

# Rat AND Mouse Essentials!



Drawing by Dean Norton.

## 10 Things You Need Before Buying A Rat Or Mouse!

### (1) A CAGE

Aquariums with wire mesh covers make excellent homes for your pet. For two rats a 20-gallon tank (or larger) is good; for two mice a 10-gallon works well. Wire cages can be drafty and will allow your pet's bedding to fall out causing a mess. They are, however, more adaptable than tanks and can be used for rats. If the cage has shelves, they should be made of ½ by ½ inch wire mesh as a rat's back foot can get caught in 1 by ½ inch wire and it can break a leg.

### (2) BEDDING

DO NOT USE CEDAR OR PINE SHAVINGS! They cause respiratory disease and organ damage. Good alternatives are Aspen shavings or paper beddings such as CareFRESH™, etc.

### (3) WATER BOTTLE

A demand type water bottle is essential in providing fresh clean water for your pet. They can be mounted on the outside of cages, and holders are available for use in tanks.

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### (4) FOOD

As a main diet, the best food for your rat or mouse is laboratory pellets (Lab Blocks, Rodent Chow, Pet Blocks, etc.). This is a complete, balanced diet and should be available to your pet at all times.

### (5) TREATS

All pets enjoy an occasional treat. Fresh and dried fruit, vegetables, salad greens, plain popcorn, whole wheat bread, and low-sugar breakfast cereals are all good treats and add variety to your pet's diet. In fact, anything you eat, that wouldn't be classified as junk food, would be enjoyed by your pet. Just be careful not to overfeed with treats as they can lead to obesity. Be sparing with oily seeds, nuts, and grain mixes.

### (6) TOYS

Toys encourage rats and mice to be more active and inquisitive. Good choices are:

**Rats:** Boxes, ladders, shelves, large PVC pipes, large wheels, bird toys, ferret toys, etc.

**Mice:** Toilet paper tubes, ladders, wheels, houses, etc.

### (7) A BOOK

There are several good books on rats and mice available in pet stores. These books will explain what you can expect from your pet, and are an important reference if a problem should arise at some point in your pet's life.

### (8) A VET

While rats and mice do not need yearly checkups or shots, emergencies can arise. It is important to know which vets in your area treat rodents.

### (9) A RESPONSIBLE BREEDER

Just as with puppies and kittens, many mice and rats found in pet shops are mass produced in commercial facilities where they are weaned as early as possible and never handled. This, combined with the stress of shipping greatly increases the chance that the person who buys them ends up with a sick pet. A responsible breeder focuses on health and temperament when planning

their litters. They raise their rats and mice in clean surroundings with plenty of quality food and clean water, and handle babies from birth to produce well-socialized pets. They are also an excellent source of correct information should questions arise. Check with your local rat and mouse club for information on breeders near you.

### (10) A CLUB

The best way to become more involved with your pet, stay current on health and husbandry practices, and meet other people who are also interested in rats and mice, is to join a rat and mouse club. Clubs usually hold shows which are open to non club members, and they are always happy to offer advice, suggest veterinarians, and direct people interested in specific colors or types of animals to appropriate breeders.

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