Gerbil Facts

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

- The most common pet gerbil is from Mongolia.
- An adult gerbil can leap a distance of over 2 feet.
- Gerbils were first brought to the United States in 1949.
- There are 87 known species of gerbils worldwide.
- Gerbils thump both hind legs on the ground to communicate.

Gerbils are the fearless detectives of the rodent family. They are related to rats, hamsters, and mice. But a gerbil is more likely to investigate any new object or sound, while their rodent cousins are more apt to run away and hide. Gerbils are small desert-dwelling animals originally found in Europe, Asia, and Africa. The most common gerbil species kept as a pet is the Mongolian gerbil. Its scientific name is *Meriones unguiculatus*. Gerbils communicate with each other through a series of high-pitched squeaks. They also exhibit "thumping", in which they will pound both hind legs on the ground when excited or stressed. Each thumping pattern signifies a different meaning. Gerbils also have a long tail that is equal in length to their bodies. The tail is covered in fur and ends with a tuft of fur. Their eyes are either dark black or deep red. Their diets consist of quality pellet foods with an occasional treat of sunflower seeds, fresh fruits, or vegetables.

What Is It Called?

Common Name	Technical Name
Father	Buck
Mother	Doe
Baby	pup
Group	Horde

Gerbils Around the World

In nearly every language, "gerbil" is the only word used to describe them. Some languages have a word for "jerboa," which is a small rodent related to gerbils. In fact, the word "gerbil" comes from a Latin word that roughly translates to "little jerboa."

The Most Common Question About Gerbils

How can I tell the difference between gerbils and mice?

At first glance, gerbils and mice do look similar. But upon closer inspection, there are a few simple ways to differentiate between these two related animals. First of all, mice are much smaller than gerbils. Mice also have a different shaped head and smaller eyes. The biggest visual difference between a mouse and a gerbil, however, is the design of each one's tail. The tails of both a mouse and gerbil are roughly equal in length to the animal's body. That means if the body of your mouse or gerbil measures 3" long, the tail should also measure about 3" long. But the tail of a mouse is typically void of hair. Contrastingly,

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a gerbil's tail is covered in hair and ends with a little tuft of fur.

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