

Hamster Care & Comfort Recommendations

General – Syrian/"teddy bear" hamsters MUST live alone or will fight (eventually to the death!). Some dwarf species can cohabit if raised together but will breed if not correctly sexed; also, many/most may ultimately need separating due to fighting. When in doubt, house alone. When provided proper housing, stimulation (wheel, playground), they thrive with just human companionship and attention.

Housing – Aquarium with wire lid or Plastic Bins with DIY wire lid insert (Internet-search "hamster bin cage" for examples, instructions, and tutorials). Minimum size 360 sq in., e.g. 20 gallon "Long" tank (30" X 12"). For cages, no wire floor; bar space no wider than 1/2 inch for Syrian/large hamster, or 1/3 inch for all others. Crittertrails, Habitrails, etc. are far too small and very hard to keep clean, prone to escapes.

Igloo/Hideaway– Hamsters need a little secure hideaway to sleep or hide in. Small plastic igloos and the like sold for hamsters are inexpensive and easy to clean. Empty box okay if never contained anything toxic (such as cleaning products).

Wheel – Wire wheels are very dangerous (and even wire mesh can damage toes)! Too small a wheel will hurt a hamster's back. Syrian/teddy bear hamsters need at least an 8" wheel; dwarfs need at least 6". A safe, relatively inexpensive wheel for ALL hamsters is the Kaytee 8.5" Large Comfort Wheel; even the smallest dwarf hamster can power these. Other good, larger wheels are available for Syrians online. For dwarfs only, the 6.5" "Medium" Silent Spinner is good, too.

Cage Bedding – Hamsters are burrowers and need 4 – 5 inches or deeper cage bedding. Cedar and pine wood shavings are actually toxic, do not use! Aspen shavings are usually acceptable but better are paper-based products such as Carefresh, Kaytee Clean & Cozy, Oxbow Pure Comfort, PetSmart's All Living Things Paper Pet Bedding. Colors are fine but never use anything scented! Also, rip up some toilet tissue for their hideaway - they usually love to add it to their "nest". Do not use any "fluff" products, fabric, old clothing, etc (hamsters may chew causing fatal intestinal blockage).

Chew Sticks or Blocks – Hamster teeth continually grow, they must chew to keep them trim, so need chew sticks/blocks to keep their teeth worn down. Kaytee Apple Orchard Sticks are a fine choice, for example. Must use store-bought wood chews (as other wood may be poisonous, chemically treated, or may splinter).

Water – Easiest, cleanest way to provide water is with a 4 to 8 ounce water bottle. Filling bottle to top (instead of just part way) will often prevent leaking. Change at least every 2 days to avoid illness. Once filled, tap spout with a clean finger to make sure it's dispensing water and not clogged.

Food – Need about 1 Tablespoon of food daily. Expect hoarding, this is normal behavior; hamsters are "self-limiting", they don't overeat. Most seed/kibble mixes don't have proper nutrition, also, most hamsters just eat the seeds leaving the behind the pellets containing the vitamins and minerals! As the main staple, Mazuri "Rat and Mouse Diet", a "rodent block" food (usually carried by Petco), is recommended, supplemented with a good hamster seed mix without added sugars (e.g. Higgin's Vita Garden Hamster food carried by Petco, or Vitakraft VitaNature hamster food carried by PetSmart).

A healthy daily supplement: A very small amount of fresh vegetables (think a couple of thumbnail-size pieces) such as well-washed broccoli, zucchini, leafy greens such as romaine lettuce, arugula, mixed greens. Do not give iceberg lettuce, citrus, onion, garlic, avocado, kidney beans, any sort of sugary treats (most store-bought treats are unhealthy). Introduce any veggies slowly and do not feed it if any signs of diarrhea.

Good resource for commercial hamster food products and nutrition:

<http://hamsterhideout.com/forum/topic/102520-hamster-nutrition-iv-commercial-hamster-food-list/>

Good resource for good versus bad supplemental foods:

<http://hamsterhideout.com/forum/topic/96457-hamster-nutrition-v-safe-and-unsafe-foods-for-hamsters/>

Other Comforts – Empty toilet paper rolls – for Syrian hamsters, slit it lengthwise for safety. Some hamsters love to chew them, dwarfs use as tunnels! Also a "sand bath" or litter box. Some will use as a litter box, others to roll and play. Kaytee UNscented "Soft Granule Blend small pet bedding" or quartz-based reptile sand such as Zoo Med Repti Sand Desert White are safest (avoid calcium carbonate sand or sand with additives or chinchillas sand/dust/powder which is too dusty).