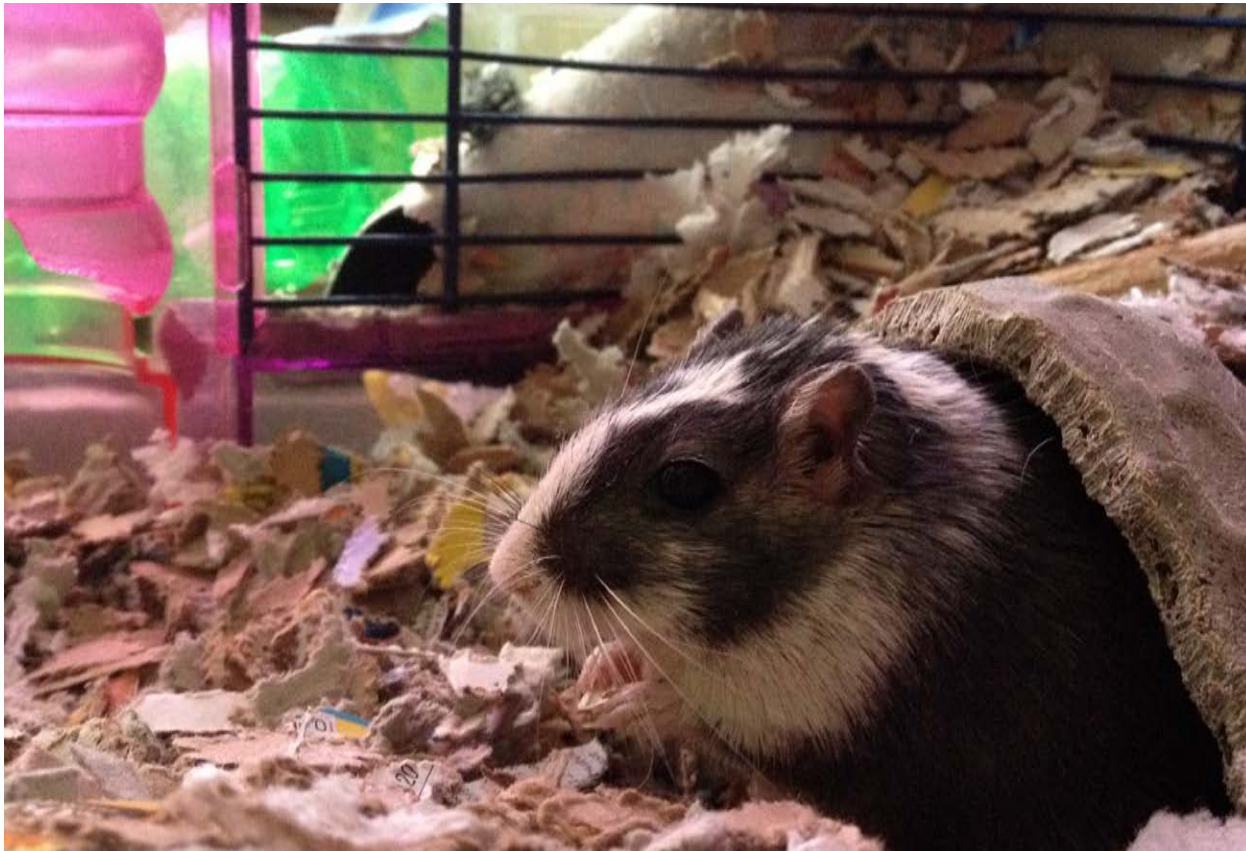


Gerbils

By Abigail Fine



Have you ever heard of a gerbil? The *meriones unguiculatus*, more commonly known as the Mongolian gerbil, are a species of adorable little rodents that are usually kept as pets. Are they good pets? In my opinion, and many others' opinions, yes.



One of the reasons why these cute little creatures make exceptional pets is that they're pretty cheap and easy to take care for. Contrary to popular belief, you don't need to spend ten dollars on a bag of bedding over and over again, just to "suit your gerbils' natural instinct to burrow." Heads up, because your gerbils can actually make their own bedding! (Ooohh, amazing...) You can just give them a clean cardboard box or tube, and your gerbils will start chewing! Don't worry, it's completely safe! And while they're chewing, they're also keeping their teeth at a normal length. If they don't chew, their teeth will grow to an unhealthy length and cause problems. So instead of spending a ton of money on some factory-made bedding, your gerbils can just make their own bedding and you'll all benefit!





