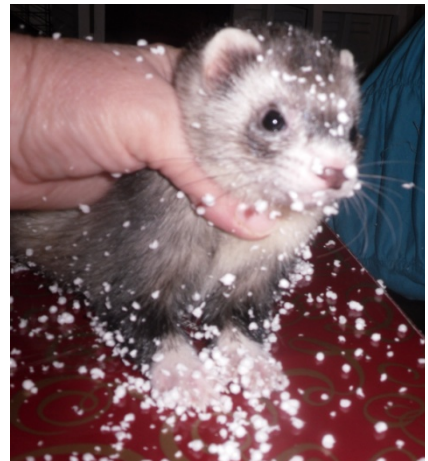


Ferrets Love to Explore... Is Your Home Ready for These Tenacious Weasels?

When considering whether to adopt a ferret, you must also think about ferret-proofing your home. Ferret-proofing your home is just as important as assuring the safety of a child in your home. If your ferrets roam free in parts of your home, it is imperative to ensure your ferrets and home will be safe. If a ferret wants to explore something, it will find a way. Be prepared! And, even when you think you have a handle on ferret-proofing, these intelligent and tenacious little weasels will find something new to challenge you! It will always be a work in progress!

It takes time and lack of interruption by you for ferrets to really be naughty, so you must be diligent. Plus, some develop new skill sets. Introduce your ferrets to new rooms and areas of the home under close supervision. Grab a good book or your laptop and station yourself comfortably so you can observe their efforts and explorations. The moment you take your eyes off of them they could get into trouble! Let's break ferret-proofing down by areas of the home.

Off-limits rooms: It is perfectly reasonable to designate ferret free zones! If well attended, many rooms in a house are fine for ferrets to visit or in which they may play. However, there are some places in a house that should routinely be considered as off limits to ferrets. Laundry rooms are not a good place for ferrets. By virtue of the appliances and the vents and holes necessary for venting a dryer there is the possibility of injury or escape. There are often cleaning solutions and other chemicals in laundry rooms that are deadly. Garages are also not a good place for ferrets because of the dangers of vehicles, chemicals, lawn equipment etc. Additionally, ferrets in a garage may suffer from "out of sight, out of mind" circumstances. Ferrets need lots of daily human interaction that they might not receive if removed from the household. Screened porches are yet another place a ferret should not be left unattended. Ferrets can easily scratch and dig though screening and escape to the outside. If ferrets are allowed on a porch, make sure slats are tight enough that ferrets cannot fit through or even get a toe stuck. You can screw sheet metal pieces on any larger gaps in the wood and cover it with outdoor carpet, but monitor this closely as they may pull up outdoor carpet. Lastly, closets are best used to store all the many things ferrets cannot have.



Sophia (Lindsey & Katy Tootle's 8 month old ferret) climbed to the top of a closet and destroyed a holiday decoration made of Styrofoam!

Kitchen: Kitchens are full of ferret hazards from inappropriate foods to sharp utensils and large appliances that might be dangerous. It is not the best place for ferrets have access. That said, many smaller living spaces and apartments make it a necessity. You need to make sure your ferret is unable to open the cabinets and drawers, even a crack. And, always check under the cabinets for gaps and openings. Ferrets can wiggle into even the smallest spaces! You will want to make sure your ferret can't get under the oven, dishwasher or refrigerator. If your ferret gets into one of those places, it could be injured or even get stuck underneath. If ferrets will have access to the kitchen, you can create a barrier of thin plywood cut to fit on either side of the

fridge. If you have an electric stove, before turning it on, always check the drawer underneath of it for ferrets who were attracted by a warm place to curl up. Ferrets love water and may try to climb into the sink. If a garbage disposal is installed, the blades or even trapped, spoiled food may be a hazard. Human foods should not be fed to ferrets, so do not leave foods out on counters or even on the kitchen table. A fruit bowl may be appealing to the eye but it will also be attractive to ferrets. As obligate carnivores, fruit, even as a treat, is not appropriate. If your kitchen has a dishwasher, be sure to check each time you close the door to make sure a ferret is not inside. Lastly, check garbage bags before disposal or you risk throwing your ferret out with the trash!

