

New Small Pet? How to Get Ready

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You've picked a new pet. You've read all about her needs – habitat, food, water, heat, light, and more – and decided that you have the time, space, and financial resources you need to become a pet parent. To help you get off to a good start, here are some recommendations on what to do before you pick up your pet, and care tips for the first month at home.

Before pick-up

Find a local veterinarian - Before you ever get a pet, find a veterinarian you can work with who has experience with exotics. Discuss your choice of pet and health concerns you should watch for. Make an appointment to have your pet examined as soon after purchase as possible. Obtain any health or vaccination records from the breeder, pet store, or shelter and take them with you to the appointment. Place the phone number and contact information for the veterinarian in view in your home, and carry a copy in your wallet.

Set up [cage](#) or [habitat](#) - Obtain everything on your habitat shopping list. Assemble the habitat and place it in the best possible location. You'll be certain everything is in good order and won't have to make-do on arrival day.

Locate a reliable supplier for [food](#) and [health supplies](#) - You need not look any further than Drs. Foster and Smith.

Create a pet first aid kit - For a complete list of recommended items, read [Making a First Aid Kit for Your Small Pet](#). A basic kit should include the following, plus any species-appropriate medications:

- Veterinary clinic number and directions to the clinic
- Phone number of your local poison control authority
- A travel cage
- [Scissors](#)
- Sterile gauze or telfa pads
- Q-tips to clean wounds and apply ointments
- Tape
- Roll of gauze
- An antibiotic ointment to apply to cleansed wounds
- Betadine, Povidone, or chlorhexidine (Novalsan) to clean wounds
- [Styptic powder](#) or sticks to help stop a bleeding nail
- Pliers or [hemostats](#) to help remove wire, string, or other foreign objects
- Medicine dropper or [feeding syringe](#)



Pet-proof your home - Small animals will chew and sample everything they encounter, including electrical cords, so be sure to protect them. Be sure to store away toxic materials like antifreeze or household cleaners, as well as pesticides and medications. Remove any poisonous house plants, including dieffenbachia, philodendron, and hyacinth.

Prepare your family members - Everyone in your household must be on the same page when it comes to understanding your small pet's needs. They need to allow her time to adjust, and must resist over-handling. Talk to your children before you bring your new pet home. Explain that she may be a little fearful for a while and that they'll have to be very quiet and gentle with her. Caution them about allowing your new pet to have contact with other household pets. Supervise your children as they

interact initially with your pet. Apprise everyone of the location of the first aid kit and veterinarian contact information. Lay down rules and assignments for providing food and water. Set up a care schedule so that everyone knows who does what – feeding, cleaning, water changes, and so on – and when.

The first day home

Take a [travel carrier](#) with you to pick up your pet, or purchase one on site. Don't trust a shoe box. The last thing you want is a small pet roaming about your vehicle while you have your hands on the wheel.

Once home, the first few days may be stressful on your pet. Ease her into her new situation as gently as possible. Small animals can be placed in their new [cage](#) and left alone with food and water. Make sure there is a hide box in the cage. This will give your pet a chance to explore her new surroundings and learn that she's safe. Look in on her every once in a while, but, if possible, let her indicate when it is time to meet with you and others. She'll be at the front of the cage, willing to make eye contact. With most animals this doesn't take more than a few hours. Then, allow family members to approach the cage quietly.



If possible bring home the diet that was fed to your pet where you purchased her. Keep her on that diet at first, and discuss the diet with your veterinarian. If changes need to be made, make them very gradually.

Introducing your new pet to other animals in your household takes special care and patience. Dogs and cats can coexist with other small animals, but always require supervision.

The next few days

When she's first settling in, your new pet may experience a range of emotions – shyness, anxiety, restlessness, excitement. She may drink more and eat less than normal, urinate more frequently, and have mild diarrhea. This is usually due to stress, and should gradually dissipate. If any of these symptoms last more than two days, however, call your veterinarian.

Among small pets, routine means security. The sooner you get feeding, exercise, and bedtime on schedule, the better.

Within the first month

Within a few days, your new pet should be feeling calm and secure; then you can concentrate on bonding. Pet her often, and provide gentle grooming as needed. Make plenty of time for [play](#). Allow your pet to get used to the voices and hands of everyone in your family. When she seems nervous or gets tired of all the attention, place her back in his cage.

The keys to success with small animal pets are preparation and patience. Your care and affection will be rewarded.

