

Thinking of

**RATS**

*as pets?*



**READ OUR TOP TIPS ON  
RAT CARE AND ALL YOU  
NEED TO CONSIDER FIRST**

**If you're thinking of getting rats as pets, you've come to the right place! Rats are intelligent and can make the most wonderful pets, but they do have complex care needs and there are quite a few things to consider before deciding that rats are the right pets for you.**

**Here are some things you need to know before you get your rats that may help you to decide.**



## *Tip 1*

# You can't have just one rat

Rats are highly social animals and need other rats as friends.

They will become depressed if kept alone, so you should always have at least two suitably paired rats to keep each other company - however, groups of three or more often thrive better.



***Rats need friends!***

## Tip 2

# Rats need the right habitat and plenty of space

**Your rats enclosure should be the biggest you can get.**

**Most of the cages you can buy in pet shops are suitable for baby rats but you might want to think about something bigger as your rats grow.**

**Most people use cages such as the Savic Royal Suite or Liberta Explorer. They will set you back £200-£400 initially but it will be worth it - you can also often pick up a great second hand bargain!**



Photo: Isamu Rattery

**Rats have very delicate respiratory systems which are easily irritated by dust, drafts and scents. Your rats should be housed in a quiet area free from drafts, chills, artificial scents, extreme heat and sudden temperature changes.**

**Suitable substrates should be dust-extracted and can include soil (see Tip 3!), chopped card, paper pellets like Back2Nature (great for litter trays) and kiln-dried wood shavings such as Bedmax. Any shavings must be kiln-dried; ordinary sawdust / shavings are a no-no as they contain harmful phenols which are toxic to small animals.**

**Read more about rats' housing at [isamurats.co.uk](http://isamurats.co.uk)**



## Tip 3

# Rats need lots of enrichment

In order to live a fulfilling life, rats need lots of enrichment, both in their cage and outside it in the area they will use for free-ranging. Ideally they should be let out of their cage to play and exercise for at least an hour each day, in an area of your house free from cables and other hazards.

You need to provide them with lots of opportunities to dig, run, climb, hide, forage and sleep. When setting up your cage it's important to also include plenty of fall-breaks.



You can buy many enrichment items such as ropes, hammocks, cargo nets, wooden ladders, hides and foraging toys. You can also make some yourself e.g. with old cardboard boxes.



# Enrichment, continued

## Bioactive set-ups & dig boxes



Rats are natural burrowers and love to dig, so providing them with a dig-box containing sterile, pesticide-free soil like coco-coir gives them a great opportunity to do what they would do in the wild.

Many people are now taking the dig-box idea one step further and converting their cages to include a big perspex base and making soil their main substrate. This gives rats the chance to burrow underground as they would in the wild and provides great enrichment.



Photo: Adele Wharton



Photo: Azuline Rattery

The perspex also gives you the chance to see your rats tunneling under the soil, which is wonderful to watch.

**[Click here for all you need to know about bioactive / soil set-ups.](#)**

## Tip 4

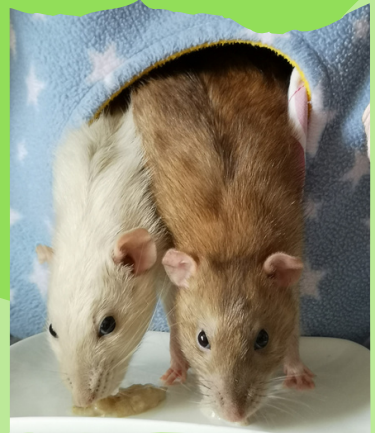
# Rats need the right diet

Rats are natural omnivores and their wild ancestors would have eaten a wide variety of different foods.

Many people feed their rats a grain and seed mix based on the Shunamite rat diet - such as the ones sold by Rat Rations - along with the recommended supplements, fresh vegetables and a small amount of fruit.

You can also make fresh, nutritionally balanced meals for your rats, which normally go down a treat!

Rat nuggets which are sold at pet shops are not the best diet as they often contain poor quality ingredients.



