

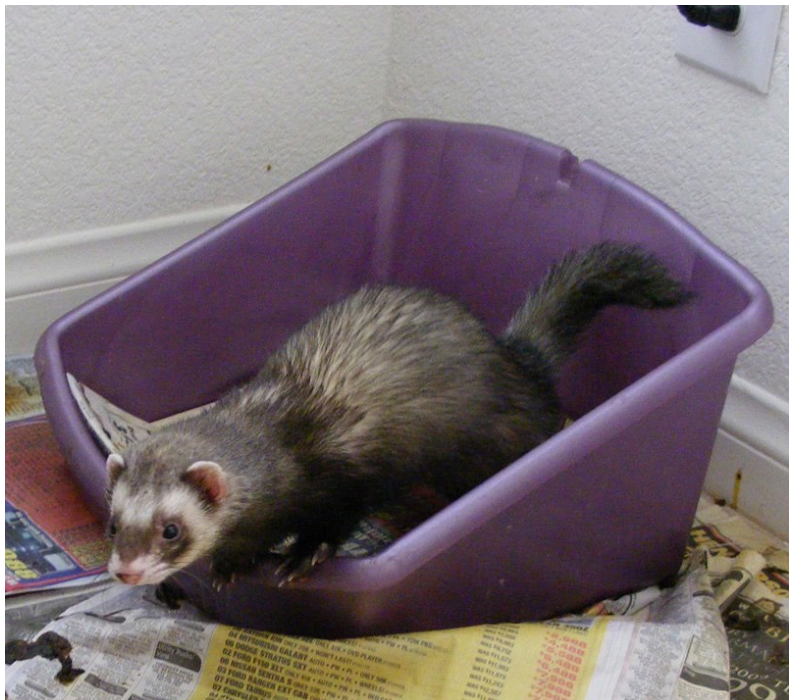
## Just the Right Spot: Litter Training Your Ferret

Have you ever noticed how children often wish to go to the bathroom in a restaurant, store or new place they visit? Seems like they have to check out and try out every potty they encounter. Well, ferrets are not so very different! Litter training a ferret can be frustrating because ferrets want to try out many new spots.

The first step in training a ferret where to appropriately potty is to select a litter box. A wide variety of litter box styles are available. You may need to try several to allow your ferret to choose the one with which they are most comfortable. Medium size cat litter pans, high-sided square ones and corner-shaped boxes are all obtainable. You may even decide to choose more than one style as more suitable for the ferret's cage verses a box placed in a room. Next, the box needs to be filled with litter.

Recommended litter products for ferrets include those manufactured out of recycled newspaper or a pelleted variety. Such products can be purchased in most pet stores. Do not use any of the following products as they may cause respiratory distress or irritation to your ferret: scoopable litter, clay litter, cedar or pine shavings. Many ferret owners will also choose to place "piddle pads" around the box to prevent messes as ferrets dig and some will also "wipe" after leaving the box.

The next step is to identify where your ferret has already chosen to use as a potty. Whether the spot is in his cage or the location is in a room, once a ferret shows you where he wants to go, that is where you should place the litter box. Few ferrets will choose to return to their cage to go, so pans must be made available in all spaces in which a ferret is allowed to roam and play. One important consideration in litter box placement is that ferrets may choose to mark their "territory" and choose to go in several places. It often seems they will choose sites near doorways, corners or under furniture such as beds and sofas. This will necessitate placement of multiple boxes, vigilance and cleaning to eradicate odors left behind if you attempt to train them not to use a selected spot. In addition to cleaning the sites of accidents, you can take preventative measures by placing objects such as ferret bedding, blankets, toys, tubes, baskets or even furniture where you do not wish the ferret to go.



Natalie Fontaine's Rocket uses the potty!  
(Photo by Natalie Fontaine)

After locating litter pans in the correct places, the ferret must learn how to actually use the pan. This can be a challenge, as ferrets, by nature, are burrowing animals and may choose to play or even sleep in a litter pan. To deter this, place some of their feces in the box which should help them learn that it is the correct location to go. When you see the ferret use the box correctly, offer positive reinforcement in the form of praise or even treats. The down side of offering treats is that some ferrets will learn to pretend to go and then expect something yummy. Always make certain the ferret has actually done the deed before treating him!

A ferret's litter box should be scooped or cleaned daily. However, it is a good idea to leave a small bit of feces or used litter behind so that the ferret remembers the box is a toilet and not a play area. For ferrets who insist on digging in the litter box, provide them with an alternative opportunity to dig such as in a dirt dig box, rice box or pasta box.

One last important consideration in litter box training a ferret is to be mindful of its short digestive system. A ferret will eat and poop about every 3-4 hours. Often ferrets will wish to go when they first wake up. In fact, many ferrets will leap out of their sleep sack or hammock in urgency to use the box! So, if you are letting your ferret out for some exercise and enrichment, make a pit stop in the litter box first. If your ferret does have an accident, clean it thoroughly to help prevent repeat mistakes in the same spot. And, never use negative reinforcement or punish a ferret for a mistake as generally, they will not connect this with the action of going in an inappropriate spot.

The most important factors in successfully litter training a ferret are patience, consistency and effective supervision. Once you get to know your ferret, you will easily be able to identify when he has to go and can assist him to the litter box. Encouraging use of the litter box prior to out-of-cage activity and providing enough boxes in ferret-selected places are key. If you do have ferrets who resist training, limit their free range time to an hour or two at a time so they are in their cage or room often enough to go in the correct place.

Contact the American Ferret Association to learn all about ferret care, foods & more!

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