



Small Animal Housing

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As a small animal owner, you will find that proper housing can cost much more than your pet. Although good confinement can be costly, it is important to provide appropriate housing to ensure a happy and healthy life for your small friend. When choosing confinement for your pet, think of it as a habitat rather than as a cage. A habitat is defined as an area where an individual is most likely to be found. It is an area that provides all of the necessities for living, including food, water, shelter and space.

Size

The area should be large enough to provide four separate living areas. These areas include sleeping quarters, feeding station, toilet area and an area for enrichment and exercise.

Shape

The shape of your small animal habitat is just as important as the size. When choosing confinement, you need to keep in mind the activity patterns and physical abilities of your pet.

Hamsters, mice and rats tend to climb quite a bit. They need housing that has plenty of room to climb and explore. A habitat with height would be best for these little creatures.

Animals such as guinea pigs do not tend to climb bars and be very acrobatic. Guinea pigs thrive in areas that have lots of floor space and sturdy platform areas for jumping.

Gerbils love to shred things and dig; therefore an owner should provide gerbils with an area that provides lots of depth for digging in deep areas of bedding.

Safety

In addition to size and shape a small pet owner should also take safety into consideration when choosing confinement. If providing a home with metal bars make sure that the space between the bars is appropriate for your pet. Too much space between bars can result in twisted feet or your pet escaping. Make sure that all doors securely latch and that there are no sharp edges on the inside or outside that may result in injury. Also make sure that if there are tunnels present in the home they are large enough for your pet to easily enter and exit.

NEVER use a habitat that has a wire bottom. Wire bottoms cause foot injury and infection. You should ALWAYS provide a home that has a solid bottom. Do not use habitats constructed of wood because small animals will gnaw

on the wood and cause damage; they may even escape. It is not possible to thoroughly disinfect wood like plastic. Also consider ventilation. Make sure that your pet is receiving plenty of air flow. If you choose to use an aquarium to house your gerbil or hamster make sure that the lid is a strong, solid mesh that allows plenty of air flow. The lid must also be securely fastened to the home to avoid escape.

Bedding

The type of bedding you provide for your small animal can truly mean the difference between life and death. DO NOT USE CEDAR, PINE OR WHITE SHAVINGS. Wood shavings used as bedding can cause severe respiratory problems in small animals. Shredded paper, CareFresh, paper towels, tissue paper or blankets are much safer types of bedding for your small pet.

Location

The location of your small animal habitat is just as important as the habitat itself. Small animals are very social creatures who love to be part of the family. It is important to maintain the habitat in an area that is frequented by the family. Avoid areas that are in front of windows, near heating or cooling vents and do not place the habitat on the floor. Small animals are very sensitive and cannot handle long periods of direct sunlight, drafts or dampness. Some small animals are susceptible to chills and others to overheating. Research the temperature requirements of your small pet before choosing an area in your home.

Privacy

Because most small animals are nocturnal, they frequently nap throughout the day. Provide a privacy area for your small animal. This area could be something as simple as a shoebox with an entrance cut out, or as fancy as a deluxe nesting box from a pet supply store.

Building Your Own Habitat

You may choose to construct a habitat for your small animal instead of purchasing one. There are many great websites and books available that can help get you started. You may want to investigate "The Neat Idea Cube Cage," at www.cavycages.com.