

Housing

You'll want to get the biggest cage you can afford and still fit where you plan to keep it. Rat owners seldom wish they had a smaller cage, and buying a smaller one first only to buy a larger one later is money that could be saved for other things. Money seemingly saved by housing rats in an aquarium will be spent at the vet instead as ammonia fills your rats' lungs. A baseline cage would be something like a Petco Rat Manor. This is all-metal and an acceptable size for two boys or three girls. Some ferret cages are larger and nearly the same price but their bar spacing will allow most young rats to escape.

Martin's Cages makes some excellent cages.
www.martinscages.com/products/cages/rat/

The R-690 or better would be a great cage. Make sure to get powder-coated rather than galvanized as the latter tends to soak up urine.

The Midwest Critter Nation is considered to be one of the premium cages and is typically what rat owners upgrade to (or wish they could).

www.midwesthomes4pets.com/products/critter-nation-2

There is a single-level version (CN) that is appropriate for up to five boys or six girls. The double-level version (DCN) is appropriate for up to ten boys or twelve girls. The Ferret Nation has the same dimensions and is cheaper, but has the wider spacing that can lead to escapees so it is not recommended.

Bedding

Your options here are going with a disposable bedding or using cage liners. You could use a litter box with either option but you'd certainly want to use one if you choose liners. Some cages do not support disposable bedding without modification so consider this also. For disposable bedding you may choose from recycled paper bedding, aspen shavings, alfalfa pellets or recycled newspaper/phone books. Avoid cedar or softwood shavings. If you choose cage liners, you'll typically use fleece or other fabric over an absorbent layer like a towel or furniture pad. See our website for additional information.

Food

The two premium block foods for rats are Oxbow and Harlan Teklad. A lesser, but useable block, would be Kaytee Forti-diet. There is a noticeable difference between rats fed the premium foods and rats fed one of the "mixes" sold in most stores. Their fur gets softer and shinier, their overall smell improves, they maintain a good weight and have a good energy level. Oxbow comes in Young Rat and Mouse formula for rats up to 6 months and then an adult formula afterward and it is carried by some major retailers as well as being available online. Harlan Teklad is fed in many laboratories, and is only sold by the company in bulk orders. Some rescues invest in the minimum order and then will break it down and ship it to you. One of the best values for Harlan Teklad is www.thecraftyrat.com/ where you can get a full 20lbs sent via flat rate. They also offer a wonderful organic mix to feed periodically.

Rats also benefit from fresh vegetables, fruits, cooked sweet potato, liver, and cooked beans. Choose healthier, washed, dark vegetables rather than something like iceberg lettuce. Organic vegetables make an even better choice. A vegetable serving (2 per day per rat) would be about the size of their head, while a fruit serving (1 per day per rat) would be about half the size of their head. See our website for additional information.

More Information

New Ken Rat Rescue: www.nkrats.com

Rat Fan Club: www.ratfanclub.org

Goosemoose (forums): www.goosemoose.com/rfc

Ratguide (medical): <http://ratguide.com>

Local Rescue: <http://www.pittsburghratloversclub.org/>

Adoptable Rats: www.petfinder.com

This brochure by: New Ken Rat Rescue

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Basic Domestic Rat Information



A Short Guide to Rat Ownership.

What Are Domesticated Rats?

Domesticated rats, or “Fancy” rats, are domesticated Norway brown rats (*Rattus norvegicus*). They are psychologically and physiologically different from wild rats, for example they are tamer, have many color varieties, live longer, and are more comfortable around humans than wild rats. From here on out we will refer to domesticated rats as, “rats.”

Do Rats Make Good Pets?

Here are some quotes from various rat owners, edited for grammar, spelling, and clarity.

“Rats go beyond making good pets, I believe they make great, loving, fun and loyal family members!”

“They are like the best mix of a cat and a dog with the same large personality in a tiny body.”

“Very loving, super intelligent, and they bond to you like glue on paper. Extremely funny, always doing something to make you laugh, always ready to cuddle with you, groom you, and give you kisses.”

“Rats are fun, affectionate and cheap to feed. Rats are really easy to please. They love attention like dogs but aren't needy, thus making great pets for busy city professionals.”

