Caring for your new *pet rat*.

RENO
RATS
HIGH DESERT RODENTRY

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INTRODUCTION

Congrats on your new furry family member!

At Reno Rats, our mission is to raise healthy, well-socialized pet rats with a focus on exceptional temperament. We believe every rat deserves a loving, enriching home and every adopter deserves confident, friendly companions.

Through proper handling, intentional breeding, and lifetime support, we're proud to share the joy of rat ownership with caring families across Northern Nevada and beyond

Pet rats are intelligent, affectionate, and deeply social animals that form strong bonds with their humans. Unlike many small pets, rats enjoy interaction, can be trained to do tricks, and even come when called.

They're clean, curious, and thrive on companionship, making them a surprisingly delightful addition to the family. With proper care and daily attention, rats make loyal, engaging pets for both kids and adults alike.

At Reno Rats, we're passionate about helping people discover just how rewarding rat ownership can be. These clever, loving animals bring joy, connection, and curiosity into any home. Whether you're a first-time owner or a lifelong rat lover, we're here to support you every step of the way as you welcome your new companions.

-Reno Rats

Proper Care Starts Day One

Day One Checklist:

- Spacious, escape-proof cage (assembled and ready)
- Safe bedding (paper, hemp, or kiln-dried aspen)
- Water bottle or ceramic water bowl (filled and tested)
- Rat block food in a dish (Oxbow, Mazuri, Science Selective, etc.)
- Hideouts and hammocks for security
- Enrichment items: chew toys, cardboard, foraging treats
  - Check out our Amazon store front on renorats.com
- Cage located in a quiet, temperature-stable area (no drafts or direct sun)
- Carrier or transport bin lined with soft material
- Optional: worn t-shirt or fabric to introduce your scent

Settling in Tips:

- It is safe to handle your pets right away. Start bonding and building trust!
- Sit near the cage and talk softly to help them get used to your voice.
- Avoid overwhelming noises, new pets, or other stressors for a couple days.
- Offer treats once they start exploring.
- Keep lighting soft in the evening to mimic their natural active hours.
- Reach out for tips to introduce them to other rats or pets. We are here to help!

Bringing Your Rats Home

What to Expect in the First Few Days

Arrival Day Behavior: What's Normal

Totally normal:

- Hiding or freezing when you approach
- Running from hands or staying in their hide
- Exploring mostly at night
- Light squeaks when picked up
- Gently "nibbling" fingers while exploring (see below)
- Sleeping a lot — stress is tiring!

Not normal:

- Loud wheezing, heavy breathing, or discharge from nose/eyes
- Not eating/drinking at all for over 24 hours
- Severe lethargy or limpness

→ If you're unsure, reach out! Better safe than sorry.

"Nibbling" vs. Biting: What's the Difference?

Young rats often nibble on fingers as a way to explore, especially in a new home where everything smells unfamiliar. This is not aggression and is not a bite. It may feel like a little pinch or tickle.

✨ Think of it like a baby tasting the world with their mouth.
To discourage excessive nibbling:

- Wash your hands before handling (to remove food scents)
- Gently redirect with a toy or treat

True bites are rare and usually fear-based or due to pain. A real bite is fast, hard, and breaks the skin, not something most pet rats will do without serious provocation.

Bringing Your Rats Home

What to Expect in the First Few Days

Bonding Tips for the First Few Days

- Sit by the cage and talk calmly
- Offer treats
- Let them come to your hand on their own
- Avoid quickly grabbing from above
- Place a worn shirt or cloth in their cage to help them get used to your scent
- Use an oversized shirt or hoodie - offer them your sleeve or hood to hide in
- Wear a scarf for them to burrow into
- Being close to you and learning your scent promotes bonding and a sense of security and safety
- The more you handle them the faster they will settle in and learn to trust you

What Progress May Look Like

- Day 1–2: Nervous, hiding, sniffing from a distance
- Day 3–5: Accepting treats, approaching bars, more active
- Day 6–10: Climbing on hands, following you during play
- 2+ weeks: Seeking interaction, riding on shoulders, grooming you

CAGE SETUP

Rat Cage 101:

Cage Recommendation:

We strongly recommend the Critter Nation cage (Single or Double unit). It's the gold standard for pet rats: easy to clean, easy to decorate, has great floor space, and the doors open wide for full access. It's a worthy investment for any rat parent. All cages pictured here are Critter Nation cages.

