



Pet Care

Preparing Chickens for Winter

This spring, you brought home a box of happy little chicks and, over the warm months, raised up a flock of backyard chickens.

Here's how to get them ready for the colder temperatures to come this winter and no, it doesn't involve knitting them sweaters.

WINTERIZE THE COOP

Check your coop before cold air sets in and make any necessary repairs, including sealing any gaps that will let out heat. Remember not to reduce air flow too much. That will let ammonia build up. Situate vents toward the roof of the coop so that cold air isn't able to flow in. Ideally, vents will have a hatch that you can open and close to control air flow and also to help keep the coop warm and dry.

USE DEEP LITTER

Chickens naturally huddle together for warmth, but you can help them out by letting bedding material and refuse build up over the spring. By winter, you should have a decent layer of composting material building up on the floor of your coop. That will give off heat and warm your coop naturally.

FEED BEFORE BED

Give your chickens a good meal right before they go to bed. Cracked corn is believed to help keep chickens warmer, and whether or not that's true, what we do know is that they love it. Giving them a tasty treat to digest right before putting them up will help them keep warmer at night. On the coldest days, you can also protect fragile wattles and combs against frostbite with a smear of petroleum jelly.



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BUILD A SUNROOM

Help keep your chickens warm and healthy by building a cold frame out of clear plastic. This will help them keep warm and give them more light, which might help them lay more, particularly if you've noticed a drop off in egg pro-

duction during winter's shorter days. If there's snow on the ground, scatter hay to help them walk around.

ROOST AWAY

Chickens will roost together and keep themselves warm. A good roost

will keep them off the cold ground. Roosts should be at least two or three feet above the ground and there should be enough roost space for all your birds to fit. Check on them in the evening. If there's birds on the ground, you need more roost space.

Canine Dental Care

The American Veterinary Dental College says that the majority of dogs show signs of canine periodontal disease by just three years old.

Periodontal disease is associated with ailments in the kidney, liver and heart as well as just the teeth.

Dog breath doesn't have to be a side effect of dog ownership. You can fight both bad breath and disease by keeping your pup's teeth squeaky clean.

BRUSHING THEIR TEETH

Brushing your dog's teeth is a great way to prevent plaque build up. You don't have to do it every day, but the American Kennel Club says the more you can brush, the better. Get a toothpaste specifically made for dogs. Not only might it come in flavors more palatable to your pup, but it won't contain some ingredients that human toothpaste does that are harmful to dogs. Use a dog toothbrush that it's specifically shaped to fit inside your dog's mouth or a brush that fits over your finger. You can also use dog dental wipes that are made to be rubbed against your dog's teeth to remove plaque.

DENTAL TREATS AND CHEWS

Dog dental treats and chews

are made to remove plaque buildup and often contain ingredients that can also freshen their breath. The act of chewing benefits your dog's oral health because it works to scrape plaque off their teeth. Some chews made from meat also contain enzymes that can help with dental health.

PROFESSIONAL CLEANINGS

The best solution for good oral health is to schedule regular dental cleanings with your veterinarian. It can be expensive as it involves anesthesia, but it allows the veterinarian to make a thorough inspection of your dog's teeth

and address any issues found. February is pet dental health month, and many veterinary clinics offer specials on cleanings around that time.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Other than bad breath, watch for broken or loose teeth, extra teeth or retained

baby teeth, discolorations on teeth, abnormal chewing, drooling, dropping food, reduced appetite, pain around the mouth, bleeding from the mouth and swelling around the mouth.

Be careful when evaluating your pet's mouth; an animal in pain may bite.



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Feline Leukemia Basics

Feline leukemia virus is one of the most common infectious diseases in cats, affecting between 2-3% of all cats in the U.S., the Cornell Feline Health Center says.

