

## **FERRET Enclosures and Cages**

A ferret cage or enclosure is not easily defined in height, depth and width as the requirements will vary depending on the number and size of the ferrets that you own.

What is constant is that the enclosure must allow your ferret(s) to display natural behaviour whilst incorporating security to protect your ferret from external threats whilst also ensuring it cannot escape or harm itself.

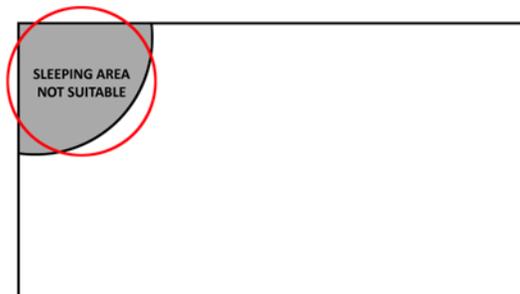
An enclosure must incorporate various environments necessary for your ferret to live comfortably; these include an area to sleep, an area to eat and drink, an area to use as a toilet and also an area to play safely. These areas can reside on a single level or be spread over a number of levels as long as safety is considered.

### **Indoor cages.**

Whilst a number of commercial cages are available in pet shops, department stores and also online, it is necessary to consider that whilst these may offer security for your ferret, do they offer an environment that they can live in? A small female (jill) ferret may be content in a cage with moderate dimensions over a number of levels whereas a larger male ferret (hob) could suffer from anxiety and stress from being caged.

The cage has to allow the various areas that were mentioned above and these cannot be compromised; food cannot be practically placed in the same area as the where the ferret goes to the toilet and a reasonable distance needs to be maintained for sanitary and practical reasons. In comparison the sleeping area needs to be safe and large enough to accommodate the number of ferrets that you keep.

A number of indoor cages utilise small shelf-like attachments to place a bed for your ferret however this is not considered adequate nor is the single provision for a hammock or an anchored open bed. A sleeping area needs to be dark, protected from draughts and the cold and also of a size that can support your ferret(s). It is preferred that a single area where the bedding can be situated and supported for its entire size.



It is also necessary to understand that the ferret will require an area to use as a toilet and this will need to be kept separate from its eating area (to the best of the owner's ability and patience as some ferrets do not define these boundaries themselves). It is suggested that within a multi-tiered cage the bottom level is exclusively used as a toilet area as this regularly employs the use of a tray which is easily cleaned and can be lined with wood shavings or another litter substitute. It is important that the likes of wood shavings are dust free and are not incorporated into the bedding area; another reason to ensure the cage is big enough to allow separate areas.

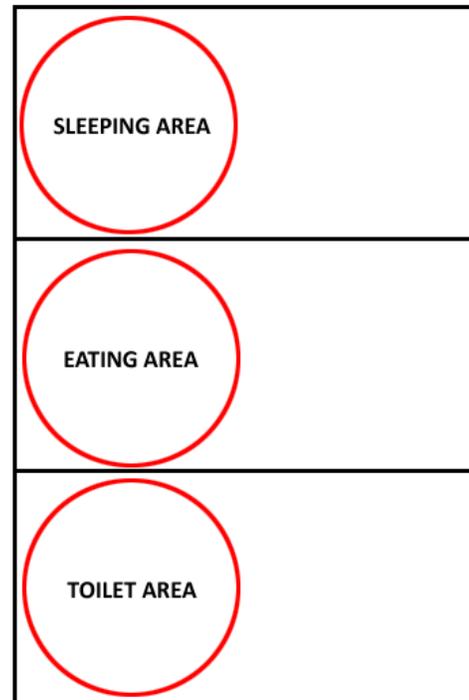
The toilet area should be cleaned daily and then disinfected / cleaned with an appropriate cleaner on a weekly basis to reduce smell and the risk of infection.

The ferret's eating and drinking area does not need to be a large area as there are products such as gravity feeders that attach to the sides of cages along with water bottles and bowls. Ideally the area around the feeding 'zone' should be kept tidy and of a design that can be cleaned and tidied easily. Spilt water or liquids should not be allowed to run or penetrate into bedding areas making them damp and uncomfortable.

It is our organisation's assessment that the preferred indoor cage is of a design which is spread over multiple levels (3 if not more) as this allows all necessary areas / zones to be incorporated.

Tubes and access between levels can enrich the ferret's environment and also give them additional areas to hide and play.

The important thing to never to forget is that the cage is not the permanent home of your ferret(s) and is only a place for them to sleep securely whilst you are away or cannot supervise them. A ferret will require a much larger area to exercise and interact with you or other ferrets which in turn will need to be safe and appropriate for your ferret. On average a ferret will need approximately 2 hours outside of their cage to explore and exercise and this should not be a single session. Your ferret will be much happier given a larger play area and time to interact with you and their own kind.



