Cage Toys & Accessories: Ferret Buyer's Guide

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While many ferret owners think that a cage is just a place for their ferrets to sleep, the truth is that ferrets need mental stimulation in the form of fun toys and bedding, both inside and outside their cages. A cage isn't just a burrow, it's a place to play and exercise as well. Their mental and physical health depends on having a fun, stimulating environment each and every day. However, simply placing random toys and bedding in your ferret's cage isn't enough. Each toy, sleep sack, hammock, and any other item placed in your ferret's cage should be chosen carefully to meet his special needs.

Which toys and cage accessories will my ferret like?

It can be difficult to find the right toys and accessories for your ferret's cage. How many times have you purchased a toy or a piece of bedding, only to put it in your ferret's cage and have it completely ignored past a perfunctory sniff? Chances are that's happened more than once!

The key to finding the right items for your ferret's cage is to choose things that he likes rather than the things that you think he would or should like. The best way to do this is to expose your ferret to a variety of toys and bedding to determine which he likes best. If he loves bell balls, be sure to have a variety of them and similar toys on hand. If he doesn't like sleeping in a hammock, provide him with a selection of sleep sacks or other bedding that can be placed on the floor of the cage. If it's obvious

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that he really dislikes a certain toy, determine what it is about the toy that displeases him, and avoid toys with that aspect (e.g., some ferrets dislike high pitched squeaking noises while others love squeak toys).

Here are some helpful tips for picking out toys and cage accessories:

- **Choose items that stimulate your ferret's natural instincts**
  Ferrets like to tunnel, so purchase toys and bedding that allow them to run through tubes or sleep curled up in them. They also have a strong hunting instinct, so look for toys that "interact" with them (squeak, jingle, or make some other noise when moved around or that they can chase and move around. In the wild, ferrets would sleep in dark burrows, so be sure to provide plenty of sleeping and nesting areas that cater to that need.

- **Provide a variety of the items they like**
  Though it may seem like your ferret likes to play with his Snuggle Toy most of all, his cage should not be filled with just this toy. Give him a variety of different items that share similarities with the toy that he likes, so he doesn't get bored with only one toy to play with. Additionally, there are many cat toys that are suitable for ferrets that he would probably enjoy playing with, so don't think you have to stick to just ferret items.

- **Remember that every ferret is unique**
  Ferrets have different personalities and different needs, so if you have multiple ferrets in the same cage, you will need to place toys and bedding in there for all of them. For example, just because your female ferret loves to sleep in hammocks doesn't mean that your male ferret will. Be sure to provide each ferret with some toys and bedding that he or she will enjoy.
- **Always keep safety in mind**
  Some toys are fine to play with under supervision, but they should never be placed in your ferret's cage unattended. This includes anything with rubber or latex parts, or any toys with small parts that could come off. If your ferret has a habit of chewing up soft fabrics or chewing holes in stuffed animals, be sure to keep these items out of their cage. If any of the toys or pieces of bedding

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in the cage are showing wear (pieces missing, holes in the fabric, stuffing coming out), throw them away immediately.

No matter what I put in my ferret's cage, she always seems to get bored - what should I do?

The most important thing you can do to keep your ferret interested in the toys and bedding in her cage is to rotate them. If she likes a few different toys, don't put all of them in her cage at once. Rotate them randomly throughout the week so she isn't living in the same environment with the same stimulants day in and day out.

Some other tips for keeping your ferret's cage new and exciting include:

- **Don't overfill the cage with toys**
  While the common idea is "if my ferret likes one of these toys, she'll love ten of them," that just isn't true. This thought process results in a cage overstuffed with toys, and they become just another part of her environment because they're so plentiful. Stick to just a few fun toys placed strategically around her cage, and allow her to explore the cage and find them.
- **Rearrange the cage often**
  This isn't limited to just bedding and items in the cage, though it is important to vary what is in the cage. Depending on which cage you have, this could even mean rearranging the shelves to completely change the layout inside the cage. This could be as easy as adding a couple new shelves, moving one or two shelves, or completely rearranging the shelves.
- **Rotate toy and bedding selections**
  As mentioned above, it is important to change the items in your ferret's cage often. This could mean that you have three or four different sets of bedding, and when you pull one set out to wash it, you put a different set in. It could also mean that every few days, you switch out her open hammock with a sleep sack style hammock. With toys, we recommend purchasing several toys and putting them in groups. Then rotate those groups through her cage every two to three days so she

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never has access to the same toys for long.

The key to successfully keeping your ferret interested in her cage by using rotation is doing it randomly. What you don't want to do is change her cage every morning at 8 a.m. That becomes part of her schedule. Keep it random, and change different things at different times (i.e., change her bedding one morning, change her toys another evening, etc.).

Remember, all of these tips are designed to do one thing - keep your ferret's cage fresh, interesting, and fun for her. Ferrets are very intelligent and naturally curious animals, and every part of their habitat, both in and out of the cage, should reflect that.

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