using hammocks as a result, and instead just use plastic hanging baskets filled with bedding in order to eliminate the risk of injury that comes with any material products. You can watch the following video for more information:

<https://youtu.be/1YQzonjgvNU>



PLAYPENS

These are the ones that we and most rat owners use. They often go on sale on Amazon and are very reasonably priced:

[SONGMICS Pet Playpen with Floor, Small Animal Pen, Pet Fence Indoor, 56.3 x 28.7 x 18.1 Inches, White ULPC02W](https://www.amazon.ca/SONGMICS-Pet-Playpen-with-Floor-Small-Animal-Pen-Pet-Fence-Indoor-56.3-x-28.7-x-18.1-Inches-White-ULPC02W/dp/B07K111111)
[amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca)

Have a CRITTER NATION CAGE?

These bins from Canadian tire happen to be the exact dimensions of the cage and so it fits in the bottom perfectly and is a great scatter guard and easy big dig box to fill with Aspen and hemp for them. Some rats will end up chewing them and being able to get behind them, but others don't.

<https://www.homedepot.ca/product/shelves-llc-large-mixing-tub/1001098728>

There's also various people/companies that make custom metal inserts for the Critter Nation cages (and I'm sure other cages/dimensions as well), that are fantastic and the best product, but a bit more expensive than the plastic bins from Home Depot (rats can't chew and destroy them though, which is ideal!)

<https://www.chinchilla.ca/products/pre-painted-galvanized-metal-bottom-tray-3-in-high-midwest-nation-cages>

If you have ANY other questions let us know! We are always happy to help out and support you and your rats in any way we can!

The Frankie's World Team

Frankie's World
Where misfits belong