Introduce a New Ferret, How to

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When adding a new ferret to your one ferret household, it is very important that you keep it as stress free as possible for both your new ferret and your old ferret. Having a new ferret invade her territory is going to be very stressful for your old ferret, and dealing with a new environment and a new cage mate is going to be stressful for your new ferret.

Successful integration can take only a couple days or as long as the better part of a year. How well the two ferrets will get along will depend on a number of things, including how old they are, how long each has been alone, whether or not either ferret has ever been with a ferret before, their individual personalities, and many other factors. However, there are some things you can do to make the integration easier on both ferrets.

If you're adopting a ferret from a shelter, find out if it's possible for you to bring your current ferret with you. Allowing her to pick out her new friend may make the integration easier because you have a better chance of finding a ferret with similar activity levels and complimentary behaviors. This can be especially helpful if your ferret is three years old or older. Older ferrets may not have the energy to deal with a young, rambunctious ferret, so adopting a ferret closer to her age can be less stressful for her.

When you bring the new ferret home, introduce them or allow them to play for the first time in a neutral area. This will lessen any aggressive territoriality on the part of your old ferret and allow them to explore the area together. If your ferret has free roam of the house, you may want to let them out together for the first time at a friend's home.

If you do decide to introduce them in your home, allow the new ferret some time to explore her new environment before letting your old ferret out of her cage. This will minimize the stress for her by helping her to acclimate to her new home before she has to interact with a strange ferret.

Never put the new ferret in the old ferret's cage right away. This will usually elicit an aggressive response from your old ferret as she will see her as invading her space. Use separate cages, and place the cages next to each other so the ferrets can see each other while they are caged. Switch their bedding back and forth between the cages so they can get used to having the scent of the other ferret in the cage. Do not actually cage them together until they are playing normally and curling up together to sleep outside the cage.

Supervise all playtimes initially so you can break up any scuffles. However, you

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don't want to interfere unless it seems like one or both ferrets are truly frightened or upset. Expect some roughhousing, as there will be an initial period where they have to establish who will be the dominant ferret. Signs that things are getting too rough and you should step in include:

- Biting with a darting motion (striking like a snake)
- Biting and shaking her head back and forth roughly
- Fear pooping (defecating in the middle of the floor or while playing)
- Screaming

If your new ferret and your old ferret are fighting excessively, limit playtimes to no more than 15 - 20 minutes. Forcing them to spend more time together isn't going to make them get along any better; it will just stress both ferrets out.

Signs outside of playtime that a ferret is stressed by a new ferret can include:

- Lethargy
- Lack of appetite
- Diarrhea
- Depression

If your ferret is showing any of these signs, we recommend scheduling a veterinary appointment.

If there is excessive biting going on, try applying a bite deterrent such as Fooey to the neck of the ferret being bitten. If you don't want to use a bite deterrent, you could try putting FerreTone on the ferret being bitten so the attacker will lick her instead of bite her.

When play does get too rough, do not punish either ferret. Remember, this is a stressful time for both, and punishing one for what is just instinctive behavior is not going to help. Rather, put the ferret that is being rough in a cage or a separate part of the room and soothe the frightened ferret. Give both ferrets treats and speak to them softly. You need to reassure them that they are safe and not in any danger. You may find that giving them both FerreTone right next to each other will be enough to distract them and will help the bonding process.

The most important thing you can do is have patience. Sometimes integration will happen in a few hours and sometimes it can take as long as six months to complete. Be sensitive to your ferrets' needs, and be sure to spend quality one on one time with each ferret. With a little patience and the right methods, you will have two bonded ferrets in no time!

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