

Dwarf Hamsters (Robo, Winter White, Chinese, Russian)

Genus *Phodopus*



LIFE SPAN: 2-4 years
AVERAGE SIZE: 3-4 inches

PET SUPPLIES PLUS
GREAT PRICES. NO STRESS.

written by an expert in the pet care industry and approved by a qualified exotic veterinarian

the information on this care sheet is a basic overview and not a substitute for veterinary care. For more information and to find a qualified exotic mammal veterinarian, go to www.AEMV.org

WILD HISTORY: Dwarf hamsters are hardy creatures that come from dry areas that experience extreme temperature fluctuations, such as Mongolia, Siberia, China and Kazakhstan. Dwarf hamsters in the wild can live in areas as different as semi-deserts to wooded forests. The typical dwarf hamsters that are pets in the United States are captive bred.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Dwarf hamsters are stout, round-bodied rodents with small dark eyes and tiny, stubby tails. They have small, furred paws with small claws. Dwarf hamsters have internal cheek pouches, which extend from their mouth to nearly as far back as their hind legs. Like deer and many other animals, hamsters have "harderian glands" behind their eyes. Aside from lubricating the eyes, these glands aid in the detection of light and the maintenance of body temperature. Hamsters make a variety of sounds to communicate with one another. Many of these sounds are ultrasonic, so are not audible to the human ear

NORMAL BEHAVIOR & INTERACTION: Very social & engaging, hamsters are generally very gregarious. Unlike their larger, Syrian cousins, dwarf hamsters are happiest living in groups of two or more. It is sometimes difficult to introduce new dwarf hamsters to each other, so it is best to purchase them at the same time from the same cage at the pet store. Also be sure to purchase groups of the same sex, as dwarf hamsters reproduce readily. Dwarf hamsters are easily tamed, even if they are difficult at first. The more you handle and work with your hamster, the tamer it will become. A hamster will bite in defense if it feels threatened. You may want to interact with your hamster after dusk, as it will be more willing to cooperate since it is a nocturnal animal. Place your hamster's cage in a place in the home where it will be around the family, yet protected from direct light, drafts and excess noise during the day. Also be sure it is high enough to be out of reach of dog noses and small children's hands. Hamsters are prey animals and can feel threatened by large bodies looming above them or in their faces.

Like many rodents, hamsters have cheek pouches, which in the wild allow them to hoard and transport food. Although their food is readily available to them in captivity, many hamsters still instinctively pack their food into their pouches and run frantically around their cage to find a hiding place.

FEEDING: Omnivores (Vegetarians / grain eaters) and will eat an occasional insect such as a cricket or mealworm. Commercially prepared hamster diets are available. Plain pellet diets are best, as they offer a complete balanced diet. Diets that include seeds and treats seem to be nicer for your pet, but many hamsters will only pick out the treats and not eat the pellets. This may result in malnutrition and obesity. You can feed seeds as a treat for your pet and use them for training and taming purposes. Be sure to replenish the food in your hamster's cage often. Hamsters are notorious for food hoarding. They will take food to various places in the cage for storage, bury it and often forget about it. For this reason it is important to spot clean your hamster's cage daily to remove foods that may become spoiled. Seeds and pellets can remain in their hiding spots.

FRESH FOODS: Healthy, fresh fruits, vegetables and grains can also be fed to your hamster. Offer these treats in small amounts, as they may cause diarrhea if fed in too great an amount.

**** Please avoid feeding sugary treats such as yogurt drops or honey sticks to your hamster. These treats contain far too much sugar and can cause illness.**

SUPPLEMENTS: If fed a balanced diet, supplements are not necessary for your hamster.

WATER: Clean, fresh water must always be available and should be changed daily. All water should ideally be free of fluorine, chlorine and heavy metals. We recommend that you use unflavored bottled drinking water or bottled natural spring water. If tap water is used, you should treat it with a water conditioner. If you do not want to chemically de-chlorinate the water, you can leave an open container of tap water out for at least 24 hours with exposure to ultraviolet light. Do not use distilled water, which can cause severe medical problems, since it lacks minerals that are essential to important body functions.

RECOMMENDED SUPPLIES:

- Cage
- Water bottle
- Food bowl
- Food
- Bedding
- Hide house
- Running Wheel
- Chew toys

HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT: Many different types of hamster cages are available at the pet store. Do not buy the smallest cages thinking that because the pet is small, it does not need much room. Hamsters love to run and explore. A larger cage will allow it to create several "rooms" as hamsters will do. They like to have separate bedrooms, food storage areas and play areas. A ten gallon glass tank is an excellent sized cage for two to three dwarf hamsters. These cages will allow you to choose different toys and hiding places that can be interchanged within the cage. Choose several hiding places, a solid walled plastic wheel and chew toys. Small cardboard boxes will also be appreciated. When designing your cage set-up, be sure to include a mesh wire top for the cage that can be secured snugly with cage "locks". Hamsters are escape artists and will find a way to escape if it is

possible. The plastic cages with tube accessories are also excellent cages that all hamster types usually enjoy. Your hamster will undoubtedly chew on parts of this type of cage, so monitor the cage daily so your pet does not chew an escape hole.

