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**Pet Rat Care: The Top 10 Mistakes Of New Rat Owners**

**By Colin Patterson**

Being a dedicated rat owner can be very rewarding. All it takes is a little research and a lot of preparation.

If you're getting ready to adopt a rat as a cherished pet, there are some pitfalls that you should be aware of beforehand. Here are 10 of the most common pet rat care mistakes that first-time rattie owners make:

1. Getting only one rat.

A person might think that getting two rats is too much extra work... or that a pet rat will bond with a human owner more readily if there is no other rat around to become friends with. The truth is that rats are highly social creatures. They need to have other rat-friends to play with and to "talk" to. Furthermore, taking care of two rats is not much more work than caring for one.

2. Getting the wrong kind of bedding.

Sometimes a rat owner will want to cut corners and use newspaper or cheap bedding. Rats are very sensitive to the chemicals in the ink and cheap bedding can often have dusty particles that will irritate their lungs. If you see a red discharge coming from their noses, chances are, there is an irritant present in the air. Pine wood chips are not safe!

3. Feeding the rats an imbalanced diet.

No, it's not cute how your furry friends can eat almost as much pizza as you. Caring for pet rats means feeding them healthy food. Look, there's no excuse. Fruits and veggies are not expensive items to buy; also, be sure they get their share of lab blocks, seeds, and a daily dab of a vitamin supplement.

4. Not cleaning the cage often or thoroughly enough.

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Their urine will decompose and produce ammonia. This, along with the decomposing bedding can irritate their lungs. Yes, it's a pain to do. But putting up with the unpleasant aspects will only help you to appreciate them more. Clean and disinfect with bleach–water once a week, or up to two weeks, maximum.

### 5. Not taking them out to play often enough.

Rats will eventually get depressed if they remain cooped up inside their limited cage environment. If you make play time fun and challenging, you will be looking forward to the bonding time as well!

### 6. Deciding to breed for the wrong reasons.

Breeding responsibly is not a lucrative or easy hobby to get into, especially at the beginning. Don't get stuck with a litter of rats that wind up becoming snake–food at a pet store. Instead, try investing some time volunteering for or starting an apprenticeship with a breeder.

### 7. Not giving them enough toys.

If you bore your rats, they will become boring. Rats not only love to play, explore and solve problems, but they actually need to be constantly stimulated by a challenging learning environment. Provide them with a variety of toys and games and switch things around constantly. They'll love you for it!

### 8. Entering them into a fancy rat show before researching it.

You may love your rats and think they are just the most perfect rats you have ever seen, but the American Fancy Rat and Mouse Association (AFRMA) has very strict standards and those judges have seen hundreds—if not thousands—of rats in their day. Before deciding to enter your rats into a show, visit one first. Interview a handful of judges and learn exactly what makes a rat top in its class. Then decide.

### 9. Procrastinating on researching a qualified vet for small animals.

The moment one of your rats becomes ill, you will want to have the phone number of a good vet handy. Not all vets will treat small animals or rats. Do the searching beforehand and spare yourself the frustration and desperation an emergency situation can sometimes bring about.

### 10. Underestimating the importance of belonging to a rat club or rat society.

Belonging to a rat club or rat society such as AFRMA will go a long way in getting your key rat questions answered. Moreover, doing so will connect you with a community of rat lovers who are likely to want to share what they know for the sake of advancing the hobby as a whole.

Colin Patterson is author of a guide to pet rat care that will explain all you need to know if you're thinking about getting pet rats. Visit Colin's site at

<http://www.petratguide.com>

## **The Top Three Pet Rat Training Mistakes**

**By Colin Patterson**

It can be very rewarding to train your pet rats to do tricks and learn obstacle courses. Since they tend to be highly intelligent creatures, rats can actually learn a lot (and get bored if they have nothing to do).

Furthermore, because they're people-pleasers, rats enjoy the challenge of striving for your reward and praise.

However, before you begin training, you may be interested to know the main pitfalls of pet rat training. That way, you can get started on the right foot and make the most of training time. Here are the top three mistakes that novice rat-trainers will often make:

1. Neglecting to create a stimulating living environment for their rats.

Sometimes trainers make the mistake of thinking that their ratties' living environment doesn't need to be interesting or fun to be in. They seem to think that an hour of play time or training time is enough to stimulate their little minds.

This is untrue.

Rats are constantly problem-solving, 24/7. Giving them a stimulating and challenging living environment will ensure that their minds stay sharp for learning tricks.

– Buy or build a large caged enclosure complete with shelves, ramps, ladders, cubby holes, bins, hammocks, exercise wheels, tunnels, hide holes, baskets and ropes strung across.

– Occasionally, treat them to a game of "hide n' seek" with sunflower seeds. Hide them in hard-to-reach places so they really have to think hard about how to get to them.

– Be sure to adjust and rearrange the furniture and food locations. Always keep 'em guessing.

– Make playtime games challenging as well with swimming pools, sand boxes and tunnel-mazes.

2. Being too "results oriented" about training.

One major pitfall a rat owner can fall into is to be too demanding about what is to be accomplished during training. This approach to rat-training will only end in frustration and neglect.

Never forget that training is just an extension of play time and that repetition, along with positive reinforcement, is the key to success.

3. Forgetting to reinforce old tricks.

As the saying goes "If you don't use it, you lose it." The first-time rat trainer will often teach his rats a few basic tricks, move on to other ones for several weeks, only to discover that his rats have forgotten

the first tricks!

Just because a rat learns a trick, it does not mean that the little guy will remember it later. Reinforcement is everything. This is why, when teaching a rat to run an obstacle course, the trainer must tack a new obstacle onto the one(s) that were previously learned. Otherwise, the rat will fail to remember the first obstacles learned.

So, remember: keep their lives full of challenges at all times; try to be patient and not to get too attached to results and accomplishments; and don't take it for granted that they will remember those first tricks they learned... because they won't. Repeat and reinforce their learning at all times!

Knowing about these three major pitfalls will go a long way in helping you to make the most of your rats' intelligences and abilities; and as long as you are together, you will look forward to training time every single day.

Colin Patterson is author of a guide to pet rats that will teach you the proper way to train your little ratties. Visit Colin's site at

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