

Keeping Your Ferret and His Space Smelling Sweet

Ferrets naturally have a light, musky odor. This scent is produced by oils in the skin and the odor is greatly minimized when the animal is spayed or neutered. Ferrets also have scent glands which release scent as a defense. The American Ferret Association strongly opposes the practice of descenting of ferrets, unless medically necessary, as it will not reduce a ferret's natural scent.

Frequent bathing is not recommended. This will in fact have the opposite effect to the one desired, since the ferret's skin will produce more oils to replenish what was lost in the bath. Baths may be given no more than once per month and as infrequent as every few months. Be sure to use a very mild shampoo, like one manufactured especially for ferrets. Regular ear cleaning may also help with a ferret's odor.

Owners who may find their ferret's scent stronger than usual can easily alleviate the problem by replacing the ferret's bedding (hammock, sleep sacks, washable toys, etc.) with clean bedding and toys. Scented laundry detergents or dryer sheets may be used when laundering your ferret's belongings but keep an eye out as in rare cases this may cause irritation for some ferrets. Overall, clean bedding and a healthy diet are the best ways to minimize a ferret's odor. In addition to regularly washing your ferret's bedding and belongings, creating a ferret proof environment that is planned for their habits and behaviors will make a big difference.

First, consider the flooring. Sheet vinyl (linoleum) or vinyl planks with overlapping flanges or "click locks" are easy to clean and prevent urine from seeping into the sub floor. Laminate floors or hard wood floors are the next best choice but may be damaged by spilled water bottles or urine. Carpet is the least desirable surface as it will absorb accidents and also retain odors. If carpet is present, laying sheet vinyl over it will help with odor control. This can be cut to fit corners and moldings. Another



The photo above shows an ideal ferret room. The carpet floor is protected by laminate flooring. The cage is large, well ventilated and has multiple litter boxes. There are hammocks, bedding and toys that are easily cleaned. And, this room is comprised of a wide variety of enrichment to maintain ferrets' natural curiosity which will help prevent destructive behaviors.

protective material that is inexpensive and easy to cut to fit is the plastic carpet runners intended for stairs and hallways.

The second consideration is how the ferret will be housed. For their protection, ferrets should be kept in a ferret-proofed area of the home or in a large, well-ventilated cage when not under human supervision. However, ferrets should never be confined for an extended period of time. They need exercise, affection, and human companionship to remain happy and healthy. A ferret's cage and play areas should include plenty of soft bedding, safe toys, and litter boxes filled with paper-based or wood-based pellet form litter. There is a good reason why many ferret litter boxes are corner-shaped... they tend to go in corners! So, plan accordingly to prevent accidents. The type of litter used will have a big impact on odor. Litters that produce dust or are highly scented are not recommended! Ferrets have short digestive tracts and fast metabolisms which dictate that they must eat often... and thus will also poop and pee often. Frequent cleaning of the litter box will make an enormous difference in ferret odors!

A third factor in controlling ferrets odors is toy selection. Ferrets need a MINIMUM of 4 hours per day out of their cage, at least 2 of which should include human interaction. Choosing toys that are safe but readily cleaned is important. Do not give ferrets toys made of rubber or with loose pieces of string or leather (for example, the tail on an animal-shaped toy). Be careful with toys that have bells or squeakers that could be chewed loose and swallowed. All of these types of toys can cause problems such as an intestinal blockage. Toys made of harder plastic are excellent because they do not pose health hazards and can be easily washed. Fabric toys should also be selected for safety and should be washable. Toys can be frequently cleaned and swapped out to control odor, but also to provide enrichment for the ferret.

A fourth component in ferret care and control of odor is nutrition. Ferrets are strict carnivores; they require diets based on highly digestible animal (meat) protein with little to no carbohydrates. Selection of foods will have an impact on odor. Do not choose foods with ingredients such as fish, grains, fruits or vegetables. Do choose high quality ferret or cat/kitten foods sold by pet shops, feed stores, and veterinarians with at least 36% protein, that is moderate in fats (approximately 20%) and low in carbohydrates.

Lastly, the products used to clean a ferret's space should be carefully chosen. A wide variety of products are available that are made specifically for cage cleaning, hard floor surface cleaning and carpet cleaning. Never use powdered carpet cleaners that are sprinkled down and vacuumed up. Airborne deodorizers are also a no-no, but solid-type odor eliminators kept well out of reach of the ferrets can be used. When selecting cleansers or deodorizing products, those with natural ingredients are the best choice for a ferret.

Since 1987, the American Ferret Association (AFA) has worked on these goals:
PROMOTE - To promote the domestic ferret as a companion animal through public education via shows, newsletters, legislative education, and other venues.

PROTECT -To protect the domestic ferret against anti-ferret legislation, mistreatment, unsound breeding practices and overpopulation, needless scientific research, and any practice deemed to lower the health standards or survivability of the animal.

PROVIDE - To provide constant and up-to-date information about veterinarians, legislative activities, medical developments, research data, rescue shelters and other information of interest to ferret fanciers everywhere.

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Visit the American Ferret Association to learn all about ferret care, foods & more!

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