Odor Control Tips for Rabbits & Rodents

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In the wild, most small animals keep themselves clean and odor free. They do not soil their nest, and they groom meticulously. In captivity, animals need help to maintain a hygienic, healthy environment. The leading cause of odor is the buildup of urine and fecal matter in the cage. Fortunately, effective odor control is seldom difficult. It usually starts and finishes with cage maintenance. Occasionally, if a pet becomes soiled by conditions in the cage, grooming or bathing may also be necessary.

Practice Good Housekeeping

To simplify maintenance, choose the right cage and set it up carefully to meet the specific needs of your pet.

- Wire-mesh cages are the most popular. They provide much needed ventilation and are easy to clean. Choose the correct size of wire mesh for the size of your pet. Wire flooring can be hard on your pet's feet. Cover a portion of the body of the cage with an untreated, unpainted board, grass mat, or needlepoint canvas. Select a cage with a slide-out bottom tray for fast, easy cleaning.
- **Bedding & Litter** can consist of many soft, absorbent materials. However, maintaining a steady supply of shredded paper or fabric can be a hassle. Commercially available products - such as natural wood shavings, or cotton and wood nesting pads - have the advantages of being uniform, nontoxic, and readily available. They are also cost effective.

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- **Nests** will normally be constructed by your pet, but you should also provide sleeping boxes. Mice and hamsters like the security and warmth of the Hideouts.
- **Food and water containers** that attach to the cage are recommended. On the cage floor, water in a bowl can become contaminated or tipped over, soaking the bedding.
- **Temperature** extremes are a danger to all small animals. A fur coat is no advantage when temperatures rise into the 80s. Depending upon the species, the ideal room temperature may range from 55 to 75 degrees. Position the cage in a well-ventilated room, but away from drafts, air conditioning vents, radiators, or windows that are in direct sunlight.

Several factors influence the frequency of cage maintenance. The size and construction of the cage, as well as the number and habits of animals in the cage are the primary factors. The larger the cage and the fewer the animals, the less often the cage will need to be cleaned. The entire cage will need to be cleaned less frequently if the pet is litter trained, and more frequently if the pet is messy, scattering food about the cage or defecating in feeding bowls. Higher temperatures and humidity often necessitate cleaning more often. If you or family members have allergies to your pet, more frequent cage cleaning may help reduce the dander and salivary proteins that can trigger allergic reactions.

As a general rule, follow these cleaning guidelines:

- **Once a day,** remove any damp clumps of bedding with a spoon or scoop, whether it is wet from urine, or spilled water. Most pets tend to urinate in one corner of the cage. In this case, you can line that area more heavily. Pick up any spilled food particles on the floor of the cage. Wash the food and water containers with soap and water, rinse well, and refill them.
- **At least once a week,** replace bedding or empty the droppings tray. Also, wash toys, exercise wheels, seesaws, and any other cage accessories.
- **Once a month,** wash the cage and accessories in hot, soapy water and rinse well. Then make a bleach solution at a dilution of approximately 1 part

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bleach to 16 parts water (1 cup bleach to 1 gallon of water), and apply to the cage and accessories. Allow the disinfectant to have contact with the material for 5-10 minutes. Rinse the items thoroughly with clean water, especially any wooden items. For your safety and comfort, use the bleach solution in an area that is adequately ventilated. Rubber gloves and safety goggles are also recommended. Rinse the cage thoroughly and dry completely. When thoroughly dry, add fresh bedding and nesting material.

Maintain Good Pet Hygiene

Grooming - Your pet likely invests a significant amount of time grooming himself or cage mates. Mice, rats, hamsters and gerbils seldom need additional brushing. If they do become soiled with fecal matter or food, you can brush them lightly with a small bristle brush or toothbrush. Rabbits tend to shed every three months, and usually twice a year the shedding will be heavy. Regular grooming is essential to free the coat of dead hairs and reduce the amount of hair the rabbit may ingest while grooming.

Bathing - Unless your pet has been accidentally splashed with a sticky substance, it is not necessary to bathe him, ever. Because of their exceptionally thick coats and fine fur, however, it is necessary to provide chinchillas a dust bath on a daily basis, or at least several times a week. Sanitized chinchilla dust, or a 9:1 mixture of silver sand or volcanic ash and Fuller's earth, can be used in a Bath House. Remove the dust bath after use to prevent fecal contamination. Gerbils, also, can benefit from a dust bath.

Most owners appreciate the natural, clean smell of their pet. It should never be masked with perfumes or foreign scents. With your help, your pet's home, and yours, will stay fresh and pleasant.

WE RECOMMEND

Blue Cloud Dust

CareFRESH®

Farmer's Market

FURminator

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Thoroughly removes moisture and odor from fur.	Bedding Absorbs waste moisture to neutralize urine and maximize odor control.	Corn Mat Use it as a comfy resting spot or bed, as a floor mat, a door covering, or even to line the walls of your small pet's home to create a cozier atmosphere.	Deshedding Tool This top-selling pet groomer reduces shedding up to 90%, removing loose hair before it can be ingested.

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