



A Beginner's Guide To Hamster Care



Hamster Habitats

Hamsters require much larger cages than what pet stores often lead on. Crittertrail and similar small wire cages are not suitable for housing.

Hamsters need a **minimum** of 775 sq inches of floor space (roughly 100x50 cm/40x20 inches). This is due to the hamsters' natural urge to move; in the wild hamsters can travel up to 5-8 miles (8-12 km). This size of enclosure allows you to put all of the necessary enrichment to keep your hamster happy and thriving!

To find the floorspace of your cage, measure the width and length of the base and multiply them together. If it's greater than 775 sq. inches, then that's an acceptable enclosure!

When hamsters aren't given enough space, they can show common stress behaviors like—

- Bar Chewing
- Monkey barring
- Cage pacing
- Cage Aggression



Suitable Cages



**NITEANGEL BIGGER
WORLD CAGE**
39" X 19" & 47" X 19"



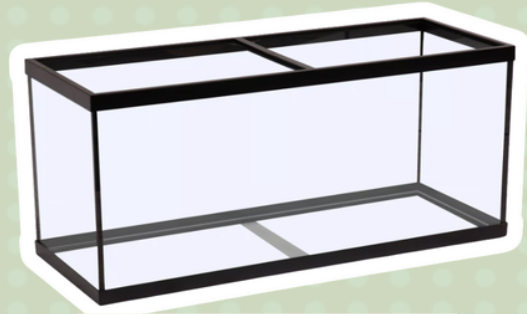
NITEANGEL VISTA
39" X 21" & 45" X 21"



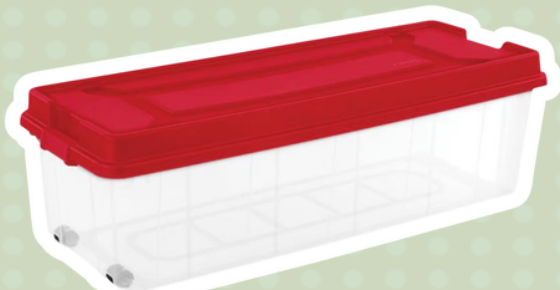
**PAWHUT WOODEN
HAMSTER CAGE**
45" X 22"



BUCATSTATE 2.0 & 3.0
39" X 19" & 47" X 23"



75 GALLON TANK
48" X 18"



**STERILITE CHRISTMAS TREE
BIN**
52" X 15"



STERILITE 200QT BIN
39" X 21"

BIN CAGE TUTORIAL [HERE](#)

You can also make DIY enclosures if you're handy, there are tons of ideas on YouTube!

Bedding

Bedding is another important aspect to hamster care. Hamsters are terrific burrowers; they've been seen in the wild creating intricate tunnels sometimes up to 3 ft deep! Another study showed us when hamsters had deeper bedding, they showed fewer stress behaviours.



Therefore, it's recommended to have a minimum of 8 inches deep of a safe bedding, but the deeper the better!

When it comes to choosing the **right** bedding, safe options include: Unscented paper-based bedding (i.e., Carefresh, Kaytee Clean & Cosy), Aspen shavings, hemp shavings, or spruce shavings.

You will want to **avoid**—

- Pine shavings
- Cedar shavings
- Unlabeled shavings
- Scented bedding

Pine and cedar contain natural chemicals that can cause upper respiratory infections.



Sand baths



Hamsters in the wild would naturally keep their coats clean by rolling in sand, as hamsters shouldn't be bathed in water unless advised by your vet. Dwarf hamsters in particular love rolling in the sand; some Syrians may enjoy digging in it as well, but many may use it as a litter box, which can be helpful when spot cleaning!

Safe sands include NiteAngel bathing sand and Exo terra desert reptile sand (or any other reptile sand) without added calcium or dyes. You can also use children's play sand as long as you bake it at a low temp to sanitize it!

You'll want to avoid anything labelled "dust" or "powder." While good for chinchillas, the fine dust can cause hamsters to develop upper respiratory infections.



Wheels

Because hamsters are so active, they should also have access to a safe, correctly sized wheel.

For Syrian hamsters 11-12 inches will help prevent their back from curving when running (A too-small wheel can cause back issues over time).

And for dwarf hamsters, 8 inches or larger is recommended (some find the larger the wheel, the more control a dwarf has over the speed of it and can help prevent them from flying out of it.)



Avoid wire and mesh wheels, as these can cause severe injuries to the feet and legs if caught.

