
LIVING WITH FERRETS

Perfection Comes in Furry Packages

by Lori Barber
Germantown, Md.

I have perfect ferrets. In addition to being affectionate and smart, they abide by the rules of the house. I never need to scold them for missing the litter box or scratching the carpet. I never chase them off the sofa. My vining plants cascade elegantly from unchipped pots, and unattended sodas never splash onto the computer keyboard. I have perfect ferrets. Now, before a bolt of lightning zaps through my computer monitor and strikes me between the eyes, please allow me to define "perfect."

Perfect ferrets are tumbling, mustelid acrobats that bounce and hop and climb and leap and dig and dance and can turn your house and your life upside down in one joyous, unbridled moment of ferret fun. Perfect ferrets have healthy curiosities and need an endless parade of stimulating objects to be sniffed, tasted, climbed on, and slept in. Perfect ferrets will dump a litterbox, dig to China through the living room carpet, create a castle in the couch interior, gleefully check for buried raisins beneath the philodendron, and splash dance through day-old Coca-Cola...if they have been given nothing better to do.

Perfect ferrets need tubes and boxes and worn out tee shirts for hide and seek. Perfect ferrets love to dig in ferret-sized sand boxes and race down a set of stairs. When perfect ferrets dig at the carpet, they need to be chased and tickled and kissed until they forget about China.

I have perfect ferrets because I would rather play with them than scold them. The upholstery on my sofa is so tough it could double for a bullet proof vest. When grapes are A.W.O.L from the fruit bowl, I find a better place for the bowl. Litter box misses are analyzed for intent: Is Gracie upset because I moved her blankie? Is George trying to tell me he's not feeling well? My plants live so high off the ground I use an oxygen mask when I water them. I simply never leave a beverage unfinished, and I thank George for helping with the dishes when he laps the last drop of milk from a cereal bowl I accidentally left on the coffee table.

My ferrets are perfect because I give them a home where it's okay to be perfectly ferrety.



Ferrets can do anything! They love to dig, dig, and dig. Missy Bear crawls into boxes; others prefer to hang out in the laundry, especially freshly folded towels. Jinx (next page) leaps from the sofa to the window sill to the speaker to the curtain rod, where he takes a stroll. It's important that ferret owners satisfy their ferrets while providing a safe play environment. Photos by Patty Asheuer and Cheryl Goedeke.

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The Ferret Proofing Myth

by Cindy Sooy
Newark, Del.

There is no such thing as a ferret-proof house. You may do everything possible to make your house safe for the ferrets only to be lulled into a false sense of security. Ferrets are extremely curious, and this curiosity can lead to their downfall. Ferrets have been known to crawl into mailing tubes standing on end (a natural act for a ferret that is drawn to anything that resembles a tunnel), only to slide down to the bottom head first and find they can't back up. They struggle, tire, and eventually smother, face down in the tube.

If you've read Wendy Winsted's book, you know that one of her ferrets crawled between a mattress and boxspring to sleep and suffocated. I had a kit crawl into an open Igloo cooler, the small one with a sliding lid. When she tried to get out, the cooler tipped over and the lid closed. When I finally found her, the air in the cooler was hot and moist. I don't think she would have survived for long in there. I've also had young kits try to climb up something only to fall between the leg of a chair and the wall. They struggle but are unable to free themselves. This can be deadly.

So you see, you can read all the books, follow all the suggestions, get rid of the recliner, line the bottom of the couch, and put child-proof locks on the cabinets, and your ferret can still find a way to get into trouble. Keep an eye on your ferrets when they are out; check on each one often. Know all of their hiding places and favorite spots for napping. Ferrets are a lot like children. Supervise them and keep them out of trouble.



Training Humans

by Cindy Sooy
Newark, Del.

Training humans is a piece of cake as any self-respecting ferret will tell you. We're so easy we don't even know when we're being trained. For instance, a ferret stands on his hind legs. We say "Aw, isn't that cute?" and we give him a raisin. The ferret quickly puts two and two together and stands up again. We give him another raisin and think that we've trained him to beg. He thinks, "I've trained her to give me a raisin whenever I stand on my hind legs."

So, I ask you, "Who's training whom?"