Budget - Friendly Option:

If the Critter Nation is out of your price range, the Vevor or Habutway small animal cage (available on Amazon) is a popular budget-friendly option. It offers decent space and similar features, but the build quality and ease of cleaning don't quite match the Critter Nation. Still, it's a workable setup for many adopters. You can find it. linked on our website in our Amamzon storefront.

Floor Space Matters Most

Rats are ground dwellers who enjoy running, playing, and lounging. Prioritize floor space over height. A long and wide cage is better than a tall one with limited usable area. Avoid cages marketed for ferrets or chinchillas if they lack flat shelves or safe surfaces.

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CAGE SETUP

Rat Cage 101:

Bedding:

- **Paper-Based Bedding**: Brands like Oxbow Pure Comfort, Kaytee Clean & Cozy, and Small Pet Select are soft, absorbent, and safe for rat respiratory systems.
- **Aspen Shavings (kiln-dried)**: May be slightly dustier than paper but is better with ammonia build up
- **Fleece Liners:** Great for older rats or supervised time, but require frequent laundry and a proper absorbent layer underneath.
- **Avoid:**
  - **Pine or Cedar Shavings**: These contain aromatic oils that can cause severe respiratory problems.
  - **Scented Bedding**: Artificial scents can irritate your rats' lungs.
  - **Cat Litter, Clay, or Clumping Materials**: Dangerous if ingested and too dusty for delicate lungs.
  - **Newspaper Shreds:** Often too thin and not absorbent enough.

We find its best to put bedding and food on a subscription service like Amazon or Chewy so you never run out of the care supplies you need for your pet. We also do this with food and items that we frequently replace in the rats cages.

CAGE SETUP

Rat Cage 101:

Cage Décor & Enrichment:

- **Easy Enrichment Ideas**

Cage decorating doesn't have to break the bank! Many enrichment items can be found or made at home:

  - **Cardboard Boxes** (shoe boxes, cereal boxes) for hiding and chewing
  - **Shredded Paper or Tissue** for digging, nesting, and burrowing
  - **PVC Pipes,** paper towel rolls, or scrap fabric for tunnels and hammocks
  - **Wooden Chew Items / Pumice Ledges** (for chewing and teeth grinding)

- **Dollar Store Hacks**
  - Plastic baskets, rope toys, and bins can be repurposed into hammocks, platforms, or hideouts.
  - Hang baskets using metal binder clips (also available at the dollar store) to create hanging lounges or platforms.

- **Pet Store Finds**

The bird and reptile sections at your local pet store often have awesome rat-safe items like ladders, coconut huts, and platforms that aren't overpriced like small pet-specific gear often is.

- **Shop Our Favorites**

We've curated our most-loved cage décor, toys, and hammocks on our Amazon Storefront —linked directly on our website at www.renorats.com. These are items we've tested and trust in our own rattery.

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DIET AND FEEDING

Feeding Tips

Rats are omnivores with complex nutritional needs. A balanced diet keeps them healthy, active, and long-lived. Below is a comprehensive breakdown of what your rats should (and shouldn't) be eating, how often to offer fresh foods, and how to set up their hydration properly. 💡 **Lab blocks should make up about 75–80% of your rat's daily intake.**

Staple Food:

Your rats' primary diet should consist of a high-quality lab block or pellet, which ensures they're receiving the essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals needed for long-term health. These blocks are nutritionally balanced and prevent selective feeding (where rats pick out just their favorites from mixes). Use a scatter feeding or foraging method (hide blocks or bits of food around the cage) to encourage natural behaviors.

Recommended Brands:

- **Oxbow Essentials Adult Rat Food** – Trusted, widely available, and veterinarian-approved.
- **Mazuri Rat & Mouse Diet** – A breeder-favorite with consistent formula and good protein/fat balance.
- **Science Selective Rat Food** – A solid UK-based brand that's also widely used in the U.S.