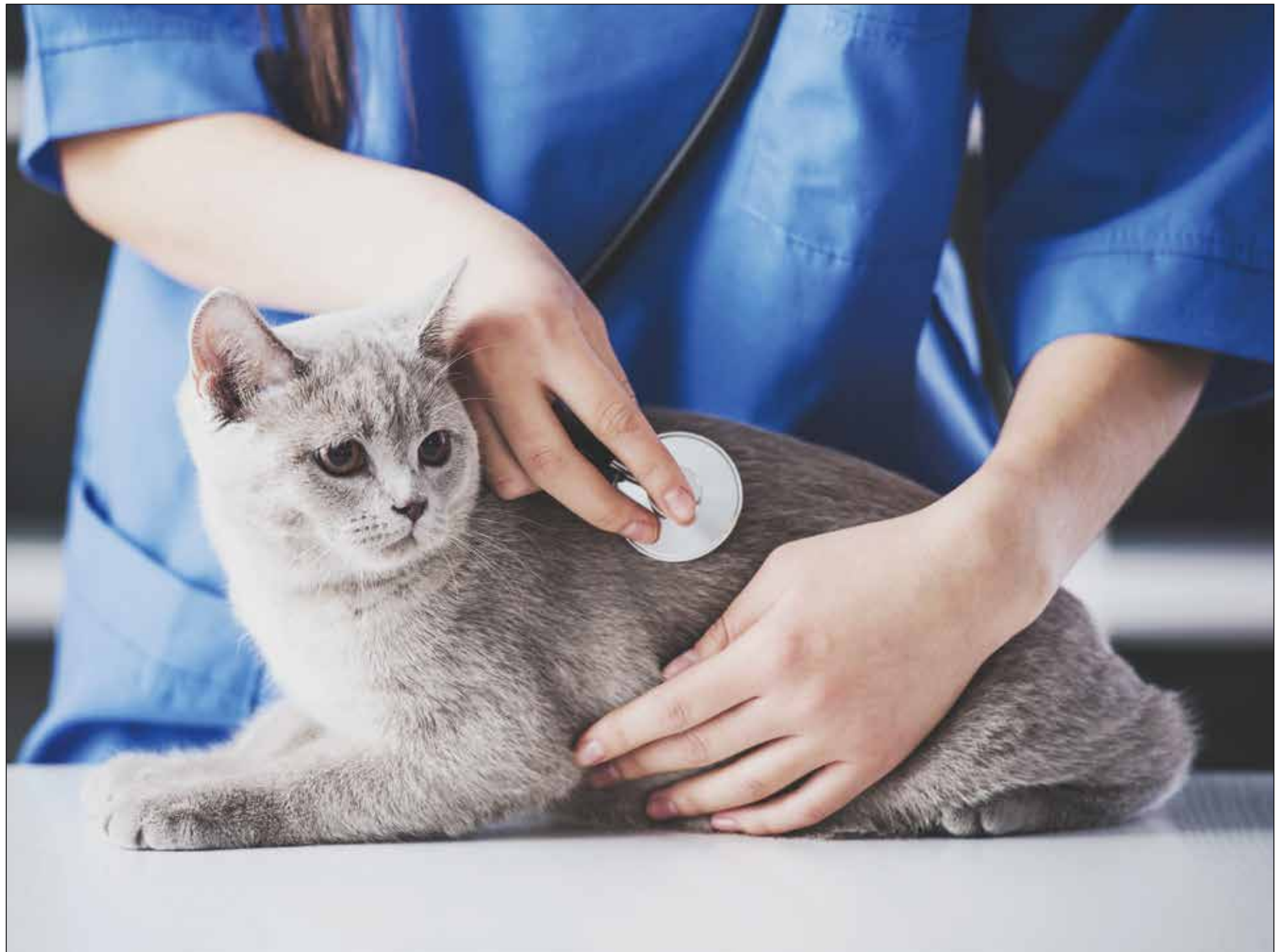
The virus is spread through saliva, nasal secretions, urine, feces and other bodily fluids of infected cats. Kittens are more susceptible to feline leukemia infection than adult cats, but even adult cats can become infected if exposed.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Feline leukemia virus is the most common cause of cancer in cats. It can also cause blood disorders and may lead to immune deficiency that leaves a cat unable to fight off other infections. Some cats may not show any signs of illness, but some signs of feline leukemia virus can include a loss of appetite, progressive weight loss, poor coat condition, enlarged lymph nodes, persistent fever, pale gums, inflammation of the gums and mouth, infections of the skin, urinary infections, upper respiratory infections, persistent diarrhea, seizures, eye conditions and more.

DIAGNOSING FELINE LEUKEMIA

There are two types of blood tests used to diagnose feline leukemia virus, both of which detect a protein component of



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the virus called FeLV P27. An enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, or ELISA, is usually performed as a screening tool in a veterinarian's office. This tests and tests like it detect the presence of free feline leukemia virus particles commonly found in the bloodstream during the early and late stages of infection.

