Back to Nature: Let Your Ferret Discover the Outdoors Safely

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let your ferret discover the outdoors safely

t's a well-known fact that ferrets love to explore new places. This is the result of high intelligence level and an overabundance of curiosity. Given their desire to experience new things, many ferrets love to spend time outdoors, exploring the different smells, sights, and sounds your backyard can offer. However, before you and your ferret venture out into the great outdoors, it is important to take precautions to keep your time outside safe as well as fun.

Temperature

When planning an outing with your ferret, the first thing you will need to take into account is the temperature. Ferrets are most comfortable at temperatures between 65° and 68°F. Anything over 80°F is dangerous, and anything over 90°F can be deadly. Avoid excursions with your ferret outdoors during hot summer days, or wait until evening when the temperatures are more ferret friendly.

The best times to take your ferret outdoors are in the spring and fall, when the temperatures are pleasant without being too warm (in most parts of the United States). Some ferrets will often enjoy going out during the warmer days of winter as well. Many ferrets will have fun playing in piles of fallen leaves or digging tunnels through the snow. If there is snow and ice on the ground, keep an eye on your ferret's paws for any buildup, and limit time outside to about 30 minutes to an hour.

Harnesses & Leads

No matter how easily you can catch your ferret inside, it's a whole different game when you get outside! A ferret that darts away or slips out of your hands could very quickly scamper away into a neighbor's yard, the woods, or the road. Other concerns for an unharnessed ferret include other animals, birds of prey, and other people. Therefore, you should always use a harness and lead when taking your ferret outside.

The most effective and comfortable harness is an H-style harness. Ferrets seem to adjust to wearing an H-shape harness most easily, and they are much less likely to be able to wiggle out of it. Most H-harnesses are adjustable, and you should tighten it to the point where you can slip the tip of your pinky beneath it. This will give your ferret room to breathe, but not enough room to get it off.

The first time you put the harness on your ferret, expect him to roll around and act like he's been crippled. Harnesses take some getting used to,

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and the earlier you start using one on your ferret, the faster he will adjust to wearing one. Always try out the harness for the first time in the safety of your own house, and continue to use it indoors only until it seems like your ferret is comfortable enough with it to venture outdoors. Attach an ID tag to the metal ring on the harness before taking your ferret outside just in case he does manage to slip away from you.

Possible Outdoor Hazards

While the outdoors can provide lots of entertainment for your ferret, it can also be dangerous if you aren't prepared. Here are a few things you will need to keep an eye out for and protect against:

- Prevent your ferret from eating anything off of the ground.
- Avoid any areas with other animals such as cats and dogs that may hurt your ferret.
- Be on the lookout for wild animals that could injure your ferret if you take him into the woods.
- Carry your ferret through areas with heavy foot traffic - ferrets are small, and pedestrians can easily step on them.
- Avoid blacktop, sand, and other surfaces that could become very hot and burn your ferret's feet.
- Keep your ferret on grassy surfaces whenever possible.
- Use a flea control product before taking your ferret outside, and check your ferret for fleas and ticks when you get home.
- Keep your ferret up-to-date on all vaccinations. Canine distemper is an airborne virus, so your ferret could come into contact with the pathogen when you take him outside. Annual vaccinations, with a canine distemper vaccine created for ferrets, can protect him from this incurable, deadly disease. Also, see your veterinarian for rabies vaccinations.
- If heartworm is a problem in your area, speak to your veterinarian about a suitable heartworm preventive. Like cats, the small size of their hearts means that a single heartworm can be fatal.

If Your Ferret Won't Wear His Harness

If your ferret refuses to wear his harness, or if he is too old to walk for long distances, you can still take him with you. A variety of ferret carriers are available to allow you to keep your ferret close while still giving him time outdoors. You can also use an Exercise Pen to keep your ferret safe while enjoying the fresh air.

However, no matter how much your ferret struggles against his harness or to get out of your hands, never let him run around outside without restraining him in some way, either with a harness, a carrier, or contained! It's just not safe, and many ferrets have been lost, injured, or worse when escaped outdoors.

Regardless of how you choose to take your ferret outdoors, if it seems like your ferret is frightened, agitated, or upset in any way, take him home. Outings with your ferret should be a fun time for him to explore. If you think that your ferret may be fearful of the loud noises or strange surroundings of the outdoors, limit his outside time to short excursions in your backyard.

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