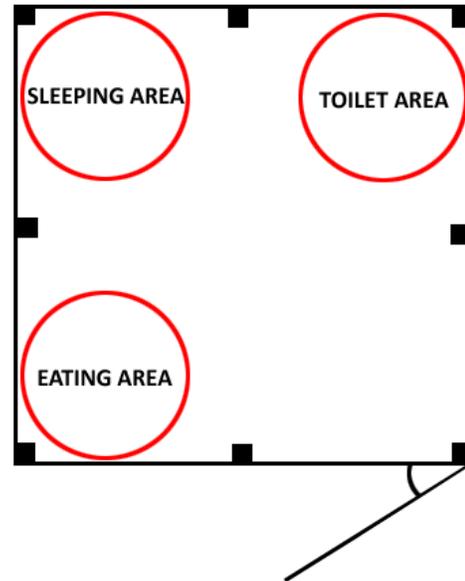
### **Outdoor enclosures and exercise areas.**

Ferrets have lived in the UK climate for approximately 2000 years so given the appropriate consideration they can happily live and thrive in an outdoor enclosure.

When building an outdoor enclosure it is worthwhile making it as large as area that you can permit but keeping it within a manageable size; whilst a 5m square enclosure is very attractive when filled with pipes and tunnels, cleaning such an enclosure will take time so please operate within your means.

The most basic of enclosures can be made from 1m (w) x 2m (h) meshed panels (approx 3' x 6') which are available from garden centres, fencing suppliers or suppliers who make bespoke aviaries or animal enclosures. By linking a number of similar panels together and creating a 2m x 2m x 2m (6' x 6' x 6') area this will create an adequate enclosure with one of the panels hinged and secured with a hasp and padlock to create a door.

How you furnish your outdoor animal enclosure is entirely a personal decision however the required areas remain the same; a toilet area, a feeding area and a sleeping area are all required.



It is only as part of a larger enclosure can a manufactured rabbit hutch or similar sleeping area be considered suitable. **A RABBIT HUTCH ON ITS OWN IS NOT SUITABLE OR PRACTICAL FOR EVEN ONE FERRET.** When situated in a protected corner of the larger enclosure, the hutch offers an acceptable sleeping area however it is advised to raise the hutch from the floor by putting it on legs and also removing the mesh front to allow an open area for your ferret to rest and observe. A ramp or tube from the raised hutch to the ground is the best means of entrance and exit for your ferret(s).

A commercial plastic litter tray which has a suitable weight in it (a house brick for instance) makes an ideal water trough / tray as it will be difficult to tip over and gives plenty of volume for more than one ferret. They are also very easy to clean and can be replaced at minimum cost.

A purpose designed small animal gravity feeder is considered an alternative to an open food tray however ferrets will dig into both and likely move their food around to where they want it. Options are available from all good pet shops and also online.

Consideration should be given to the enclosure's roofing and flooring. The area needs to be protected from adverse weather but also allow ventilation. An area which is shaded is advisable as ferrets do suffer from heatstroke. A number of solutions are available; corrugated clear plastic is one option as is a felted roof. One would obviously let through more light than the other therefore maybe a 50/50 split is worth considering.

The floor of the enclosure needs to be solid; concrete in the form of paving slabs or one large concreted area. This ensures the ferret cannot dig under the meshed panels and also makes cleaning easier.

If your outdoor area has a known prevailing wind or the rain is regularly blown from a particular direction, consider adding additional protection to that side of the enclosure. Outdoor T&G shiplap fencing is cost effective and long lasting. Shielding the enclosure will also protect from frost in the winter and sun in the summer

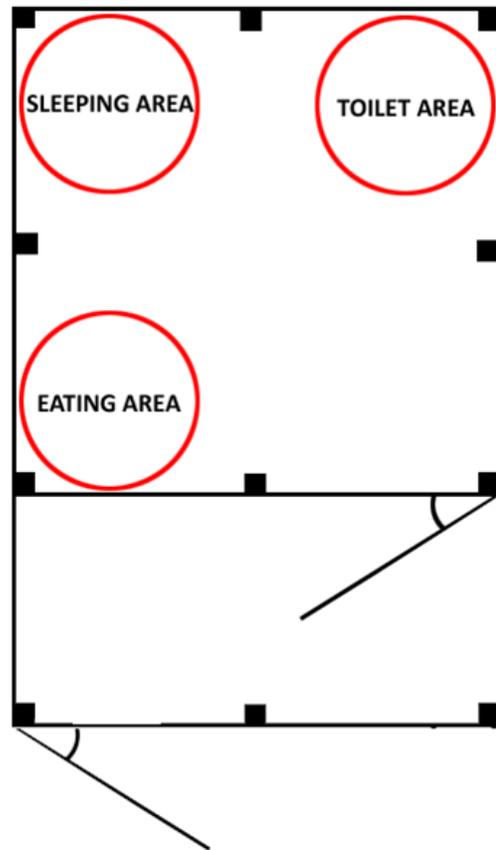
More elaborate enclosure designs are possible with the addition of more meshed panels. Some owners find it beneficial to have a security area that they can step into before then open the main enclosure to prevent the ferret(s) from running out and escaping. This simple addition can be seen in the illustration to the right. The same effect can also be achieved by the addition of a small fenced area around the front of the enclosure.

### **Conclusion**

For the comfort and welfare of your ferret(s), it is worth investing time and all available resources to ensure you provide the best enclosure for them, no matter if it is indoors or outdoors.

The bigger the enclosure or cage the better as this will ensure your ferret is not stressed and also has a safe environment for them to thrive.

Further information and advice is available from our website.





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[www.ferrettrust.org](http://www.ferrettrust.org)

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