An indirect immunofluorescent antibody assay, or IFA, test is sent out to a lab after a positive ELISA test. It confirms feline leukemia virus and can determine whether the cat has reached the later stages of infection. The majority of cats who test positive on this test are positive for life.

A polymerase chain reaction

test may be needed to determine whether feline leukemia virus has infected the cat's bone marrow.

TREATMENT

There is no definitive cure for feline leukemia virus, although some therapies may decrease the amount of virus in the bloodstream. Vets usually

treat specific symptoms instead of the virus itself. There is an effective vaccine against feline leukemia virus, though it will not protect 100% of cats vaccinated and is not considered a core vaccine. Since the vaccine won't protect every cat, keeping cats from being exposed to strange cats remains the best way to prevent feline leukemia.

Guinea Pig 101

Guinea pigs are small rodents also known as cavy. They are social animals who require daily interaction and have an extensive vocabulary of vocalizations.

When they're very happy, they popcorn, or jump and twirl in the air. There are more than 20 recognized breeds of guinea pig.

Guinea pigs can live for up to eight years with proper care.

GETTING STARTED

You'll need an appropriately sized habitat for your new pig. At minimum, you need about 7.5 square feet per guinea pig. Start with a habitat that's at least three feet by three feet by 18 inches tall.

Also pick up some high-quality guinea pig food, Timothy or other grass hay, treats, bedding, a food bowl and water bottle, a place for your pig to hide, toys, a hay rack, wood chews, mineral chews, a vitamin C supplement, a brush and nail clippers, and cardboard chew tubes.

Guinea pigs are fine at household temperatures, though you shouldn't place them in direct sunlight or allow them to stay in temperatures over 80 degrees. Place about two inches of bedding in their habitat, either paper-based bedding or commercial bedding meant to absorb waste. Avoid wood bedding, which can cause



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gastrointestinal problems. Each guinea pig should have their own place to hide in their enclosure.

FEEDING

A well balanced guinea pig diet includes commercial food formulated specifically for guinea pigs offered in limited quantities. You can also offer Timothy or other grass hay,

limited amounts of fruits and vegetables, and a vitamin C supplement. Give them clean, fresh water in a water bottle and change it out daily.

Chocolate, caffeine and alcohol are toxic to guinea pigs. Also avoid sugary and high-fat treats.

CARING FOR YOUR CAVY

Guinea pigs are great at keep-

ing themselves clean, but you may need to give them a bath with a damp washcloth and mild soap. Brush their fur with a soft brush. If your guinea pig has long fur, brush them a few times a week to prevent hair ingestion and tangles. Clip their nails about once a month.

Guinea pigs may be kept in same-sex pairs if they are raised together. Otherwise, they

should be kept separately. Guinea pigs reproduce quickly, so keep males and females separated. A healthy guinea pig should be active, alert and sociable and communicate by squeaking. Weight loss, discolored teeth, diarrhea, lethargy, drooling and labored breathing are all signs of a health issue and your guinea pig should see a veterinarian.

Ferret Facts

Ferrets are a small, domesticated species of polecat related to the stoat, badger and mink.

They have long, slender bodies and were originally domesticated to hunt rabbits. There are more than 5 million pet ferrets in the U.S. They have a playful, inquisitive nature that make them great pets for the right home.