Make sure to keep your baby rats on a young rat/mouse formula until at least 6 months old to ensure proper nutritional needs.

Water:

Fresh, clean water must be available to your rats 24/7. Rats will dehydrate quickly without access to water, which can become a medical emergency.

Best Practices:

- Ensure they always have access. - check daily
- Glass bottles are highly recommended because:
  - They're more durable and chew-proof
  - They're easier to clean and sanitize
  - They don't absorb smells or leach chemicals like plastic can
- Clean and refill water daily.
- Mount bottles securely to prevent leaks and check that the ball valve is working—sometimes they can clog.
- We have glass water bottles linked in our Amazon storefront.

DIET AND FEEDING

Feeding Tips

Fresh Foods:

Fresh food add hydration, enrichment, and natural variety to your rats' diet. Offer small portions of vegetables daily, and fruits and extras a few times a week.

Safe Vegetables (daily)
- Leafy greens (romaine, kale, bok choy)
- Sweet potato (cooked)
- Carrots, broccoli, cucumber, zucchini
- Bell peppers, squash, peas, corn

Safe Fruits (2–3x per week)
- Banana, apple (seedless), grapes
- Blueberries, raspberries, watermelon
- Pears, cantaloupe, mango (in moderation)

Occasional Extras (1–2x per week)
- Cooked egg (scrambled or boiled)
- Shredded chicken or cooked ground turkey
- Cooked whole grains (rice, oats, quinoa)
- Plain pasta, mealworms, or cooked lentils

Great for hanging in the cage! Enrichment feeding. Linked. on our website!

⚠️ **Introduce new foods slowly to avoid digestive upset.**

Foods to Avoid:

Some foods are unsafe or even **toxic** to rats and should be strictly avoided:
- **Sugary or processed foods** – Can lead to obesity, diabetes, and tooth decay
- **Chocolate** – Contains theobromine, which is toxic
- **Citrus fruits** (especially for males) – Can cause kidney issues due to d-limonene
- **Raw beans or lentils** – Contain anti-nutrients and toxins
- **Green or sprouting potatoes** – Contain solanine, a toxic compound
- **Onions or garlic** – Can damage red blood cells
- **Sticky foods** (like peanut butter alone) – Choking hazard unless thinned with water/yogurt

When in doubt, look it up—or contact us!

CAGE CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

Cage Cleaning Guidelines

A clean cage is essential for your rats' health and happiness, but over-cleaning can cause unnecessary stress. Rats are highly scent-driven animals and rely on familiar smells to feel safe in their territory. Striking a balance between cleanliness and comfort is key.

Below is a complete breakdown of how often to clean, what to use, and how to handle different types of cage materials.

Daily Spot Cleaning:

To prevent odor and bacteria buildup, perform a quick tidy-up every day:

- **Remove soiled bedding** from litter areas or corners where your rats urinate.
- **Discard uneaten fresh food** to avoid spoilage or mold.
- **Wipe down dirty shelves** or hammocks with a damp cloth or unscented pet-safe wipe.
- **Check water bottles** for leaks and food dishes for debris.

This light maintenance keeps your cage smelling fresh and prevents buildup that leads to health concerns.

Weekly Cleaning:

Once a week (or more often for larger colonies), perform a thorough cleaning:

- Move rats to a secure carrier or free roam area.
- Remove all items from the cage: bedding, toys, hammocks, bowls, litter trays, etc.
- Wipe down the cage interior (walls, bars, shelves) using:
  - Diluted white vinegar solution (1:1 ratio with water)
  - Or a pet-safe cleaner like Rescue, F10, or Nature's Miracle
- Scrub litter pans and trays thoroughly, use a stiff brush for corners.
- Rinse and dry everything completely before reassembly to prevent mildew or bacteria growth.

🚫 Avoid bleach, ammonia, or strong chemical cleaners, these are toxic and irritating to rats' sensitive lungs.