Diet

Hamsters naturally are omnivores and eat grains, vegetables, and insects. Since hamsters are hoarders, they will need access to food every day to fulfill that natural behaviour. It's been observed that hamsters, when provided a healthy varied diet, they typically do not overeat and do not increase the size and frequency of their meals beyond their usual levels even when offered more food.

Because there are different hamster species, it's often recommended to feed your hamster a species-specific seed mix that best mimics what they'd naturally find in their environments. There are a couple of brands that have created Syrian and dwarf foods, including NiteAngel [dwarf](#) and [syrian](#) seed mixes and the Canadian small business Crazy Critter Toys [dwarf](#) and [syrian](#) mix. While a species-specific diet is most ideal, it can be challenging to find, so we recommend finding the highest-quality diet you can.

To learn more about hamster diets in more depth, I'd highly recommend giving [this website](#) a read.

For additional safe foods to feed your hamster check out this [list](#).



Enrichment

Enrichment is important for all animals, and their enrichment types vary species to species. For hamsters some of the ways we can provide enrichment is through their habitat setup. Because hamsters are predator animals, a semi-crowded enclosure tends to make them feel more comfortable and safe.

Provide a variety of **hideouts**; this gives your hamster lots of places to hide and options to sleep. The multi-chamber hideout helps to replicate a hamster's burrows when they would create separate chambers for sleeping, food storage, and their bathroom.



Platforms are another important thing to have to hold up heavy items, since hamsters burrow; you wouldn't want something to collapse and squish them, so we use platforms to hold up heavy items like sand baths, hideouts, wheels, etc.



Enrichment pt 2



Cork logs typically used for reptiles make amazing tunnels for hamsters, giving them another texture to touch and safe to chew!

Grapevine wood branches, also typically used for reptiles, can be great for climbing over and under and also are safe to chew.



Seed Sprays have more recently come into hamster care and make a great natural enrichment, allowing the hamster to pick the seeds off the stalk, similar to how they would in the wild. Commonly used sprays include:

Flax
Millet
Sorghum
Phalaris
Oat
Wheat
Delicha
Pagima



Dig Boxes allow you to use different substrates that your hamster can enjoy digging through! Different options include cork granules, coco fibre, aspen chips, beech chips etc!



Products to AVOID

Not every product in the pet store is safe, unfortunately, so it's important to always research. There are a few products you should especially avoid, which include;

Cotton fluff used for nesting is very dangerous to hamsters. It's long, fibrous strands can easily get tangled in limbs and cut off circulation, and if swallowed at



all can cause a blockage. As a safe alternative, unscented toilet paper is often enjoyed by hamsters!



Harnesses and leashes should be avoided, as hamsters are quite fragile and can easily get hurt if yanked and are often able to slip out.

Hamster balls often are a popular item, but they actually have a lot of issues.

First is the lack of ventilation, especially when exercising; breathing increases, so proper ventilation is important. The ventilation holes are also just wide enough that they can get feet caught and injured. Many find the ball stressful, as there is no choice for them but to run. A safe alternative is a playpen!



Common Health issues

It's important to watch out for any changes in your hamster's behaviour, appetite, or activity levels.

Some of the most common health issues include;

Respiratory infections, can cause a clicking sound, discharge from the nose, or difficulty breathing.

Mites may cause hair loss and itching.

Female hamsters are susceptible to **pyometra**, an infection in the uterus that may cause loss of appetite, bloating, or discharge/bleeding.

There are several digestive disorders that may cause **diarrhea** leading to dehydration and weight loss.

Lumps can be caused by tumours, abscesses, or cysts.

Hamsters being a prey species means they can hide illness very well; this is why it's important to watch their behaviours closely and visiting your local exotic vet when signs are first noticed!



Additional advice

What species of hamsters are there?

There are 5 species of domesticated hamsters, including the **Syrian** Hamster, **Chinese** Hamster, **Roborovski** Hamster, **Winter White** Dwarf and, **Campbells** Dwarf. Unfortunately, the WW and CD are able to interbreed, making the hybrid dwarf, which is what is in most of pet stores.

Cage mates?

It's recommended that all species of hamsters in captivity should be kept alone; when hamsters reach sexual maturity, they can fight to the death.

Socialization

Remember hamsters are prey animals and can take some time to warm up to you. Offer treats and create a routine with them. Sitting in a dry bathtub with them can also be a great way to socialize and let them explore around you.

Helpful Websites

HamsterWelfare.com

OntarioHamsters.com

TheHammingWay.com

