Rat Facts

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

- Pet rats are domesticated varieties of the Norway, or brown, rat.
- The incisor teeth of rats grow at a rate of 4 to 5 inches per year.
- In the wild, rats live in colonies of 50 to 60 closely related rats.
- Rats are excellent swimmers, able to hold their breath for up to 3 minutes.
- They are nocturnal, which means they are active mostly at night.

Pet rats are friendly, loyal, and very clean. The species of rat most often kept as a pet is the Norway rat. They are also known as brown, barn, or wharf rats. Their scientific name is *Rattus norvegicus*. However, these rats are not originally from the country Norway, as the name might imply. Instead, they are from northern China. Humans first brought them to Europe in the mid-1500's and to the United States around 1775. Rats are very intelligent. Similar to humans, rats learn from past mistakes and by watching others. Like other rodents, they also have teeth that grow continually throughout their lives. They are omnivores, which means they eat both plant and animal foods. Be careful with your pet rat, however, as he can quickly become overweight. Rats are one of the few animals who eat just to eat, not because they are hungry. They love food! Therefore, portion control is important for both food and treats. In fact, the amount of treats you offer your rat should not exceed 10% of his daily food intake. This is equal to less than one teaspoon of treats per day.

What Is It Called?

Common Name	Technical Name
Father	Buck
Mother	Doe
Baby	Pup, pinkie, or kitten
Group	Horde or mischief

Rats Around the World

Language	Name for Rats
French	salaud or mouchard
German	ratte or verräter
Spanish	rata, canalla, or desertor
Italian	ratto

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The Most Common Question About Rats

Why would anyone want a pet rat? Aren't they dirty?

Pet rats are very clean and caring animals. They are peaceful, incredibly smart, and one of the friendliest pets you'll ever meet. Unlike many animals, rats crave interaction with their human companions. They enjoy being handled. Many will even ride on their owner's shoulder. Their fondness for attention stems from how they live in the wild. Here, rats live in small colonies of around 50 companions, most of whom are related to each other. Within these packs, rats find friendship and support. Mother rats will even care for and feed another mother's babies. They truly are a family!

Unfortunately, rats have gotten a bad name, mostly because people don't understand them. Wild rats often make homes in places people find undesirable, such as garbage dumps, sewers, or basements. The reason, however, is because rats love food and food is usually plentiful in these locations. Think of how much perfectly good food we throw away each day. Or how much extra food your family stores in the basement. Your pet rat, however, gets all of his necessary food from you - he doesn't have to search in these questionable locations. Plus, as with most animals, rats constantly groom themselves and clean and organize their homes. In fact, rats are one of the cleanest animals we know. They make excellent pets.

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