

Leash Training Your Ferret

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TRAINING your ferret TO USE A harness & leash

Taking walks with your ferret can be a fun and enriching experience for both you and your ferret. However, you can't just slip a [harness and leash](#) on your ferret and take off for an afternoon in the park. Before ever venturing outside, you must train your ferret to wear and feel comfortable with a harness and leash. Below we will discuss how you can do this and how to translate that training into safe outdoor fun!

Harness Training

The younger a ferret is when you start to train her to use a [harness](#), the easier it will be. You can start harness training when your ferret is as young as ten weeks old. For safety, start the training inside. Put a harness on your ferret for three to five minutes at a time, and give her a [treat](#) while she has it on. As she gets more used to the harness, slowly increase the amount of time she wears it, and remember to always give her a reward.

It will take a few weeks for her to feel truly comfortable. Older ferrets may take longer if they have never worn a harness before. Never allow her to wear the harness in her cage or when you are not there to supervise her; she could get it caught on something and injure herself.

The best harness to use is an H-style harness, like the [Marshall Ferret Harness](#). Never use a collar - your ferret could easily slip out of it. Figure-8 style harnesses are also not preferred because they can be too loose on one side while squeezing your ferret painfully on the other side. Make sure the harness is made from nylon, and avoid Velcro® closures that your ferret could easily escape from. Plastic buckles are most comfortable, since metal buckles can get hot in the sun.



Leash Training

Once your ferret is comfortable in her harness, you can move on to leash training. Again, you will want to start inside. Attach the leash to the harness, but don't hold it. Allow her to drag it around behind her while you supervise. Give her a [reward](#) every time, and watch her closely to make sure she doesn't get tangled up.

After a few sessions, hold onto the end of the leash, but don't try to direct her or restrain her in any way. After a few more sessions, you can start restraining her by slightly tugging her away from areas you don't want her to go. After a number of sessions in this manner, you can start providing gentle guidance. Never jerk the leash as you could hurt her or frighten her.

It's important to understand that the point of leash training is not to teach your ferret to heel like a dog. It is not in a ferret's nature to walk along obediently at your side. They like to explore, so the point of leash training is to keep your ferret safe while exploring outdoors, not to restrict her movement in any way.

When training indoors and allowing your ferret to drag the leash around behind her, use a regular lead. Once you move outdoors, you can use a retractable lead if you prefer to give your ferret more room to roam.

Moving Outdoors

After your ferret is leash trained indoors, you can move the training outdoors. Start by sticking close to home - only a few feet from your back door. Once she seems comfortable, you can extend your walks to the perimeter of your back yard or house. After she has had several sessions in this fashion, you can venture out into the great wide world!

Safety First

Follow these tips to keep your ferret safe and secure during outings:

- Limit walks to 15 - 20 minutes, or however long your ferret's health allows her.
- Always bring [water](#) and offer it to your ferret regularly.
- Bring a [carrier](#) in case your ferret gets tired or there are any other animals, groups of people, or lots of foot traffic that could be dangerous.
- Always be aware of your surroundings - it's up to you to protect your ferret.
- Make sure your ferret is up-to-date on her canine distemper and rabies shots.
- Discuss this with your veterinarian; make sure the rabies and distemper vaccines are approved for use in ferrets.
- Use flea & tick preventives and heartworm preventives. Consult your veterinarian concerning heartworm preventatives for your ferret.
- Avoid strange animals that may carry disease.
- Check your ferret after the walk for injuries, fleas, or ticks.
- Never take your ferret out when it's hotter than 78° - ferrets are very susceptible to heatstroke.

No matter how long it takes for you and your ferret to start taking walks, always take it at your ferret's pace and always keep safety first!