



Hamsters

In the wild, hamsters live in underground burrows where they sleep, stash food, raise families and hide from predators. They are most active at night, traveling long distances to gather foods such as seeds and insects in their stretchy cheek pouches.

Though there are many types of hamsters in the wild, only five species are commonly kept as pets. There's the popular **Syrian**, and the less common dwarf hamsters: the **Campbell's Russian**, **winter white Russian**, **Roborovski** and **Chinese**. These small Asian rodents have only been around as companion animals for less than a century.



Syrian hamsters are the largest and easiest to handle of all the pet hamsters. Though they can be jumpy as youngsters, most mature into calm and patient pets. Syrians come in a variety of colours and patterns, like dark chocolate brown and tortoiseshell. They can also have different hair styles, ranging from long to curly. Syrian hamsters are solitary and should be housed alone. They usually live for about two years.

Dwarf hamsters are small and fast moving, and can be difficult to handle. They have not been kept as pets for as long as Syrians, and are not found in as many colours, patterns and hair styles. Dwarf hamsters are social and should be housed in same-sexed pairs or small groups. They also have a lifespan of about two years.

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What's in a name?

Over the years, hamsters – especially Syrians – have earned a number of nicknames. There are teddy bears (longhaired Syrians), black bears (black-coated Syrians), panda bears (black-and-white Syrians) and Hershey bears (chocolate-coloured Syrians), just to name a few.

When adding a hamster to your family, choose one who suits your personality and lifestyle – regardless of name!

Hamster-rific



Hamsters are engaging pets, requiring attentive, consistent care. Here are just some of the things you need to know. Check out the pet care

section of the BC SPCA website – spca.bc.ca – for more detailed hamster care information.



When's your bedtime?

Hamsters are nocturnal. They like to be active at night and sleep during the day. So your hamster may be just getting up when you're heading for bed. You need to be able to stay up late enough to care for him. Disturbing your hamster during the day may cause him to get upset and bite.



Chow down

Being omnivores, hamsters eat both plant and animal products. Feed your hamster a staple diet of

rodent food (called rodent or lab blocks). Rodent block is a complete, balanced diet and should be available to her all the time. Provide a small amount of vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds every day, too. Hamsters crave variety! Campbell's hamsters are prone to developing diabetes, though, so avoid sugary fruits.

Snacks

Hamsters love treats! Foods such as plain popcorn, scrambled egg and cooked pasta make great snacks for hamsters. Just don't feed too many or you'll end up with a fat, unhealthy hamster!

Working out

Hamsters require daily exercise and will happily explore a playpen made just for them. A wading pool filled with safe objects to climb on, over and through will keep your hamster busy and interested. Paper bags, cereal boxes, paper cups, toilet paper rolls and cat toys are a good choice. Always supervise your hamster during playtime.

Single or social?

Syrian hamsters like living on their own and should be housed by themselves. Otherwise they will fight. Dwarf hamsters are social. Two or more dwarf hamsters can live together as long as they are the same sex and have a large enough living space.

To help prevent squabbles, dwarf hamsters kept in pairs or small groups should come from the same litter or be introduced to each other when they are very young.

dwarf hamsters



Interior decorating

Adding small houses, hanging toys, ramps, tunnels, tubes and a solid (not wire) exercise wheel provides stimulation and places to hide and sleep. Swap items in and out to keep your hamster's cage interesting. Scatter or hang nesting material – like toilet paper – for your hamster to gather.



Guardian Guide

Healthy, happy hamsters

Spending time with your hamster will show you how she normally looks and behaves. When you notice something unusual - like diarrhea or reluctance to move - you'll know to take her to the veterinarian right away!



Hundreds of hamsters

Never keep male and female hamsters together, even for a short period. Hamsters multiply at an amazing rate. Females can give birth to more than 100 babies in a single year.

My, what big teeth you have!

To help wear down his ever-growing front teeth, provide your hamster with chewing items such as cardboard, wooden toys and apple or aspen branches. Just make sure the branches come from trees that haven't been treated with any chemicals.



