

## Choosing Litter for Your Ferret

Litter needs to be chosen with two things in mind: safety and odor control. Here are some important considerations to make when selecting an appropriate litter for your ferret.

Recycled paper compressed into pellets and wood pellets are the most absorbent, which means they have the best odor control. Most experienced ferret owners and breeders have found that pelleted litters are the best choice. The pellets are heavy enough to remain in the litter pan when the ferret steps out. They contain much less dust than other litter types, they are highly absorbent, and they are easily scooped. You will also find that this is probably the cheapest litter to buy. Clumping litters are not recommended unless they are made from plant material such as corn or wheat. These litters will track more than pelleted litters and are generally more expensive, but some owners prefer the ease of scooping clumping litter. Just be aware that rarely, some ferrets think these are tasty snacks, and will eat this type of litter.

Ferrets do not cover their stool like cats, so only a thin layer of litter (just enough to cover the bottom of the pan) is needed. If more is put in, many ferrets will dig it out. If your ferret habitually digs litter out of the box, try putting in less. You can also lay a folded section of newspaper over the thin layer of pellets. The pellets will soak up the urine that the newspaper does not catch/soak up and the newspaper catches the poop. You simply change the newspaper daily, and then change out the pellets every 5 to 7 days, and rinse out the litter box.

Common sense dictates that the more frequently the litter box is cleaned, the less noticeable the odor will be. Consideration must be given to the number of ferrets using the litter pan to decide how often to clean it. If not done frequently enough, many ferrets will simply stop using the litter box as a form of protest. Also make note of where the litter boxes are placed, as ferrets have particular needs in terms of restroom availability. Many ferrets also dislike walking through soiled litter to use the box. Since males urinate in the center of the box compared to females, you may choose to increase number of boxes if you have many males.

Alternatives to litter that do not control odor as well but that some ferret owners find more easily used are newspapers and puppy pads. It is advisable to place plastic mats or pieces of sheet linoleum beneath these if they are used. More frequent changes, even multiple times per day, are recommended to limit odor.



Trixie using the litter box.  
(Photo by Julie A.)

Litters that ARE Safe for Ferrets	Litters that are NOT safe for ferrets
<p><b>Yesterday's News</b> is made from recycled paper. This pelleted litter is low in dust and reasonably priced. Get the unscented formula to avoid allergies and irritation.</p> <p><b>Swheat Scoop</b> - wheat-based, natural clumping litter that is 100% biodegradable, chemical free, clay-free &amp; can be flushed down the toilet. One drawback is that it is expensive. It also tracks a lot outside of the box, and some ferrets find it tastes appealing.</p> <p><b>World's Best Cat Litter</b> is a corn-based, clumping litter with no chemicals, no clay and its dust free. One issue is ferrets easily track it from the box. Some ferrets also find this formula tasty.</p> <p><b>Feline Pine</b> is a pelleted pine litter that is highly absorbent, low dust, and 100% natural. It has a pine odor that some find unpleasant, and may irritate ferret respiratory tracts. When soiled, it breaks down into a sawdust texture that can track.</p> <p><b>Pine Pellet Stall Bedding</b> (from Tractor Supply) is a safe, low dust litter that absorbs odors well, has a pine scent and is inexpensive. Like Feline Pine, some find the odor offensive, and some ferrets seem to find it irritating. It also breaks down into sawdust when soiled.</p>	<p><b>Clay litter</b> is not a safe choice. When wet, clay gets thick and cement-like, and will stick to your ferret's paws, nose and eyes when they are trying to find the best place to "go." Ferrets "drag/scoot" to clean their bottoms after pooping. Clay can become stuck in a scooting ferret's rectum and expand, potentially blocking it. They could also cause a fatal blockage if some of it should be ingested, and it's also dusty and hard on a ferret's sensitive respiratory system, especially for those ferrets that like to dig through their litter boxes.</p> <p><b>Wood shavings</b> (pine or cedar) are not a safe choice because they contain "essential oils" (aromatic hydrocarbons, phenol). These oils release vapors, which then can cause respiratory damage and dramatic changes in liver enzymes. Cedar, pine and other softwood shavings have not been processed in a way to remove the oil that occurs naturally in all softwoods. Hardwoods such as aspen generally do not have essential oils and phenols, however, they are inappropriate choices for litter material regardless.</p> <p><b>Silica-based litters</b> (pearls, beads, flakes or gel) need to be approached with caution. Some silica litters cause major trauma to the respiratory tract due to silicosis – however, some on the market are what is called "amorphous silica" which is safe for respiratory tracts. However, these litters track heavily and many ferrets assume they are dig boxes. Silica litters tend also to be more expensive, are not scoopable, and are messy because they absorb urine.</p>

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<b>Litters that ARE Safe for Ferrets</b>	<b>Litters that are NOT safe for ferrets</b>
<p><b>Wood-stove pellets</b> are compressed sawdust that can be significantly less expensive. Make certain the pellets are made of hardwoods only (make sure there are no cedars or other soft woods with acids or phenols). Also check the labels on the pellets. Some are specifically labeled as “not for animal use” because they contain binders and chemicals specific to wood-stove burning and are not safe for ferrets. Look for wording like "Denatured wood litter pellets – kiln-dried to remove harmful phenols." You MUST carefully read the label! Woodstove pellets also have a woody odor, but not one of pine. They break down into sawdust when soiled, thus they can be messy.</p>	<p><b>Corncob litter</b> should not be used. It may contain molds and is too dusty. Ferrets may also eat this, potentially causing intestinal blockages.</p> <p><b>Alfalfa-pelleted rabbit food</b> is not ferret litter. Instead, look for alfalfa-pelleted litter! Watch the wording and read the label carefully! Be aware some ferrets find alfalfa irritating and allergenic.</p>

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**Visit the American Ferret Association to learn all about ferret care!**

**The American Ferret Association**

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