



Nibbles Rodent &
Rabbit Rescue

www.nibbles.org.uk

Reg Charity No.
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Our Guide to



Syrian Hamsters

What's Awesome About Syrian Hamsters

Syrian hamsters are the largest domestic hamster species and it is believed that all the syrian hamsters in the UK are descended from one single individual, a female with pups, caught in Syria during the 1930's. Few now remain in the wild and it is suspected that wild individuals are actually escapees from this original group of laboratory hamsters.



Syrian hamsters have a variety of different coat colours and patterns as a result of selective breeding, and have a number of different coat types from short to long, and curly to satin. These cute little rodents also have cheek pouches which they use to carry food back to their nests. They can form strong bonds with their human care givers, but this can take longer with individuals which haven't had plenty of early socialisation.



Things to Think About

Syrian hamsters are popular pets, but there are a number of important things to consider before bringing a hamster into your family. They do look cute but, of all the domestic rodents, they are the most likely to defend themselves with their teeth if they feel threatened. This is very common with individuals purchased from pet shops which haven't received early socialisation. With time, patience and gentle handling they do learn to trust humans, but this behaviour doesn't make them ideal for young children to handle.

They are also completely nocturnal and generally wake at dusk and are tucked up in bed shortly before dawn. If kept in bedrooms, they can keep their human companions awake or disturb sleep as they scamper about and run in wheels.

Of all the common domestic rodent species they have a relatively short life-span of between 18 months to 2 years, although some individuals easily reach 3 years.



Diet

Syrian hamsters enjoy a varied diet consisting of grains, seeds, fresh foods and meat protein.



A commercial mix containing seeds and grains is the best choice, but these can be hard to find. The next best option is a mix like Harry Hamster.

You can add to this mix with additional seeds, grains, dried flowers and dried insects such as meal worms.



Fresh veg and fruit should be offered in small amounts at least twice a week. Small amounts of carrot, broccoli and cucumber, along with sweet apples, grapes and kiwi.



For a bit of variety and a treat you can add dried fruit, dog biscuits, cold porridge and small amounts of cooked chicken

Enrichment



Hamsters need plenty of enrichment to keep their minds and bodies active.

Providing them with items to climb on, over, and under are all appreciated.

Providing a suitable exercise wheel is also

important. Many wheels are far too small for an adult hamster and causes their backs to bend while running. This can lead to long-term spinal damage. Wheels need to be solid and at least 28cm in diameter.

A dust bath is also appreciated by hamsters and helps to keep their coats in good condition.

Providing a small dish with chinchilla dust is a great addition. Hamster exercise balls should not be used, as they cause undue stress. Why not try an exercise pen instead.



Housing



Many cages available in pet shops or online do not provide enough space for hamsters to lead happy lives. The bare minimum recommended for optimal welfare is a cage which provides 80cm x

50cm of continuous floor space, ideally 100cm x 50cm. This comes from research carried out in Germany which showed that stereotypical behaviour significantly reduced at this size and disappeared altogether when provided with a floor space of 100cm x 100cm.

Other Important Things



Bar Biting - It is a myth that hamsters bite the bars of their cages to file their teeth down. This is actually a stereotypical stress behaviour, similar to zoo animals pacing or rocking, and indicates that the hamster requires more space.

Company - Syrians are solitary animals and once they reach 4-5 months, in some cases younger, will become highly aggressive towards their litter mates. They **MUST** be kept alone.



Vet Care - Hamsters are classed as exotics within the veterinary industry and therefore owners need to carefully select a suitable vet able to treat them. We recommend Origin Vets for West Wales and Origin Vets Clinic for South Wales.