

---

# LIVING WITH FERRETS

---

Maybe you've had a sad experience with a ferret that died of cancer at a mere three years of age. Maybe you've become dismayed by the breeding and selling practices of large commercial breeders and pet stores. Or, maybe you're looking for a particular color of ferret or would like to get in on the fun of ferret show competition. There are many reasons to choose a pedigreed ferret. For my part, once I had attended several ferret shows and had seen strong yet dainty jills and held calm and magnificent five-pound hobs, nothing less would do.

To find a responsible breeder in your area, check for ads in ferret show catalogs, in the *AFR* and other ferret magazines, or use the Internet. The AFA does maintain a list of ferret breeders, relying on our members to keep it current, but inclusion in our list does not imply any endorsement. Your best bet is to find several breeders in your area, give them a call, and make an appointment to go see their ferrets.

The well-run ferretry should be clean, with plenty of light

## Selecting a Pedigreed Ferret

by Judith Sanders  
Fredericksburg, Va.



Healthy kits have bright, clear eyes and soft fur. Photo by Judith Sanders.

and ventilation. It should be apparent that the breeder's ferrets live comfortable lives, with proper nutrition, medical care, and plenty of opportunity for play and exercise. If you feel that a breeder isn't really taking good care of his ferrets, do you want to encourage him by buying a ferret? Never make a

"mercy purchase," just to get a ferret out of an abusive situation. Ferrets raised in substandard conditions may have behavioral or medical problems that prevent them from becoming good pets. Poor hygiene in the ferretry and inadequate nutrition for dam and kits can affect a ferret for the rest of its life.

Keep in mind, though, that the breeder is also checking you out. As a breeder who wants to find the best possible home for my ferrets, I "interrogate" potential buyers about a wide range of subjects that may affect the care the ferret will receive once it leaves my home. You can expect the breeder to ask you to sign a contract regarding the care of the ferret, and the breeder will contact you at least once after the ferret goes home with you to find out if this match is working out for both you and the ferret. If not, most breeders will give you a full refund as long as the ferret is returned in good health within a reasonable length of time.

If you are buying a ferret strictly as a pet, your primary concern must be temperament. Don't assume that buying a young kit will enable you to "raise it right." In fact, your best guarantee of getting a docile ferret, suitable for a home with children, is to choose a more mature ferret, at least four or five months old. The personality of a young ferret appears to go directly from the "terrible two's" into "stormy adolescence." Even ferrets from very gentle parents can behave like little heathens until they are a full six months old. You may find that an older ferret who has given birth to or sired their limit of kits might be just what you are looking for. If a kit is your choice, however, be sure it is fully weaned and independent, at least 10, preferably 14, weeks old. It is heart-wrenching to hear the little grunting moans of a kit prematurely separated from its dam.

Now we move on to the pedigree part. The breeder should be able to tell you about all of the ancestors of their ferrets, back at least three or four generations. Many of the ferrets who consistently win ribbons at shows have pedigrees stretching back twelve or more generations. A written pedigree, in chart or table form, will include the name, birth date, place of birth, and color and pattern of the ferret and information on show points and awards. If the pedigree does not include notes on the medical history of each ferret, ask the breeder to provide this. You should be aware of how long a ferret's ancestors lived, any medical problems they had, and cause of death. A good breeder will be eager to give you all the information you need. If you buy a ferret at a show, the ped-

---

# LIVING WITH FERRETS

---

igree and vaccination records should accompany the ferret.

Do not be overly concerned if the pedigree shows that the ferret you are interested in is the result of line breeding (mating of related animals, at least two generations removed). While genetic diversity is generally desirable, a breeder may choose to mate related ferrets, such as one-half first cousins, in order to maintain desirable characteristics in their line. Again, a good breeder will be constantly striving to improve the health, longevity, temperament, and appearance of their ferrets and will continually educate themselves and network with other breeders.

If at all possible, have a good look at and handle the parents and grandparents of the ferret you are interested in buying. How do they behave when handled by strangers, and how are they aging? When choosing a ferret, trust your hands as well as your eyes. Beneath a glossy coat you should feel dense bones and solid muscle. Look for a rounded, deep ribcage and a slightly domed, not flat, skull shape. Well-articulated hips will produce a graceful walk, and good muscle tone will be evident in an arched back. Do not accept



*These kits enjoy a clean, safe cage with plenty of ferret-friendly toys. According to Judith Sanders, it should be apparent that a breeder's ferrets live comfortable lives, with proper nutrition, medical care, and plenty of opportunity for play and exercise.*

*Thank you. . .*

West End  
Animal Hospital,  
Newberry, Fla., for  
Your Donation to the  
AFA Health Affairs  
Committee



In Memory Of  
Willow Lockward

anomalies such as “pug” muzzles, bowed limbs, or ferrets bred strictly for a particular coat or color type. Check for blindness and deafness, look inside the ferret's ears and mouth, listen to the ferret's breathing, and watch it play.

The price of pedigreed ferrets varies greatly, generally from about \$100 to more than \$200. On top of this, you may have the expense of having the ferret spayed or neutered, preferably at about six to eight months of age, generally when the ferret has reached about 80 percent of its mature size, but has not yet come into season. In my opinion, in view of the cost and effort involved in raising a litter of kits, pedigreed ferrets are a real bargain. Few of the breeders I know make any money at their hobby. So, take your time and do your research. I hope you and your “dream weasel” live happily ever after.