...and a few drawbacks...

“They live very short lives and it is painful when they pass away, though that also teaches you to cherish every moment. It can also be helpful to teach children about death and the importance of enjoying life with loved ones.”

“Vet bills can be a concern, though when you consider their 2-3yr average lifespan they probably don't go any more often than a dog would in their much-longer lives.”

“Rodents have a strong chewing instinct, so left unsupervised they will chew on about anything.”

“You'll probably want to do some daily cleaning and do a thorough one weekly. Small territorial animals, including rats, have smelly urine and pee pretty much everywhere in their enclosure. The smell can get unpleasant if not spot-cleaned.”

Rats and Children

There is a big difference between having children and pets, and getting pets for your child. Most children are just not mature enough to be totally responsible their care. The parents must be willing to supervise, help with the care, and of course, take them to the vet when it is needed. A parent must monitor interactions between young children and ANY pet, and make sure they know the proper way to handle them. Rats, when abused or mis-handled, can very quickly turn into fearful, biting rats, the same as you might expect could happen with dogs.

Compatibility With Other Pets

Rats are both prey and predator animals. It is absolutely not recommended that you attempt to introduce your rats to prey animals like hamsters, mice, gerbils, or any other rodents. You may read that someone, somewhere was successful in doing this, but why take the risk with another animal's life? It would be over very quickly, before you got the chance to intervene. Guinea pigs are also prey animals and while rats may largely ignore them, guinea pigs are typically terrified by rats. Ferrets are predators of rats and other rodents so mixing them is a bad idea. Cats and dogs mixing with rats depends a lot on their individual prey drive. It's safest to avoid interaction, but if you choose to introduce them, it must be done very slowly in a controlled setting.

Introducing rats to other (same-sex!) rats depends a lot on age. Most rats younger than six months old will readily accept an additional rat or rats. As rats age, they tend to be less accepting of new rats into their homes. Girls are usually easier to introduce to existing girls, and in general introductions are easier in a larger cage. See our website for additional information.

Where to Get Pet Rats

You can find rats at breeders, from rescues, pet stores, individuals on sites like Craigslist, and reptile shows among other places. Reputable breeders would be one of the best places to get healthy, socialized rats. See our website for more information about breeders.

Rescues take in rats that others relinquish, litters from “oops” pregnancies, or rats from other situations and then work to find them good homes. Often, if the rats come in older than 18 months, they stay at the rescue for the rest of their lives due to their relatively short lifespans. An older rat can still make a great pet and many rats tend to get more cuddly as they age.

Pet stores and reptile shows can be acceptable places to get rats as long as you understand what you are getting. Typically rats from these places come from mass breeders who are more interested in quantity than in quality. Often even rats labeled/sold as pets and not as food for reptiles do not get any more human socialization than “feeder rats”, they just happened to luck out and be born with an interesting color or ear type. Reputable breeders spend regular time handling and socializing their baby rats whereas you would need to do all the work with these rats. Seldom would a store/show rat end up as tame as well-socialized, well-bred rats. Also, with store/show rats, you will probably see the vet more often. If girl and boy rats are kept together, you'll likely end up with pregnant girls. It wouldn't matter to a snake, but would be a big deal to you if you're choosing pets.

Craigslist is a roll of the dice. Sometimes you may get lucky and find rats from an “oops” litter, or well-socialized rats, or you may end up with rats from abused/neglected backgrounds and end up with an aggressive rat. Do your research as best you can. Remember that rats sold as “small, medium, large and jumbo” are being advertised as reptile food.

Should I Get Boy or Girl Rats?

(Remember to get them in pairs!) Both make great pets. Boys tend to be more cuddly and are more likely to just lay around and get petted as they get older. Boys are larger than most girls when full-grown, and they may not be as good at house-keeping. Some people may find their man bits unpleasant, and their urine may be more aromatic. Girls, especially when young, are quite happy to use you as a jungle gym, seldom slowing for long to get pets or interaction. They've got places to go! This doesn't mean they don't enjoy human company, it's just that you're on their list of other activities. Females are more prone to tumors, though spaying them can help with prevention.