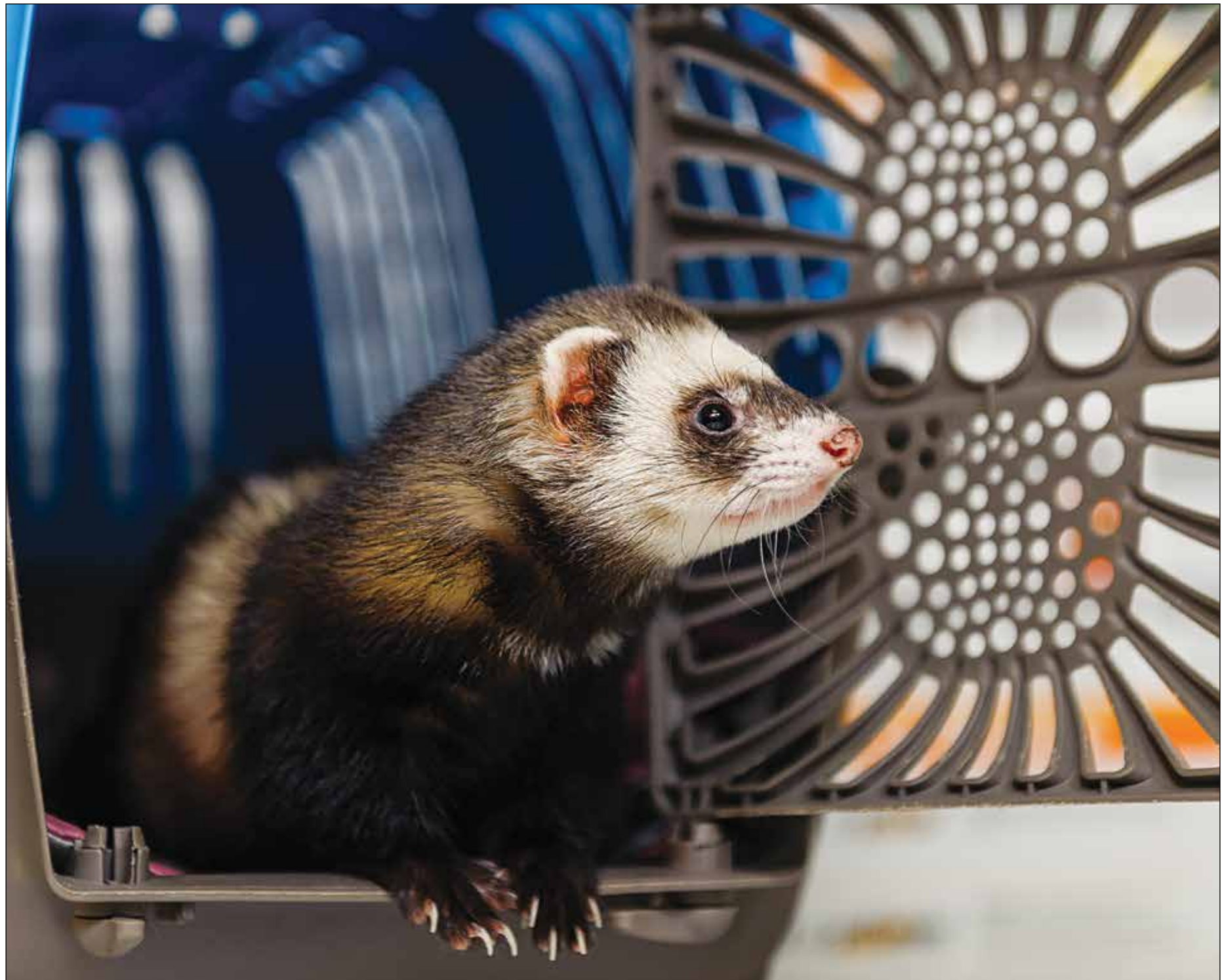
BEFORE YOU BUY

Check local laws on ferret ownership. It may not be legal in your area to keep a ferret as a pet. You should also learn how to properly care for a ferret and determine if you can safely keep one in your home. The CDC recommends that households with children under 5 do not keep ferrets because of biting incidents.

CHOOSING A FERRET

Pick a ferret that is bright, alert and active. They should have a glossy coat that is clean. Take your new ferret to the veterinarian for a complete checkup as soon as you can. If your ferret is ill, let the pet store, breeder or rescue organization where you got the ferret know as soon as possible. Male ferrets tend to be twice as large as female ferrets.

To make good pets, ferrets need to be socialized and handled from a young age. They should also be descented and spayed or neutered before they



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come home with you. Ferrets also require vaccines, both when they are young and throughout their life.

BRINGING YOUR FERRET HOME

Ferrets can be escape artists.

House your ferret in a cage especially made for ferrets that can be closed or securely locked. Remember that ferrets love to chew, and that includes not only on its habitat, but also on electrical cords and other things around your home.

They can also squeeze into small spaces and can get caught in dangerous places, such as in your home's ductwork or under appliances. A good cage is critical to keeping your new pet safe.