Handle with care

You can pick up your hamster by putting cupped hands near him and letting him crawl into your hands. Be careful not to squeeze! It is best to hold your hamster while sitting on the floor. Not all hamsters enjoy being held and he may try to leap from your hands.

Check out those cheeks!



Drink up!

Hamsters need water available to them all the time. Fill your hamster's sipper bottle or heavy ceramic dish with clean, fresh water every day. Use soap and water to clean them out - once a week for bottles and daily for dishes.

Hoarders

Hamsters hoard their food, so be sure to look for hidden stashes. Take away any uneaten fresh food the next day so it doesn't spoil and make her sick.

Toilet training

Most hamsters will use one corner or area as a toilet area. You can buy a hamster-sized litter box at a pet supply store, or use an appropriately-sized glass jar. Place some soiled bedding in the litter box to encourage your hamster to use it.

A clean, comfy home

For bedding, use wood shavings such as aspen, shredded paper, peat moss or CareFRESH® (bedding made from recycled paper). Do not use cedar or pine shavings because they can cause health problems. Create a deep layer of bedding to allow your hamster to burrow. Clean toilet areas every other day and the entire cage once a week. Save some of the old bedding to provide your hamster with a familiar smell. Keep the cage in an area protected from cold drafts and direct sunlight, as well as bright lights and daytime noise.

Hamster haven

Hamsters may be small, but they require a large habitat. One hamster needs a cage at least 60 cm long by 30 cm wide by 30 cm high. The more space, the better! Hamsters are burrowers so a deep cage with a solid bottom is best. Aquariums or large, clear plastic storage tubs with wire mesh lids work well. They are secure and can easily be filled with burrowing material.

On the loose!



PHOTO: TRGOWANLOCK/ISTOCK

Hamsters are excellent escape artists! And, once they're out, they usually don't return to their cage on their own. So, should your hamster run away, try setting up a hamster trap to catch him.

You will need:

- ✓ A bucket
- ✓ A ramp (a piece of wood or a staircase made of books)
- ✓ Two towels
- ✓ Your hamster's favourite treat

What to do:

- 1 Lean the ramp against the bucket. Wrap the ramp in a towel to help provide grip.
- 2 Place treats leading up to the top.
- 3 Line the bucket with another towel – just not too close to the top or else your hamster will climb out.
- 4 Put some more treats in the bucket.
- 5 Leave the trap overnight.

Likely, your hungry hamster will follow the trail of treats up the ramp, and then drop into the bucket to hoard more food. In the morning, he will be waiting for you!

To help prevent escapes, remember to regularly check your hamster's cage for any weak spots or holes. Hamsters have strong teeth and can gnaw through wood, plastic and even soft metals. Make sure any lids are secure, doors are latched and tubes are tightly connected.



Do your hammy homework!

This booklet provides basic care information. Please visit spca.bc.ca/animalcare for more detailed information on hamster care. You can also expand your "gnaw-ledge" with these other great hamster resources:

Hamster: A Practical Guide to Caring for Your Hamster

By Mark Evans

Published by DK Publishing, Inc.

Dwarf Hamsters

By Sharon Vanderlip, DVM

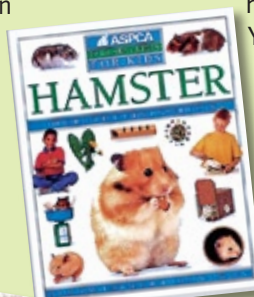
Published by Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

California Hamster Association

chahamsters.org

Hamsterific

hamsterific.com



The hamster guardian pledge

As their guardian, you are responsible for your hamsters' health and well-being. You should make sure:

1. They never go hungry or thirsty;
2. They are taken to the vet when they are sick or injured;
3. They are not afraid all the time;
4. They are comfortable in their surroundings;
5. They are free to behave like hamsters!

For more information on providing these "Five Freedoms," check out spca.bc.ca/animalcare.

Make the **BCSPCA** your first adoption option! Visit spca.bc.ca to view all adoptable hamsters.