

# All About Pets

*The national pet care information service*



## A HOUSE FOR YOUR HAMSTER



THE BLUE CROSS

*Britain's pet charity*

*Once you have made the commitment to buy a hamster, you will be ready to choose a cage. There are many cages available with varying price tags and several important factors to consider before you make your choice.*



## **What should I look for in a cage?**

The cage should be easy to take apart and made from non-porous, easy-to-clean materials such as plastic or metal. Wooden cages are unsuitable because rodents love to chew wood and this can result in dangerous splinters. Also, wood absorbs urine and is impossible to keep clean.

Cage security is another very important consideration as hamsters are brilliant escape artists. Once loose, they can be very difficult to catch. If the door is in the roof of the cage, your pets are less likely to escape when you are feeding them. Door catches need to be secure, but reasonably easy for you to open when necessary.

The cage should be well ventilated. A poorly ventilated cage will make odours worse, increase the need for cage cleaning and may make your pet prone to breathing problems. Bad ventilation can also cause the cage to become too hot in warm weather.

## **What would my hamster look for in a cage?**

Your hamster wants lots of room and plenty of activities to keep it amused. Hamsters need to play and keep fit. Running wheels provide essential exercise, while tubes, ladders and other climbing apparatus are also ideal.

The cage should be positioned away from draughts and direct sunlight. Hamsters are nocturnal creatures (active at night) so they need peace during the day to sleep.

It is also important that hamsters are in a dark room at night. Hamsters can be noisy, so if you're a light sleeper keeping them in your bedroom is probably not a good idea!

## **What type of cage should I buy?**

There are three types of accommodation suitable for hamsters: wire-framed cages, pod-type cages and glass tanks. All three kinds make a good choice for your hamster.

## Wire-framed cages

These have a plastic or metal tray base, with the wire frame providing the walls and ceiling of the cage. The frame and the base separate for easy cleaning. If you own a dwarf breed of hamster (such as Russian, Chinese and Roborovski) pay attention to the size of the gaps between the bars as these small breeds have been known to squeeze through regular cage bars.

## Pod-type cages

Cages made up of separate units or 'pods' are popular and fun. You can start with a basic unit and gradually add on extra compartments. With the pod housing system hamsters travel from one part of the cage to the other via tunnels or plastic tubing (which is good exercise and they enjoy it). These systems tend to have more closed-in areas, so make sure there is enough ventilation for your pet.

Cages with plastic tubes between compartments can sometimes be a problem for young dwarf hamsters or those who have only just been introduced to the cage. Small hamsters may have difficulty climbing the tubes, as they are not large or strong enough to grip the sides and pull themselves up. One tip is to put a mouse ladder in the tube for assistance. If you are unsure whether your pet is using the tubes, make sure it has access to food and drink in all compartments of the cage.



## **Glass tanks**

Although glass can be heavy and cumbersome, it makes a good choice of material for a hamster home. Glass is not damaged by chewing or scratching and is strong and easy to clean.

Some purpose-built glass cages have upper levels and ladders and these are ideal for one or more hamsters. Remember; never keep Syrian hamsters in pairs as they can fight to the death. If they have been brought up together, Russian hamsters can usually be kept in pairs (two females are the best choice). Glass cages are usually secured with a wooden-framed wire-mesh lid. Check that the lid locks tightly into position.

Ventilation can be a problem with glass tanks. The lid is the only source of fresh air and so it should not be covered over. Another very important point is that glass cages should not be positioned in direct sunlight or close to a radiator as the temperature in the tank can rise too high for the hamster. Another drawback is that gravity-fed water bottles cannot be fixed to the side of a glass cage, although they can often be attached via the wire-mesh at the top, or via a 'sucker' attachment.

## **How large should the cage be?**

Your pet will become unhappy if it is overcrowded, bullied, or deprived of privacy. The cage or tank should be around 60cms (24ins) long, 35cms (14ins) wide and 26cms (10.5ins) high – a total floor area of 2100 sq cms. Pod-type cages should be of a similar size, with the total floor area spread over several tiers.

## **What type of bedding should I use?**

Hamsters like to retreat to a warm and secure house filled with small-animal bedding at bedtime. Only use approved hamster bedding. Some pets will shred their bedding and move their sleeping area around according to their mood.

The floor of the cage should be covered in softwood shavings that have not been treated with preservatives and are dust-free.

## What accessories do I need?

Give your hamster its dry food and fresh food in separate, non-spill or heavy ceramic dishes. Wash them regularly.

Water bowls are not very practical as they easily fill with bedding! A gravity-fed bottle is a better choice. This fits upside down to the side of the cage with a clip and should be positioned so the pet can lap in a standing position. The tube from the bottle should ideally be made from stainless steel as plastic is easily damaged and glass cracks. Fresh water should be supplied daily and the bottle cleaned with a bottlebrush each week.

## Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit [www.allaboutpets.org.uk](http://www.allaboutpets.org.uk), the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.

This leaflet was produced in association with Vetstream Ltd

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Registered charity no: 224392