Gerbils are also very social animals, so when kept in pairs, they don't require that much attention, like a dog or cat would. So if you have a busy schedule, don't feel guilty because your gerbils are not getting attention, because these are not the most high-maintenance pets ever. If you ever decide to get gerbils in pairs though, I would recommend getting two females. If you got two males, (this has happened to my gerbils,) they will fight, and there may be some blood drawn in the process. If you got a female and a male, well, you know what would happen. So unless you're a veterinarian, DO NOT get two male or different gender gerbils. Simple enough...

The last reason why these little rodents are just so easy to take care for is that they are not hard to feed. Some things you can feed them are: Oats, cottage cheese, regular cheese, lettuce, and I could keep going for hours, but I'm not going to. Or you could just buy your gerbils gerbil food from the store.



My second reason why gerbils make great pets is that they are very child-friendly. One way that gerbils are great for kids is that gerbils are usually awake for most of the day. This fits a child's schedule almost perfectly. I mean sure, gerbils take naps, but they get most of their sleep at night. And if you do happen to catch a gerbil sleeping on the job, it's still adorable to watch the (for now) peaceful creatures take a catnap.



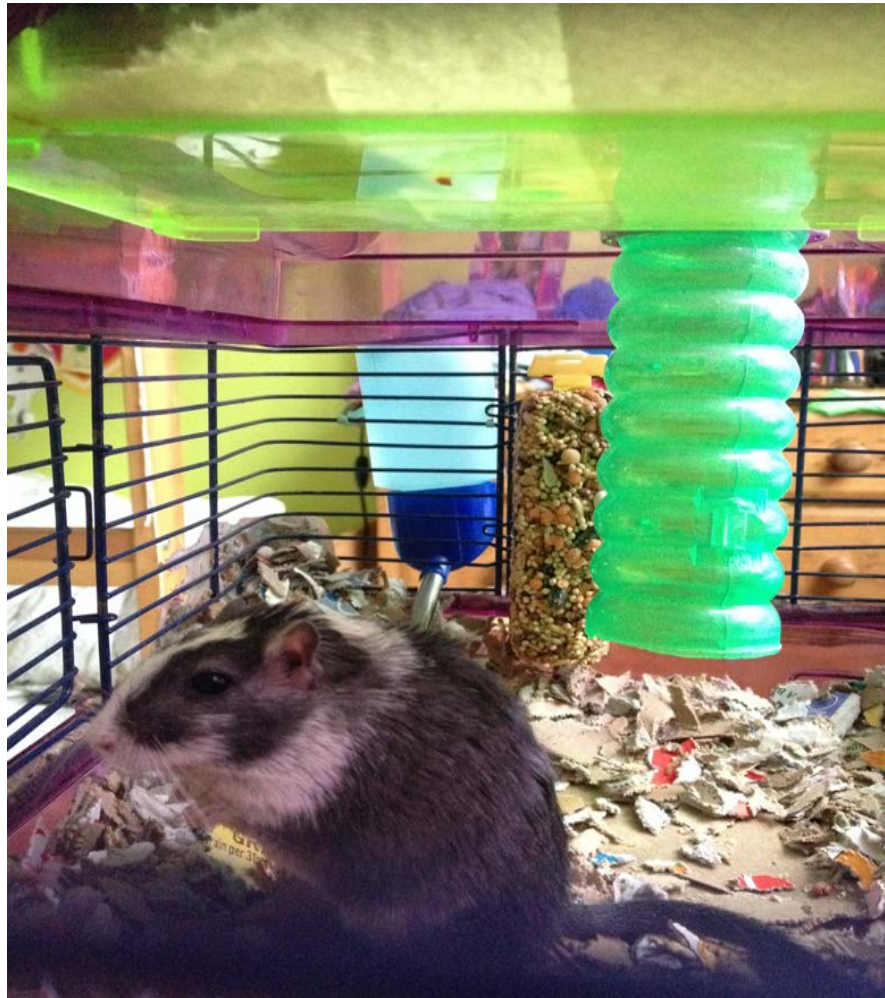


Another way that gerbils are good as pets for kids is that once your gerbils get to know you, you can pick them up and hold them. From many, many personal experiences, I know that little kids and even grown-ups love to pick them up and pet the gerbils' soft pelts.