You can buy a wide selection of high-quality, balanced rat mixes at [www.ratrations.co.uk](http://www.ratrations.co.uk)

For more information on rats' nutritional needs see [The Scuttling Gourmet](#) by [Alison Campbell](#)

and [Ratwise.co.uk](http://Ratwise.co.uk)



## Tip 5

### Rats are prone to illnesses

Rats are prone to a number of serious ailments including, but not limited to, respiratory diseases and various tumours, and it's important to check them every day to make sure everything is ok. Rats can go downhill very fast so you will need to get them to the vet as soon as possible to start any treatment.



## Tip 6

### Find a rat-savvy vet



While most vets are highly skilled at treating common pets like cats and dogs, most vets are not experts with smaller animals such as rats.

It's therefore necessary to find a genuinely rat-savvy vet to ensure you always get the correct treatment for your rats. For this you may have to travel.

Before getting your rats, consider whether you will be able to afford all the future vet bills they may need.



## *Tip 7*

### **Rats are a 2-3 year commitment**

Rats live, on average, for 2 - 3 years so when you take them on its important to consider whether you will be able to commit to them for their whole lives.

Children can often lose interest in pets, so it's also important for parents to be willing to undertake the commitment of the rats care in that case.



## *Tip 8*

### **A rat can cost £2,000 in its lifetime**



Despite their small size, rats can be quite expensive to keep. After the initial outlay for housing and accessories, there are ongoing costs for good quality food, bedding and veterinary visits which could add up over their lifetime to £2,000 per rat.

It's important to make sure you not only have the time to commit to your rats' needs but also the financial resources to be able to care for them properly.

## *Tip 9*

# Rats are not easy children's pets

They may be small, but rats have specialised needs and caring for them requires just as much time, commitment and love as caring for a cat or dog. To ensure that all the rats' welfare needs are met, children will need to be carefully supervised in their care of them.



Not all rats will like being handled and some - especially pet shop-bought rats - may never want to be held and won't be the cuddly pets children expect. Children may not have the patience to slowly build up a relationship of trust.

Great care is needed when handling rats - small children handling them roughly or holding them too tight can cause fatal injuries. They can also fall and hurt themselves. When children are handling small animals they need to be supervised to make sure the animals don't come to any accidental harm.



For this reason, while rats may be suitable pets for responsible older children under supervision, they may not make very good pets at all for younger children.

Children will often rapidly lose interest in pets and then parents need to take on the responsibility for their care, for the rest of the animals' lives.



## Tip 10

### A few extra things to consider...

Here are a few more things you should know before deciding if rats are the right pets for you!



Rats scent-mark by leaving a little bit of urine pretty much everywhere they go - including on you. You won't be able to stop this so you need to think about whether you will be OK with this in their free-range area, and when you are handling them.



Rats chew! They will chew holes in everything you give them, including the clothes you wear when you are handling them.



Rats don't live long enough! They are the most wonderful pets which you will fall completely in love with, but they only live around 2 years - 3 if you are very lucky. Are you ready for the cycle of heartbreak that inevitably comes with rat ownership?



## Tip 11

### More research needed!



As with any new species you are considering bringing into your family, if you are considering getting rats as pets it's vitally important to research them thoroughly first.

Thousands of rats go into rescues or are dumped every year because people did not realise what they were taking on when they bought them.

Many others live out their lives with incorrect care and neglect because owners do not fully understand the species.



**DO YOUR  
RESEARCH FIRST**

## Resources

Find out more about rat care at



[Isamurats.co.uk](http://Isamurats.co.uk)

[Ratwise.co.uk](http://Ratwise.co.uk)

[Azuline Rattery](http://Azuline Rattery)



## Tip 12

### Adopt, don't shop

If, after researching rats fully, you are prepared to make the commitment to giving them their forever home, please do consider adopting rather than shopping.



You've heard about puppy mills, but did you know that small animals in pet stores are also often mass-bred for profit with little or no regard for health or the genetic makeup of the lines? They can often suffer from many health issues during their lifetime as a result.

There are hundreds of rats sitting in rescues all over the UK, all waiting and hoping to find new homes and a second chance at a happy life.

In South Devon you may be able to adopt rats in need of homes from:

[Woodside Animal Sanctuary](#)

[RSPCA Little Valley Animal Sanctuary](#)

[South West UK Rat Rescues Group](#)

[Rat Rescue Network UK](#)





*Thank you for reading!*



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