

TIPS FOR NEW OWNERS

HUSBANDRY: HOUSING, BEDDING, ACCESSORIES AND SANITATION ACCORDING TO AFRMA

HOUSING

A simple, gnaw-proof cage, terrarium, or screen-topped aquarium of sufficient size is the basic requirement. Used aquariums may be obtained at garage sales and swap meets for an inexpensive price but are breakable and can be heavy. Wire cages can be too drafty, allow the bedding to fall out, are harder to clean and disinfect, and corrode after long exposure to urine. (The new powder-coated wire rat cages with solid metal shelves and plastic cat pan bottom are easier to clean, and the rats love the levels to climb on.) If wire shelves are used in the cage for the animals to climb on, they should be made of 1/2 by 1/2 inch wire as a rat's back foot can get caught in 1 by 1/2 inch wire and break a leg. Solid shelves need to be wiped down twice a day so the rats don't get dirty or develop sores.

For two small rats, use a 15–20-long gallon tank or 14x24x18 (approximate) wire cage (minimum sizes; preferably larger) for their housing. The cage should be placed either on a table, dresser, or shelf (not above eye level!), away from direct sun or drafts. Extreme temperatures should be avoided.

BEDDING

NO cedar or pine as they contain toxins and cause organ damage and respiratory disease. Use hardwood shavings (aspen chips, flakes, shredded), paper products, pelleted beddings made from hardwood, paper, or other non-toxic substances, or any other non-toxic bedding. Fill the cage with 1/2–1 inch of bedding at each cleaning.

ACCESSORIES

A demand-type water bottle to provide clean water at all times. A dish may be used only in emergencies as your pet will immediately spill the water or push shavings in it. Holders with chew guards for the water bottle are available to hang the bottle inside an aquarium. If you use a feed dish, it should be easy to clean and sturdy to prevent tipping. Sleeping boxes can be made from a variety of non-toxic household containers (washable or disposable): butter cups, jars, oatmeal cartons, etc., or store bought houses.

You can also get LARGE PVC pipe pieces (elbows, Y's, straight tubes) for your rats to play in. Exercise wheels provide plenty of exercise and fun. If you get a wheel for your rat, it needs to be at least 12–14 inches in diameter and a cage large enough to accommodate it (female rats should always have a wheel). Wooden gnawing blocks are great chew toys. Rawhide chew sticks or hard dog biscuits can also be used. Cooked soup bones are a favorite of rats.

SANITATION

Cleanliness is the best guarantee to keep your pet in good health. Clean the feed dish daily, the water bottle at each re-fill. Change bedding every 3–5 days and clean and disinfect the cage and accessories once a week.

TIPS FOR NEW OWNERS

AFRMA ESSENTIALS AND COMING HOME

ESSENTIALS BEFORE PURCHASE

- A cage
- Bedding
- Water bottle(s)
- Food
- Treats
- Toys
- A book/site source on rat care
- An exotic vet
- A responsible breeder
- A club to stay consistent with rat care updates and community

COMING HOME

Some rats will get used to their new surroundings in a few days, others may take as long as a couple weeks. You should not give your new rats boxes or hiding places for the first couple weeks. If a rat is timid and shy when they get to their new place, they will hide in a box or house and not get used to their surroundings very well. If you don't give them any place to hide, they will more quickly become used to the new surroundings, smells, sights, and sounds.

If they were in a breeding-size cage at the breeder's and you put them into a huge triple-deluxe cage three times the size of what they were living in, this can be overwhelming to some babies. If you have them in a large wire cage with multi-levels, are they able to get up to the top where you can't reach them? Does the cage have doors that access all parts of the cage? If they are able to get away from you and you have to struggle to get to them or can't reach them, this will add to the timidity.

The cage should be in an area where there is activity (such as a family room/living room) so they get used to everything. If your rats seem timid, whenever anyone goes by the cage have them talk to the rats and open the door and offer them a treat (putting it up to them to let them smell it if they won't come to you). If they won't take it, then leave the treat. They will soon associate anyone coming and visiting them with a tasty tidbit.

TIPS FOR NEW OWNERS

HANDLING, PICKUP, FIRST NIGHT HOME AND QUARANTINING

HANDLING

You should take them out and handle them at least a couple times a day – just don't take them out every few minutes if you have babies as they will still do a lot of sleeping at this age. Once they get used to your handling and come to you, then you can start taking them out and putting them on the bed or chair. If they don't know you very well and you put them on the bed, they won't associate you as their "safe place" in case something frightens them.

If you go to pick them up and they run and you let them go, you are training them to be timid. Try to pick them up on the first attempt (being gentle but firm) rather than them running from you several times until you can get them. Pick them up, hold, pet, and talk to them for several minutes until they calm down. This will go a lot farther toward them calming down than if you let them get away with being afraid. They will soon realize you won't hurt them. Also, if you take a couple steps away from the cage and turn so they can't see it, this should help. Once you handle them for several minutes until they calm down, are relaxed, and then put them back, they will then come to your hand saying, "That wasn't so bad, take me out again."