Living rooms, family rooms or dens: Recliners and sofa beds are a deadly hazard to ferrets. The mechanisms can easily cause serious injury or death, so if you cannot locate your ferret do NOT operate the mechanism at all! Your ferret can also scratch the bottom of your couch, chairs and ottoman, tearing through the lining on the underside. They will even try to climb up into them and into the springs. Like operating furniture with mechanical parts, compressing the springs can cause injury or death. Prevent entry from beneath furniture by removing the underside lining and replacing it with linoleum. Purchase sheet linoleum by the foot or thin plywood at hardware stores and then simply cut it to fit. You can even cut closely around legs and fixtures so there are minimal gaps, preventing entry. This can then be attached to the outer frame of the piece of furniture using a staple gun or upholstery tacks. Rockers should also be used with extreme caution. Ash trays, lighters and cigarettes should never be left where ferrets can reach them (you shouldn't be smoking anyway!). Remotes for electronics should be placed out of reach as well since the buttons are rubber and present a choking hazard or could cause a blockage. House plants represent a digging opportunity for ferrets. In addition to the need to clean up, ferrets digging in these can result in exposure to fertilizer and chemicals. Aquariums must be completely sealed to prevent ferrets from falling in or drinking the water which, again, may contain harmful chemicals or even bacteria.

Bathroom – While ferrets are usually attracted to baths and showers, carefully monitor ferrets in the bathroom. Cabinets and drawers must be locked. Like in the kitchen, check beneath cabinets for gaps. Personal care products, cleaning products and grooming tools such as razors, tweezers, clippers and trimmers should be carefully locked away or well out of reach. Even a tube of toothpaste can be a hazard. Medications most especially must be inaccessible! Always keep the toilet lid down. Check the security of the trim ring that surrounds the pipe where it enters the wall behind the toilet. It usually conceals a larger hole that was cut for the pipe and this gap can allow a ferret entry into the walls. Toilet paper and tissues are a ferret favorite, so while at times you may give them these items for enrichment, unless you own stock in a tissue paper company, prevent ferrets from unrolling or un-stuffing the tissue box! Always monitor ferrets playing in water for the temperature of the water and its depth. You may even consider keeping a crate or stool in the tub for ferrets to use to climb out as many times they can get in but cannot get back out.

Bedroom – Much like furniture in the living room, box springs have a fabric liner beneath that ferrets can easily tear through. Remove this and replace it with a fitted sheet that covers the entire bottom. Duct tape or staple the sheet over the top side. If you have very persistent ferrets, you can use 2 sheets or use the vinyl sheeting as described above. You can also build a wooden

box or platform to go under the bed so they can't use the area as a potty or try to stash food and toys beneath. Additional fitted sheets can be placed on the underside of mattresses to prevent scratching there as well. If you have chairs or sofas in the room, treat them as described for living room furniture. Dressers often have cut out design areas at their base, enabling ferrets to hide beneath and also enter drawers from the back side. Cut strips of wood to a slightly longer

length than the inside area of the dresser and press this in from underneath. You can even secure it further with duct tape. This prevents

entry while not damaging any of the wood of the furniture. Non-furniture items of concern abound in the bedroom. Laundry baskets should never be unloaded directly into the washer as ferrets love to sleep in them. Jewelry should be carefully placed in a box out of reach. Put remotes in drawers before bed. Shoes should be stored in closets to prevent choking and chewing – ferrets love rubber and leather, neither of which should be ingested. Other rubber items to keep away from ferrets include flashlights, pens and pencil erasers. Children's rooms are often filled with toys, like dolls, blasters, Nerf toys and toy vehicles with rubber tires can be chewed up and swallowed! Pacifiers, sippy cups, teething toys, any other toys made out of rubber and even Legos must be out of the reach.



Jennifer Larsen's Mayhem (2 years) and Chaos (10 months) snuggle up inside a dresser drawer.

Stairways – Stair rails and banisters can be hazardous as ferrets' depth perception is limited and they may jump or fall. Plexiglas can be cut to shape and fit flush to the rails and spindles. These can be attached with zip ties which results in no damage to the woodwork. Clear vinyl can also be used when woven through spindles of banisters and attached with tacks, nails or a staple gun on the ends. This must be tightly woven to prevent ferrets from crawling beneath it. If you limit ferrets to a single floor of a multi-level home, many excellent child/pet gates are now available that can safely enclose your ferrets but remain convenient to use.

