

Ferrets

Ferrets are strict carnivores. Their diet should contain at least 32% meat protein, 18% fat and minimal carbohydrate. Many ferret owners feed a high quality kitten kibble, or a ferret formulated kibble. The first three ingredients listed on the package must be meat.

A ferret's diet can be supplemented with chicken baby food, cooked egg and cooked meats. There is reason to believe that feeding ferrets a diet containing excessive carbohydrates contributes to one of the most common diseases seen among pet ferrets, insulinoma. For this reason it is best to avoid treats like raisins, dry cereals and some packaged treats.

Gerbils

Their basic diet consists of a seed mix, just like hamster food. For this reason, hamster and mice foods can be used, usually at 1 tablespoon per gerbil per day. A gerbil's diet may be supplemented with rabbit pellets, crushed oats, wheat, corn flakes, sunflower seeds, fresh washed greens, vegetables and fruit. Gerbils are particularly fond of bananas, apples, carrots, dandelions and lettuce.

Because they are a desert animal, gerbils drink very little water, however they do require fresh water every day. Small shallow water bowls or bottles with sipper tubes can be used.

Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs are strict herbivores. They have molars and incisors that grow continuously and must be worn down by their diet. For this reason, they should be provided with unlimited fresh timothy hay. Alfalfa hay may also be given, but not as frequently. Pelleted food is to be provided: 1/8 cup per day for a 2lb. guinea pig. Rabbit pellets should not be used, because they do not contain vitamin C and they may contain excessive amounts of vitamin D, which is toxic to guinea pigs. Guinea pigs do not make their own vitamin C and therefore must have the vitamin added to their diet. Vitamin C drops added to the water are the easiest way to supplement. However, the vitamin C becomes inactive quickly, especially if in direct sunlight. Therefore, the water must be changed daily and new drops added at each cleaning.

Water bowls or bottles with sipper tubes may be used. Bowls should be shallow. Sipper tubes should be checked often to ensure that they are working,

Pellets should be supplemented with fresh, washed fruits and vegetables, which are another excellent way to provide variation to the diet, and vitamin C. Slices of apples, oranges, strawberries, kiwi, spinach, parsley, romaine lettuce, fresh grass, carrots (including the tops!), cucumbers and tomatoes can be used. All fruits and vegetables should be washed.

The food bowl should be ceramic, stainless steel or hard plastic. Guinea can nibble down the edges of soft plastic containers.

Hamsters

Hamster seed mixes may be provided. Unfortunately, picky eaters may select only the tastiest seeds resulting in an unbalanced diet; therefore a pelleted hamster food is the best choice. It should contain at least 16% protein and 5% fat.

They usually accept a broad range of treats, but it is best to provide dry breakfast cereals, fresh fruit and vegetables. Only rarely should a hamster ever get treats like peanut butter or cheese. Water should be available at all times. A hanging bottle is a good choice. A water dish can be used, but it must be changed daily to remove debris.

Rabbits

A rabbit's diet should begin with commercial rabbit pellets, which will contain the protein content required. Do not use rabbit food that contains a high percentage of seeds and/or corn as these feeds are usually too high in calories.

In addition to its pellets, rabbits will need daily servings of fresh food. Rabbits are strict herbivores so this should include a variety of fruits and vegetables, alfalfa, carrots with their tops if possible, kale, grass, green peppers, clover, parsley, apples, pears, corn, melon, beet leaves or lettuce. Do not feed rabbits rhubarb or potatoes, which can be toxic to them.

Because rabbits groom themselves, they easily develop hairballs, which cause digestive problems and can cause a rabbit to starve. Make sure there is enough fibre in a rabbit's diet to help move hair through the digestive system. Timothy hay is especially helpful for this as it is high in fibre and provides the necessary "roughage" to prevent health problems. Alfalfa is less desirable and should only be given in small quantities to adult rabbits.

Food should be provided once or twice daily, and water should be changed every day. Make sure the water is at room temperature. Sipper bottles work best but dishes can be used, although the water may be quickly filled with food and droppings.

Mice and Rats

Commercial mouse and rat food are to be used to ensure a balanced diet with enough fibre. Ideally, this should be supplemented with small amounts of fruit and/or vegetables, such as carrots, broccoli, and apples, and with small amounts of seeds.

Make sure uneaten fresh foods are removed at least daily. Other food should be kept in a food dispenser rather than a dish, as food in dishes is easily spilled and can quickly become contaminated.

Budgies

Budgie seed mix is to be provided. This mix is composed mainly of canary seed and millet. Rape seed, sesame seed and oats are often added, and this can be further supplemented with Niger seed, flax seed and slices of fresh fruit and vegetable, including dandelion greens and carrot tops. A vitamin supplement powder can be sprinkled on their food in the seed cup. It is best not to mix it into the drinking water as it spoils quickly and might deter the bird from drinking. A third cup should be provided that contains gravel or grit to help the budgie break down their food in the crop. Empty the seed cup daily and refill it with fresh seed mix. Because the seed husks accumulate in the cups they will appear full even when there are no intact seeds left.

Cockatiels

Cockatiels require a combination of seeds and pellets. Unlike pellets, seeds do not contain all the necessary nutrients, but stimulate some activity of the bird to be able to break open the shells. If the bird was previously on a seed diet, a pellet diet is preferred, gradually introduce pellets. This change may take some time (months). A sudden switch could cause the bird to starve. A bird on an all seed diet requires a vitamin powder sprinkled over fresh foods several times per week. Vitamins sprinkled in water can cause bacterial growth. Fresh water should be offered daily.

Fresh vegetables, greens and fruits should also be offered daily: romaine, spinach, carrot tops, dandelion greens, corn, peas, broccoli, apple, pear, melons, and berries.

Unsweetened cereals, such as Cheerios, breads, unsalted nuts, cheese, and scrambled or hardboiled eggs may be provided as treats.

A mineral block and cuttle bone are to be provided, to ensure that the cockatiel has calcium and mineral supplementation.

Finches

Finches consume 30% of their body weight daily. Commercial finch seed or pellet mixes are to be provided. However, finches should also be supplemented with a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as a calcium source. Leafy greens, such as romaine lettuce, and dandelion greens should be provided. Other options are broccoli, carrots, cantaloupe, mango, corn, pumpkin and sweet potatoes. Supply a cuttlebone as a source of calcium and mineral supplementation. The bone also helps to sharpen and maintain the bill for breaking seeds.