FOR PICK UP

A few days prior to your rat(s) adoption day we will contact you to discuss yours and our own availability to find a time that works best for the both of us for you to arrange pickup and/or delivery. You must show up with a carrier for your rats as this is an essential for any vet visits, travelling, future introductions, etc.

FIRST FEW NIGHTS

The first few nights in a new home are super stressful for most babies as they are leaving their parents, siblings, potential cagemates, as well as us. So during this time you should allow your babies time to themselves to get used to their new environment and people without disruption. After a few nights to a week has gone by you may start bonding or introductions.

QUARANTINING NEW RATS

It is recommended by most if not all ethical breeders that you quarantine any new rats you receive. You do not necessarily need to *avoid* them but you should avoid contact between your current rats and new rats during this period or sanitization between your new rats and your current mischief. At least 2 weeks should have passed before you begin introductions.

We require our rats to be quarantined for a minimum of 21 days to be eligible for any health claims. Failure to comply is at your own discretion but you will forfeit any rights to partial refund if you do not quarantine and have health concerns arise and/or affect your existing rats. Please make sure to inform yourself of all information regarding quarantining.

TIPS FOR NEW OWNERS

BONDING AND ADOPTION BAGS

BONDING SUGGESTIONS

Once you have passed any quarantining if required you may move onto bonding with your new babies! It is best to start off with small time frames until you have gained confidence between you and your rat but once you feel more comfortable, extend the time limit. You can bond by playing with toys, playing with them in the cage or by putting them in a bonding pouch until you can eventually work your way up to free roam time.

Toys do not have to exclusively be rat-oriented toys. As long as they are safe materials for chewing then you can sub in other toys. Rats will play with just about anything so figure out what yours are into! Cat toys are good options, parrot enrichment toys to stimulate their brain activity, rat, rabbit, and most other small pet toys will do. You can also make your own DIY toys by researching some tutorials. You may also take them along with you in a sweater pocket or bonding pouch so they can recognize your scent as a safe and familiar place over time. Lastly, once you and your rat(s) have gained enough trust you may move onto giving them free roam time. Give them a dedicated space to play (this place can change occasionally as well) freely with toys and enrichment. In the beginning of each new area they will not go far or explore much as most might be scared of the new surroundings but the more they frequent these areas during free roam time they will explore more.

You should spend at least an hour a day, ideally more, with your rat(s) either free-roaming or spending some time together.

ADOPTION BAGS

We offer two bags to go home with adopters. They are just to help provide some of the basics to your rats on their first few nights home. There will also be a portion of the babies used hemp bedding for you to sprinkle in the cage for scent to help their adjustment or toss, your choice.

Regular adoption bag

Price: \$0

This bag will come regardless unless you have chosen the deluxe option. It comes with a portion of their current Mazuri 6F food, 2 applewood chew sticks, a little bag of treats for you and lastly, a digital birth certificate and photo album.

Deluxe adoption bag

Price: \$40

This bag can be requested but we will reach out to you as well to confirm. It comes with a 12oz portion of their current Mazuri 6F food, 2-3 assorted treats and protein, 2 applewood chew sticks, 1 3-tier hammock, 1 microfibre blanket, 1 lava wood block chew, 2-3 assorted chew toys, a little bag of treats for you and lastly, your digital birth certificate and photo album.

TIPS FOR NEW OWNERS

FEEDING YOUR RATS

FEEDING SUGGESTIONS

You may make your own decisions regarding your rat(s) diet but this is just what we have used, currently use and what we have heard from others. We personally use the shunamite diet within our rattery currently and we will leave a brief outline to make your own mix but, again i cannot stress enough, you should do your own research in addition to this as you will have more well-rounded knowledge on the subject matter. The foods we have used or have heard of are;

- Oxbow Young Rat & Mouse Food
- Oxbow Adult Rat & Mouse Food
- Mazuri Rat and Mouse Diet
- Mazuri 6F Rodent Breeder Food
- Shunamite Diet

The Shunamite Diet is, as a brief summary, is a homemade mix and/or diet that helps to encourage natural foraging behaviour and diet of rats. Should you decide to do this, take your time finding the right balance and ingredients; also keep in mind that your rat(s) may have food preferences and your mix may change a few times when first starting out. Some things also may change depending on the age of your rats for their protein, etc. as well as watching out for any possible deficiencies so that you can correct your mix right away to be more well-balanced.

Shunamite Diet

- 50-60% Base mix
- 20-25% Processed grains
- 5-10% Protein
- 5-10% Herbs, fruits, and veggies
- 5% Seeds

It is ideal to choose a mug or measuring cup and label it as equal to a percentage. Example: 1 cup = 10% and you would put 5-6 of those cups of base food into your mixing bin to start, then go down the list.

In addition to this you should feed your rats a variety of fresh foods such as fruits, vegetables, eggs (even your leftovers!). Always be sure to do a quick google search if it is safe for your rats before feeding. For example, mangos are an amazing treat for rats ... but only females. In males prolonged feeding of mango can potentially cause future urinary and kidney issues. So as much as most foods are acceptable, rats cannot throw up and therefore you as a pet parent should be double checking what is safe for consumption and what isn't for your specific gender.