



FEEDING ENRICHMENT FOR SMALL MAMMALS

Is 'how' you feed as important as 'what' you feed?

Choosing the right food for your pet is an important element of pet care. However, not only what you feed but how you feed can have a significant impact on their well-being.

In the wild, small mammals would spend most of their time searching for, storing, and eating enough of their food which gives them the energy and nutrients that they need. You can encourage these natural behaviours in your pets by creating the right environment to help them stay active and stimulated by working for their food reward. While playing and exercise can help reduce boredom and stress in pets, feeding time is also a great opportunity for physical and mental activities and improving your pet's quality of life.

GENERAL BENEFITS OF FEEDING ENRICHMENT FOR SMALL MAMMALS

- Prolonging the feeding time which reduces boredom.
- Creating stimulating challenges to make them work and achieve rewards.
- Encouraging natural behaviour such as foraging, digging and stretching.
- May help prevent obesity by keeping pets active.
- Dental health benefits by helping to wear down teeth (for those pets with constantly growing teeth).
- Useful for training purposes and bonding between owner and pet.



RABBITS AND GUINEA PIGS

Herbivorous small mammals such as rabbits and guinea pigs enjoy foraging. So, putting their food in different locations will allow them to express this natural behaviour and will prolong their feeding time, keeping them active for longer.



You could place some of their food in hanging positions to make them stand on their hind legs and stretch their muscles to reach the food. Also try stuffing a cardboard tube with hay, herbs, or suitable vegetables for your pets to get the food out of.



The majority of the diet of **Rabbits** and **Guinea pigs** should consist of **good quality hay or grass**. Click on the QRCode opposite to view our posters online on this topic.

HAMSTERS, GERBILS, MICE & RATS

Try using more than one location at a time to place their food. You can also hide some of their food, or treats like suitable vegetables, inside paper bags or cardboard boxes for them to shred and discover their rewards!



In the wild these animals dig burrows, which are a series of tunnels, to live, breed, and store their food. To encourage these natural digging and storing behaviours, you can provide ready-made tunnels, or let them make their own. Blocks of wood can be drilled to make tunnels, which the animals may enlarge themselves by their natural tendency to gnaw.

FERRETS

Ferrets enjoy solving puzzles and searching for their food so you can hide some of their food around their enclosure to stimulate this behaviour. Some dog toys and treat dispensers can be used for feeding enrichment for ferrets too!



A suitable small animal activity toy can be filled with treats or ferret kibbles to give them a challenge. Ferrets also love to chase things, so you can attach a treat to a string (or a cat teaser toy) to encourage their natural hunting behaviour.

PLEASE NOTE:



- Only give treats and toys that are safe for your pet's species and size.
- Consult the pet food or toy manufacturer if you are not sure about a product.
- Treats should form no more than 10% of their daily calorie intake.
- Uneaten fresh food should be removed after a few hours to prevent spoilage.
- Fresh drinking water should always be available for pets.
- Consult your vet if you have any concerns over the health of your pet.

www.ukpetfood.org

FACT SHEET

CAN'T ALL SMALL MAMMALS EAT THE SAME FOOD?

OMNIVORES
These animals that eat a variety of food sources including both plant-based and animal-based foods are called omnivores. Examples of omnivorous small pets are hamsters, gerbils, mice and rats. In their natural habitat they eat grass, seeds, grains and insects. Although they are often mistaken for herbivores, they are omnivores and eat things on a variety of plant and animal-based sources. In their captive environment, they are fed a balanced diet of suitable fresh food and vegetables can also be provided.

HOW IMPORTANT IS WATER?
Drinking water is incredibly important and a constant supply of clean, fresh water should always be available to your pet. Specially designed bottles with metal spouts are a good option for most small mammals. However, if you are offering your pet food and water which they prefer they may prefer to drink from a bowl. If you are offering your pet food and water which they prefer they may prefer to drink from a bowl. If you are offering your pet food and water which they prefer they may prefer to drink from a bowl.

Fresh drinking water should always be available.

THERE'S A PET OUT THERE FOR YOU!
With the right care, small pets make great companions for children and adults alike. Do your research to see what options are best and what your pet could tell you about your lifestyle. Think about your home environment, your family, hobbies and how much time and resources you have for your new pet. Once you've decided on a pet, it's time to start your research on this exciting journey. www.ukpetfood.org/pet-care

MORE ADVICE ON KEEPING SMALL MAMMALS CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.UKPETFOOD.ORG

RABBIT SIZE-O-METER

Size-O-Meter Score:

Score	Body Weight	Characteristics
1	VERY THIN More than 20% below ideal body weight	• Rab bones, ribs and spine are very sharp to the touch • Rab ribs are easily felt • The long spine curves in
2	THIN Between 10-20% below ideal body weight	• Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt • Ribs are easily felt • The long spine curves in
3	IDEAL Between 10-20% below ideal body weight	• Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat • Rab ribs are easily felt • The long spine curves in
4	OVERWEIGHT Between 10-20% above ideal body weight	• Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat • Rab ribs are easily felt • The long spine curves in
5	OBESE More than 20% above ideal body weight	• Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat • Rab ribs are easily felt • The long spine curves in

PLEASE NOTE:
Getting rabbits into the best body condition is a long-term goal. Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat. Rab ribs are easily felt. The long spine curves in. Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat. Rab ribs are easily felt. The long spine curves in. Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat. Rab ribs are easily felt. The long spine curves in.

www.ukpetfood.org.uk

GUINEA PIG SIZE-O-METER

Size-O-Meter Score:

Score	Body Weight	Characteristics
1	VERY THIN More than 20% below ideal body weight	• Rab bones, ribs and spine are very sharp to the touch • Rab ribs are easily felt • The long spine curves in
2	THIN Between 10-20% below ideal body weight	• Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt • Ribs are easily felt • The long spine curves in
3	IDEAL Between 10-20% below ideal body weight	• Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat • Rab ribs are easily felt • The long spine curves in
4	OVERWEIGHT Between 10-20% above ideal body weight	• Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat • Rab ribs are easily felt • The long spine curves in
5	OBESE More than 20% above ideal body weight	• Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat • Rab ribs are easily felt • The long spine curves in

PLEASE NOTE:
Getting guinea pigs into the best body condition is a long-term goal. Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat. Rab ribs are easily felt. The long spine curves in. Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat. Rab ribs are easily felt. The long spine curves in. Rab bones, ribs and spine are easily felt but are covered by a thin layer of fat. Rab ribs are easily felt. The long spine curves in.

www.ukpetfood.org.uk

Learn more about small mammals!
Can't All Small Mammals Eat the Same Food? View our factsheets and body condition score charts for **Rabbits** and **Guinea Pigs** on our website. Simply scan the QR Code opposite!

