

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



CARING FOR YOUR MOUSE



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

The domestic mouse bred in captivity makes a friendly pet and comes in a wide variety of colours. Some are also bred for show and are known as 'fancy mice'.

Mice live, on average, between one and two years and are fully-grown at about three months old. Babies should not be taken from their mothers until they are five weeks old. Never attempt to keep wild mice as pets.



Mice are happiest with the company of their own kind and, to avoid unwanted babies, it is best to keep pairs or groups of the same sex. A breeding pair will produce a litter every three to four weeks, with an average of eight to ten babies. Males tend to be more aggressive towards each other than females and have a stronger smell, as their urine contains a musk-like substance for marking territory.

Home comforts

The best home for your pet mice is a wire cage with a plastic tray floor or a glass or plastic tank with a wire lid. Wooden cages absorb urine and tend to become smelly. Two mice need a cage with a minimum size of at least 45cms x 30cms x 25cms, giving them more than enough room to stand upright. Mice like to climb, which wire cages allow, but they can squeeze through tiny gaps – so the spaces between the bars should not be greater than the width of your little finger.

Put bedding on the floor to absorb urine. Shredded paper or dust-extracted shavings are best as dusty or scented bedding may affect a mouse's delicate respiratory system. The cage should also contain a nestbox, filled with shredded tissue paper. You will need to clean out the cage at least once a week. Take out soiled and wet bedding, but to make sure that they are reassured by a familiar smell, mix in a little of the old bedding – and, if necessary, nesting material – with the new. Site your mouse home away from draughts and direct sources of heat and make sure they cannot be harassed or attacked by other pets.

Food for thought

A very small amount of commercial rodent mix is a good basis for a mouse diet – but be careful not to let your pets get fat. Mice love sunflower seeds as occasional treats and may also enjoy tiny amounts of suitable vegetables and fruit, such as carrots, apples and broccoli. Contrary to popular myth, mice don't need cheese or dairy food. Some also react badly to peanuts. Clean, fresh water should always be available from a drinking bottle.

Health matters

Mice are pretty robust, but because of their short lifespans are susceptible to problems associated with ageing. Mammary tumours, which can occur in various sites, including behind the legs and on the neck, are common. They may also suffer from respiratory problems, due to a bacterial or viral infection. If you are worried, seek veterinary advice quickly – tiny pets deserve as much consideration as larger ones.

Exercise and entertainment

Mice love anything that enables them to climb, so make sure they are able to do this. If you use a tank, they will appreciate a ‘mouse gym’ – make a wire mesh climbing frame and hang it on one wall or provide a fruit tree branch. Alternatively, you could suspend lengths of rope for the mice to climb, too.

Your mice will enjoy going through tunnels, such as cardboard or plastic tubes. Remember that by giving them these opportunities you are allowing them to follow their instinctive behaviour. Some owners like to half-fill a cardboard box with compost and allow their mice supervised tunnelling sessions.

Company

Mice need their own kind as company and love to groom and play with each other. Don't try and mix mice with pet rats or other rodents, or they may be attacked and eaten. It is usually safe to mix female mice up to the age of about 12 weeks even if they are from different litters. Males should ideally be from the same litter and will often fight if separated for more than a few hours and then reintroduced – or if a male is taken out to mate with a female and then put back with his companions. If you want to keep a breeding pair, get specialist advice and make sure you have guaranteed good homes for the offspring.

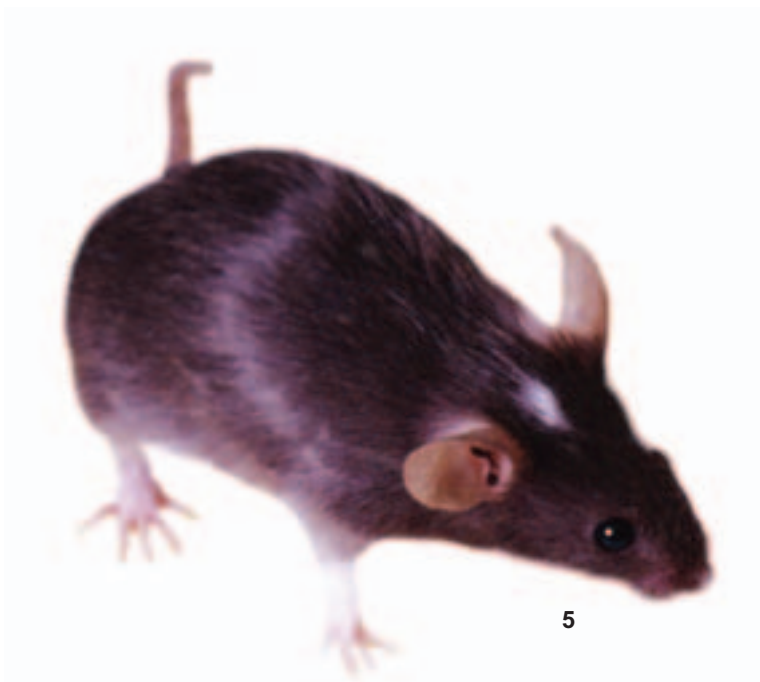
Getting to know you

Although mice are usually friendly and rarely bite, some may be naturally more timid than others. Start by placing your hand quietly in the cage, holding a treat such as a few sunflower seeds. When the mice get used to taking this from you, teach them to anticipate food by making the same sound each time, such as a whistle.

To pick up a mouse, hold the base – not the tip – of its tail gently but firmly, then lift the back end gently and slide your hand under the mouse's body. Children should not handle mice or any other pets without supervision.

Don't forget

- Mice need company of their own kind. Don't try and mix mice with rats or other rodents.
- Male mice have a naturally musky smell. It is not unpleasant if their home is kept clean, but some people prefer to keep females.
- Don't mix sexes! A pair will produce a litter every three to four weeks.
- Mice are best fed on commercial rodent mix, with tiny amounts of vegetables and fruit



Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit 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.



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