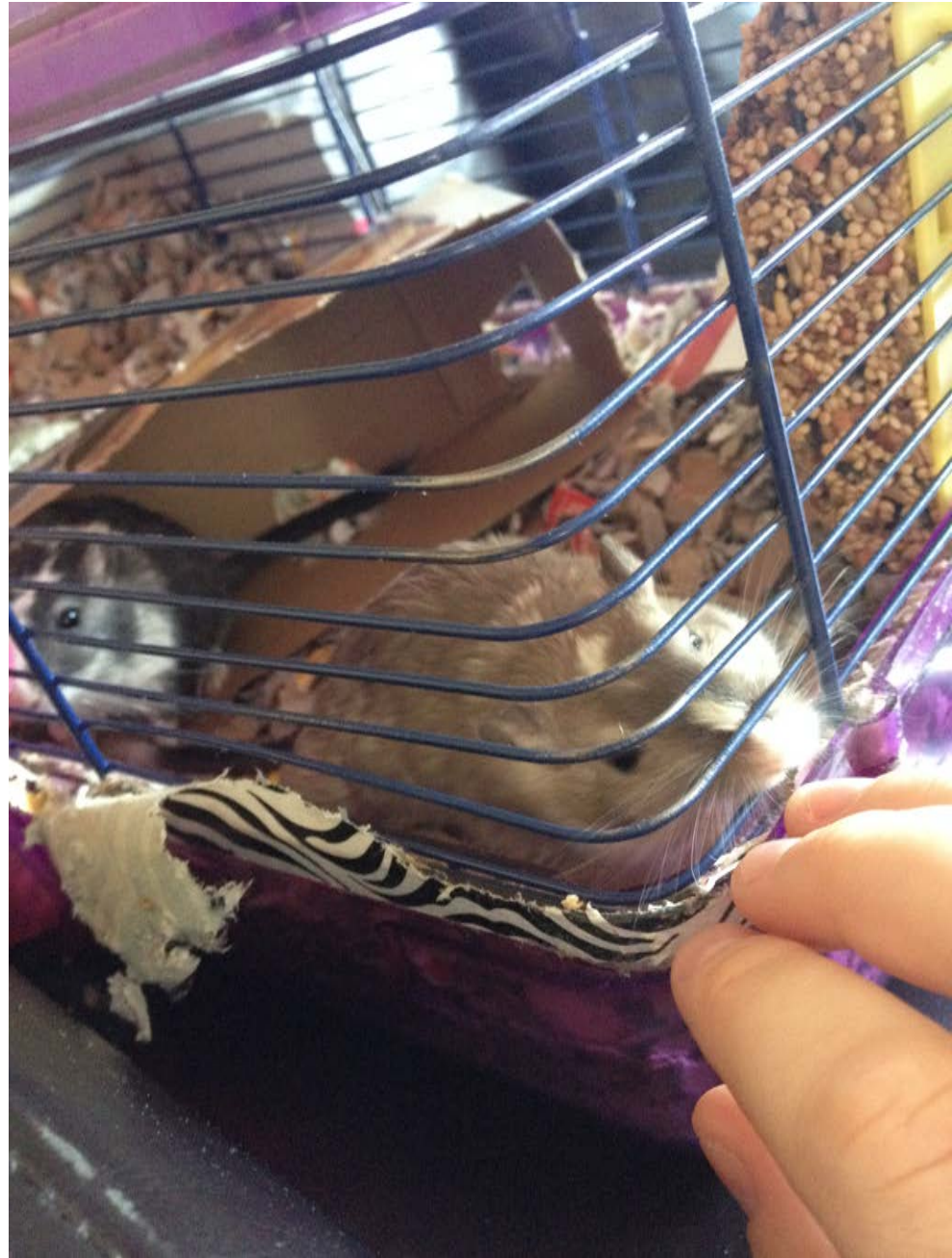


The last way that gerbils are great for kids is that these little rodents are very entertaining to just watch. If you just put them on your dining room table and let them run around, you will find that they will play a sort of tag and climb around. Which brings me to my final point...

My final point is that although these gerbils may be small, they're actually exceptionally smart. These little guys can, according to *Nature Journal*, actually be trained to do many things. When I train my gerbils, (mostly to do small things,) I use raw sunflower seeds as a treat when they do things like come to me when I crinkle the bag the seeds come in. According to *Nature Journal*, a set of six gerbils was trained to recognize a sound to call them for dinner.



Another surprisingly smart gerbil behavior is that, similar to dogs, gerbils can recognize and memorize different scents and smells. For instance, when we put out the gerbils food dish, they recognize the smell and pace over to their food dish. They also recognize human scents, like mine, or my mom's.





If you ever need a small animal as a pet, I would strongly suggest getting a gerbil. (or two!) These adorable little rodents are child-friendly, very smart, and not that expensive to take care of. Trust me when I say this, mostly because I have two gerbils of my own, gerbils are awesome!