

5 'Pocket Pets' That'll Steal Your Heart

Watch out, or these little guys will wriggle their way into your life. Sociable or solitary, playful or quiet, just about anyone can find their match in one of these tiny pets. Plus, 9 questions that'll help you figure out which one is right for you.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Popular small pets, also called “pocket pets,” include rats, guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, and rabbits
- It's important to carefully research the types of small mammals commonly kept as pets to learn which one best suits your family and lifestyle

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Popular small mammals, or “pocket pets,” include guinea pigs, hamsters, mice, rats, and gerbils. In recent years, hedgehogs, chinchillas, and sugar gliders have also become trendy, but these animals require more specialized care and are illegal to own in some states.

If you're thinking about getting a pocket pet, it's important to do your homework before deciding what type of animal is best suited to your family and lifestyle. Keep in mind that different animals require different care. When you're ready to bring a new small pet home, please be sure to check your local shelters and rescue organizations first for adoptable animals.

What Kind of Pocket Pet Is Right for You?

Some things to consider as you think about the type of small pet that best suits you:

- Do I have room for a cage, and where should I put it?
- How much space will the animal need? Some pocket pets are natural climbers and require larger and more complex habitats with multiple levels.
- How much exercise does she require? Does she need to climb or run?
- Does she eat a specialized diet? Some small animals require a variety of special foods and supplements.
- Does she sleep at night or during the day?
- How much interaction will my pet require? Do I have the time to spend with her? Some small mammals are comfortable being handled while others are not.
- Some pocket pets, for example, guinea pigs, don't do well alone and need the company of others of their species. This means you'll need to acquire two pets, and they must be the same sex or you'll start a pocket pet population explosion!

- How messy is she? How much time will it take to clean up after her? Some small pets are messier than others and require more time to keep their cages clean.
- All pocket pets require veterinary care — how often depends on the species. For example, hamsters and guinea pigs often require two or three vet visits per year, while other animals require only an annual exam.

5 Popular Pocket Pets

- **Rats** — Rats are very curious, intelligent animals and can make wonderful small pets. They are easily tamed and relatively easy to care for, however, they do require a fair amount of attention and exercise outside their cages – ideally at least an hour a day.

Rats are a social species, so they should never be kept alone. Same sex pairs or groups are best, and males usually get along, especially when they are introduced as youngsters or are littermates. As a general rule, males are larger and less lively than females; females tend to be more active and playful. Rats live an average of 2 to 3 years. Body length is from 9 to 11 inches; tail is 7 to 9 inches. They are nocturnal animals, meaning they're more active at night.



- **Guinea pigs** — Like rats, guinea pigs are social beings, so you should plan to acquire a same sex pair so they can keep each other company. Females tend to get along better than males. Guinea pigs are usually quiet but can call out quite loudly. They are often active both day and night and require a large cage. They tend to be a bit shy and nervous at first but can become very tame and comfortable with frequent gentle handling.

Guinea pigs have an average lifespan of 5 to 7 years, though some live to the age of 10. Adults are about 10 inches long and 2 to 3 pounds. Their bodies are round and stout, with no visible tail.



- **Hamsters** — The most common pet hamster is the Syrian hamster, also known as the teddy bear hamster or golden hamster. Syrian hamsters are solitary and must live alone (one hamster only per cage).

Hamsters love to exercise, so yours will need a wheel for running. They also like to hide and sleep inside enclosures, so be sure to put a small box with an entrance hole or a small flower pot in his cage. Hamsters also like to crawl through tunnels, which you can easily make at home out of cardboard toilet paper or paper towel tubes. Another cage necessity: small pieces of paper towel or napkin that he can shred and make a nest with. Adult Syrian hamsters grow to about 6 inches in length and their average lifespan is 1.5 to 2 years.



- **Gerbils** — Gerbils are very curious and entertaining. They are social animals so acquiring a same sex pair at the same time is ideal. Gerbils can become very tame and generally have a mild, agreeable temperament. Gerbils are small, with long furry tails that have a little tuft of fur at the end. It's important to never pick up a gerbil by the tail.

They grow to about 4 inches in length, with a 4-inch tail. They live 2 to 3 years on average, though some have been reported to live to the age of 8.



- **Rabbits** — Rabbits are inquisitive, sociable animals that can make wonderful small indoor pets that live to be 7 to 14 years old. They can be litterbox trained and they even purr when they feel content! Not all rabbits like to be held, however. Some prefer to sit next to their humans.

Rabbits enjoy playing with toys, for example, cardboard boxes, wire cat balls, and hard plastic baby keys, and they need natural things of their own (untreated wood) to chew on. It's important to protect your rabbit from predators, poisons, temperature extremes, electrical cords, and rough handling.



Sources and References

[PetPlace](#)

[AAHA.org](#)