You'll also need a good quali-

ty ferret or cat food, appropriate treats, bedding, hiding places, safe toys, a litter pan and litter, a playpen, a harness and leash, and grooming supplies. You'll need to clean its habitat and toys weekly to ensure proper health.

How to Keep Budgies

A budgie, or parakeet, is one of the most popular pets in the world.

This tiny bird is can be trained to do tricks and even mimic human speech, making them an ideal companion for many people.

WHERE THEY COME FROM

Budgies are one of the smallest of the true parrot species and are native to Australia. There's also a larger English budgie, bred specifically for the show and pet trade. English budgies are usually longer than Australian budgies and have larger heads and puffier feathers around their faces and crowns.

WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE

The natural budgie color is a yellow-green combination, but they also come in white and blue, a color combination bred for the pet trade. Most budgies are tiny, averaging about 7-8 inches from tip to tail. English budgies can get up to 10 inches.

HABITS

In the wild, these little parrots would spend most of their time searching for food, so they need a large enclosure with plenty of stimulation. The minimum dimensions for a budgie cage are 20 inches long by 12 inches deep and 18 inches high. They should have room for a nest, food, water,



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toys and things to chew on. They should be able to climb the cage for exercise and you should arrange perches so your budgie can comfortably jump between them. Try to make each perch a different size, shape and texture.

Your budgie should always have toys available and, for

maximum stimulation, rotate them every month so they won't get bored. Another necessity is flight time. Getting out of their cage is critical to keeping your budgie happy and healthy. Before you let them take wing, though, make sure your area is clear of anything that can hurt

them. Also remember that they're social birds, so they want to spend their time with you or with another budgie.

Budgies can also learn to mimic their owners. They can learn words, phrases and whistles and, when socialized early, can be easily tamed and loving toward their owners.

DIET

In the wild, budgies forage for seeds and plants. In captivity, they need a healthy diet with pellets or commercial food, vegetables and fruits.

Fresh vegetables such as leafy greens, broccoli, corn and fresh fruits are good choices for budgies.

Setting Up an Aquarium

Fish can be a great addition to your home. The relaxing sights and sounds of an aquarium are well worth the minimal effort it takes and watching your habitat grow and change is a fulfilling hobby.

Here's how to set up your first aquarium.

WHAT YOU NEED

Small aquariums are cute, but when it comes to keeping fish, bigger habitats are really better. Tetra, a leader in aquarium products, recommends starting out with a 20-gallon tank because it's easier to keep balanced and clean.

You'll need a filtration system that provides clean, healthy water, an air pump to add oxygen, a heater for tropical fish and a thermometer to monitor your tank's temperature, lighting, gravel, a water conditioner because tap water isn't a healthy choice for fish, and, lastly, an easy-to-care-for fish. Tetra recommends starting out with a betta, goldfish, mollies, platys, swordtails or cichlids. Talk to your pet store experts about which fish would be right for you.

You can also liven up your tank with accessories, such as faux plants and other decorations. Caves and tunnels can give a fish a place to hide and



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make them feel safe. If you opt for real plants, which can help keep your tank clean and balanced, remember that they also require some maintenance, usually in the form of trimming and fertilizing.

SETTING UP THE TANK

First, wash all the gravel, rocks and decorations you plan to use. Don't use soap or other detergents, which can harm your fish, just warm water. Add

the gravel and other decor to the tank, then fill it about a third of the way full with room temperature water. Pouring the water onto a plate sitting on the gravel will help keep everything in place.

Add a water conditioner according to package directions. Next, connect the air pump tubing. If your air pump has a check valve, you can locate the air pump underneath your aquarium. Otherwise,

place the air pump above the water line. Arrange the plants in your aquarium, ideally to hide your equipment. If you're using live plants, make sure the water is warm enough for them and plant the roots gently below the surface of the gravel, leaving the crown exposed.

Fill the tank to the top of the frame. Add your heater and thermometer and turn it on. Monitor the temperature carefully. Set up your filter and

cycle the tank. This helps to establish colonies of good bacteria that will help you regulate the nitrogen cycle in your tank.

One way to cycle your tank is to add only a few fish, 10-20% of your planned fish, to the tank initially. Test your water regularly and be prepared to do some extra water changes if the ammonia and nitrate spikes to high. In about four to six weeks, your tank will be fully cycled and you can add more fish.