General considerations:

- Any object made of rubber is a definite no-no! Ferrets love to chew rubber but if ingested, rubber can cause a blockage requiring expensive surgery.
- Door stops are often tipped with rubber. Be certain to remove these rubber pieces. They can be replaced with hard plastic tips. Even these may be attractive to ferrets, so you may be able to make due without or you can also purchase the bumpers that apply to the back of the door or doorknob as these will be out of the ferrets' reach.
- Area rugs add color and style to many rooms in a house. Just be aware that ferrets love to burrow beneath these and could be injured if you are not careful when walking on a rug beneath which lurks a ferret.
- In general, metal mesh screens are more difficult for ferrets to penetrate than the vinyl type. If unattended ferrets are enclosed in rooms with windows, it is safest to keep the windows closed.
- In the summer if you run a fan, make sure little paws can't reach into it.

- Some ferrets are attracted to electrical cords and wiring for computers and electronics. Deter chewing with products such as bitter apple. Never spray these when the ferret is nearby and only apply when the cord is unplugged.
- Ferrets interested in electrical outlets can be prevented from harm by using plastic outlet covers available in the child safety section of hardware stores.
- Plug-in type deodorizing devices should be placed out of ferrets reach as they present both an electrical hazard and are possibly poisonous if ingested.
- Never leave burning candles or incense where a ferret might get to it. Serious or deadly burns can occur.
- Heavy objects such as speakers should be placed at a height higher than your ferret can reach as they will push them onto the floor. Free standing speakers can be gently wrapped with screen to protect them from scratching ferrets.
- Keep closet doors closed. This is the best place to store all of the items that are hazardous to a ferret! And, many ferrets learn to climb hanging clothes and meander through the hangers, finding spots where they can even scale to the top shelves. The trip down is never pretty and falls from even reasonable heights can cause back injuries. The flip side of keeping a closet (or any door to a ferret free zone) shut is that without caution they can get locked into them and have access to dangerous items, as well as being unable to reach their food, water or potty.
- Scratching is the favorite past-time for many ferrets, especially on carpeting in corners or near doorways. Plastic carpet runner mats can be taped down or carpet remnants can be attached to prevent damage to the flooring.
- Many doors have a gap beneath through which smaller ferrets can wiggle. Secure wooden strips or 1/4 to 1/2 inch thickness beneath the door to prevent escapes.
- Make sure heater vents in floors and those that are mounted low along walls are securely screwed down.
- Make sure fireplaces have doors that close completely so ferrets cannot get in and hurt themselves or inhale ash. Woodstoves should be gated off so ferrets don't burn themselves.
- Wherever there are shelves, make sure the bottom shelf is higher than the ferret can reach, or you will find all the items stored there removed and even stashed away in your ferrets' hidey hole.
- Exercise equipment is particularly dangerous to ferrets that can get in, under, and around it. Dreadful injuries could occur once the equipment is started for use.
- Ferrets are amazing climbers, scaling cages, furniture, shelves, drapes and even blinds. This is problematic because of the dangers of falling from a hazardous height or falling and getting caught on something on the way down!
- Guests are not used to ferret needs, so follow them as they move through a ferret room/house. Be certain to warn guests about ferrets and the use of recliners and sofa beds!

Ferret Proofing must haves:

Plastic carpet runner mats
Linoleum sheets
Duct tape
Upholstery tacks
Plywood or Plexiglas
Clear sheet vinyl
Wood strips (1/4 to 1/4 inch thick)
Heavy flexible vinyl sheeting
Child locks for drawers and cabinets
Baby/pet gates
Zip ties
Staple gun



This information about ferret proofing was compiled by American Ferret Association (AFA) Education Committee members including Maggie Houseman, Becca Nolan, Yu-ri Luke Bando, Jennifer Larsen, Lindsey Tootle and Robin Landes. This group collectively has owned ferrets for more than 50 years! For more up to date information on ferrets and their care, visit the AFA web site at www.ferret.org

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

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