HIDE HOUSE: The hide house is extremely important to the hamster, and will most likely become your pet's main 'bedroom'. Two to three (depending on cage size and number of hamsters) will be appreciated even more. Hamsters will not often relieve themselves inside the hide house or 'nest', so it is not necessary to disturb the nest to clean it daily. Cleaning of the hide house can be done during the more intensive bi-weekly cleaning.

WATER BOTTLE: A full water bottle must be available at all times; refill it daily. Be sure to clean out the inside of the bottle thoroughly during the more intensive cage cleaning sessions every week. Water bottles will often become slimy inside, which will in turn harbor harmful bacteria. Your pet will most likely chew a bottle that is inside the cage, so be sure to attach the bottle to the outside of the cage. Check the straw daily for any blockages to make sure your pet always has access to the fresh water. If you cannot place the bottle on the outside of the cage, purchase a metal water bottle guard. This will keep him or her from getting to the bottle.

BEDDING: We recommend an aspen bedding or soft recycled newspaper bedding such as "Carefresh". Neither of these choices will cause allergic reactions or respiratory distress and it is easy to clean. **DO NOT use cedar chips, as they contain dangerous phenols, which are toxic to your pet.** Place enough bedding in the cage so your pet can happily tunnel underneath it. Spot clean your pet's cage daily by simply removing the soiled portions of bedding.

TOYS: Several types of toys should be available to your hamster. Chewing toys such as wooden hamster toys (available at the pet store), hide houses, wheels, "run-about" (clear plastic balls for your hamster to run around the house in), cardboard boxes, paper towel tubes and dried, untreated fruit tree branches are all excellent toys for your hamster. Hamsters must chew constantly in order to wear their teeth down, which grow on a continual basis. Therefore, toys that allow the hamster to chew and wear those teeth down are invaluable. Stick to toys bought at the pet store, as these are generally made of pet-safe materials.

CAGE TEMPS: Normal room temperature (60-70F).

DUST BATHS: Like chinchillas, dwarf hamsters love to take dust baths. Dust bath sand is available at the pet store; it is a fine grain sand ideal for small mammals. Pet stores also offer small dust bath containers for dwarf hamsters. These containers are generally made of glass or plastic with a roof and small opening in the front to contain the sand while the hamster is flailing about inside. The dust helps keep oils controlled and the pet clean. Offer the dust bath to your pet inside his cage at least once a week. It can be removed from the cage when the hamster is finished.

HABITAT MAINTENANCE: Daily maintenance should consist of spot cleaning by removing soiled substrate, cleaning water bowl thoroughly and wiping glass clean. The entire cage should be cleaned thoroughly at least once every month with:

- A mild dishwashing liquid in warm water
- Vinegar & water (1:8) or bleach and warm water (1:32)
- Cage "furniture" should also be scrubbed clean with the same dilution.
- Rinse off all soap and bleach thoroughly with plain water before re-introducing your pet to its enclosure.

- NEVER MIX VINEGAR AND BLEACH - IT CREATES A TOXIC SOLUTION

GROOMING & HYGIENE: As long as dust baths are offered, it is not necessary to clean or bathe your hamster. They are extremely neat and will groom themselves! If it seems as if your pet has not been grooming him or herself, he may be ill. Contact your exotic pet veterinarian.

SIGNS OF A HEALTHY ANIMAL: Healthy hamsters have a rounded, full body and smooth, even fur with no bald patches. The nostrils, under-tail area, under-chin area, ears and eyes should be clear and free of discharge - fur should not be damp or stained in any way. Your pet should have bright eyes; teeth should be even and well aligned with no staining around the chin; breathing should be even and not labored, with no wheezing or gurgling sounds. Healthy dwarf hamsters are very energetic and busy; although there are nocturnal and may be caught napping during the day. We recommend physical exams every year with an exotic pet veterinarian. If your vet sees your pet regularly, many common conditions that afflict your pet can be caught and treated early.

SOME COMMON PROBLEMS THAT REQUIRE VETERINARY EVALUATION INCLUDE:

HEALTH ISSUE:	PHYSICAL SIGNS:
Bacterial enteritis "Wet tail"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diarrhea, • Wet bottom and tail • Lethargy, irritability • Loss of appetite • Lack of grooming
Pneumonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased respiratory effort, rate • Lethargy • Loss of appetite, weight
Mites, lice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of hair • Bare spots on skin or small red sores • scratching
Traumatic injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open wounds • Lameness
Ringworm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circular ring of missing fur • Might have crusts and scabs • Might be itchy • CAN be transmitted to humans