

# Congratulations on your new furry companion!

## Here are some helpful tips for bringing home your new friend.

### DO

- Give your rats a few days to 'settle in' to their new home.
- Talk to/interact with your rats in their new cage.
- Allow your rats to free-roam (couch, bed, desk) while you relax, so they can explore and get to know you at their own pace.
- Use a neutral space (bed, couch, bathtub, etc.) to introduce new rats to existing rats
- Deep clean your rat's cage before combining new/existing rats
- Pick your rats up by scooping under their bellies, and hold them close to your body

### DON'T

- Throw rats together in a communal cage without a proper introduction
- Allow inter-species interaction (ie. Dogs, cats, mice, etc.) It only takes a moment for things to go very wrong!
- Allow bucks & does to interact. A second is all it takes to mate, and does go into heat every 4-5 days.
- Pick up or hold your rats by the tails

### Quarantine

It is always suggested to properly quarantine any new rats before you introduce them to your home, to prevent the spread of diseases. The recommended quarantine period is 1 month, with the rats NOT sharing air space. Rats in quarantine will get lonely, which is why it is recommended that rats are brought home in pairs if possible. If you can't keep them in an entirely different air space for quarantine, keeping them in a different room across the house and taking proper disease-transmission avoidance precautions will suffice. Change any clothing the rats may have come into contact with, wash your hands/arms, etc. before and after handling quarantined rats.

Please keep in mind, rats often get the 'new home sniffles' from the stress of a new environment, though this should clear up within 2 weeks. If not, it is best to consult a vet to rule out a respiratory infection.

## **HOUSING**

While the pet rat community commonly recommends at least 2 square feet of cage space per rat, this can cause issues. Rats are fossorial, meaning they prefer to spend their time on the ground and burrowing, rather than climbing. While rats WILL climb, they can be somewhat clumsy, and are easily hurt in a fall. We recommend between ½ - 1 square foot of cage space per rat.

*Bin cages are constructed from large plastic totes, with large 'windows' cut out of the sides and replaced with hardware cloth. They are very easy to clean and sanitize thoroughly, lightweight, and fully customizable. You can add hammocks, toys, and even connect totes with PVC piping. A large tote can comfortably house 3-4 adult males or 4-5 adult females.*

*Wire cages are a popular choice of enclosure, and they do have their benefits. There are a variety of easy to assemble cages readily available on the market. They have plenty of airflow, and ease of adding enrichment items like toys and hammocks, etc. However, they can retain an odor if not deep-cleaned every few months. Urine and feces can build up on the bars, and seep into the cage joints, where it is difficult to remove. If you do opt for a wire cage, the bars must be no more than ½" apart, or the rat will be able to escape.*

*Tanks and homemade wood-frame cages are not recommended. Tanks do not have adequate ventilation; ammonia is heavier than air, settling at the bottom of the tank so ammonia from urine builds up to dangerous levels in short amounts of time. They are also heavy, and fragile, and can break or shatter if bumped or dropped. Wood-frame cages are difficult to clean, as the urine can soak into the wood and cause a lingering smell. There is also the concern of making sure the cage is completely secure against escapes, from chewing or pulling staples out of the wood.*

Kiln-dried pine bedding is the first choice of Arkham, because it naturally combats odor, and it is very cheap and easy to find. Aspen is also a good bedding option, though it tends to be a bit more expensive and harder to source.

Fleece is not a recommended bedding for rats. While it has become more popular, with many sellers on Etsy and other sites selling cute matching fleece cage sets, it is not ideal. Liquids such as urine or spilled water are not absorbed, but rather bead on the surface of the fleece, or soak through and sit on the surface underneath to rust metal pans, or go rancid on plastic. If you choose to use fleece, you will have to change it out every couple days, and add an absorbent layer underneath to prevent urine sitting in the cage.

Cotton/Paper bedding are not recommended for rats either. Cotton beddings can have small strings that can get wrapped around tiny toes, causing loss of circulation and serious injury. Paper bedding tends to be very dusty, aggravating sensitive respiratory systems, or be ingested which can cause an obstruction. Neither option offers any odor or ammonia control.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

There are a few options when it comes to your rat's main diet. There are a few commercially-available rat food options; Mazuri and Oxbow are the main two, and for good reason. They are nutritionally complete, and formulated especially for pet rats. They do tend to be a bit pricey if you are buying small quantities at a time, and may not be available locally so you might have to order food online which requires a bit of planning ahead. There are rat blocks available at stores such as Walmart or some of the pet chains; these tend to be a much lower quality, but will work in a pinch.

There are a few brands of low-quality dog food that tend to be horrible for dogs, but ideal for rats. They are grain-based instead of meat-based like many of the 'better' dog foods, making them more in line with a rat's dietary requirements. Tractor Supply carries a brand called "Doggy Bag", while Walmart sells "Kal Kan" and "Twin Pet".

There are many commercially available mixes available for rats, though we do not recommend them for your rat's main diet. Rats tend to pick through the mix and eat the tastier parts, and leave the rest, which can lead to unbalanced nutrition. These should be reserved for use as occasional treats.