CAGE CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

Cage Cleaning Guidelines

Depending on how many rats you have monthly or seasonal deep cleanings will be necessary. Here is how to perform a full breakdown:

Monthly Deep Clean:

- Remove all components including base trays, wheels, and even cage doors (if detachable).
- Disassemble and clean hard-to-reach areas (hinges, corners, bottle holders).
- Use an old toothbrush or bottle brush for cracks and crevices.
- Inspect for rust, wear, or sharp edges that could harm your rats.
- Consider pressure-washing outdoors (weather permitting) or soaking trays in a large tub.

Odor Tips:

- Avoid over-sanitizing, your rats rely on familiar smells.
- Litter train your rats for easier waste management and cleaner cages.
- Provide good airflow in the rat room, stagnant air intensifies odor.
- Keep spare hammocks and liners on hand to swap out midweek if needed.
- Activated carbon air purifiers are great for helping with small animal odors. Our favorites are linked on our website in our Amazon store.
    - 💨 **Levoit Core 300 / 300S**
        - Filters: True HEPA + Activated Carbon
        - Safe for Pets: Yes
        - Room Size: Up to 219 sq ft
        - Quiet Mode: Yes (great for use near cages)
        - Smart Version (300S): App-controlled with air quality monitor
    - 💨 **Winix 5500-2**
        - Filters: HEPA + Washable Activated Carbon
        - Extra: PlasmaWave (can be disabled to avoid ionization)
        - Room Size: Up to 360 sq ft
        - Budget-Friendly

RAISING HEALTHY PETS

Health & Vet Care

Rats are hardy, intelligent animals, but like all pets, they are vulnerable to illness, injury, and age-related conditions. Early detection and access to proper veterinary care are key to a long, healthy life for your rats.

Recognizing Signs of Illness:

Rats are prey animals by nature, and they instinctively hide pain or illness. That's why daily observation and handling are important for catching subtle changes early. Watch for the following red flags:

🚩 **Respiratory Symptoms**

These are among the most common health issues in rats:

- Frequent sneezing
- Wheezing or clicking sounds when breathing
- Labored or rapid breathing
- Excessive red discharge from nose or eyes (porphyrin staining)

Note: Occasional sneezes are normal, persistent sneezing or respiratory distress is not.

🚩 **Behavioral or Physical Changes**

- Lethargy or excessive sleeping
- Sudden disinterest in food, treats, or toys
- Hiding more than usual
- Unusual aggression or squeaking when handled

🚩 **Visible Health Concerns**

- Lumps or swelling (especially around mammary areas)
- Unexplained weight loss
- Hair loss, scabbing, or constant scratching
- Head tilting or circling (possible neurological issue)
- Wet or dirty tail region (possible diarrhea

Recognizing Signs of Illness:

- Perform weekly weight checks, a digital kitchen scale works great. Sudden weight loss is often the first sign of illness.
- Trim overgrown nails as needed (usually every 4–6 weeks).
- Check for overly long teeth, they never stop growing and can require trimming
- Consider annual checkups with an experienced exotics vet, especially for aging rats.

RAISING HEALTHY PETS

Health & Vet Care

Choosing a Vet:

Not all vets are trained to treat rats or other small mammals. When choosing a vet, make sure they:

- List “exotics,” “small mammals,” or “pocket pets” on their website or services list
- Have staff who are comfortable handling and restraining rats
- Understand common rat conditions (e.g., respiratory illness, tumors, abscesses, parasites)
- Have access to appropriate anesthesia and surgical tools for small animals
- Offer emergency care or referral options for urgent needs

local recommendations:

Mountain View Animal Hospital & Holistic Pet Care
Address: 6474 Bonde Ln, Reno, NV 89511
Phone: (775) 853-6900

Animal Medical Center
Address: 855 East Peckham Ln, Reno, NV 89502
Phone: (775) 827-3033

Kreature Komforts Animal Hospital
Address: 2205 Glendale Ave, Suite #117, Sparks, NV 89431
Phone: (775) 356-5524

For Non-Local Adopters
If you're outside of our region, we recommend using the following resources to locate a rat-savvy vet:

- www.AEMV.org (Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians)
- www.NAAE.org (National Association of Avian and Exotic Veterinarians)
- Search "exotic vet near me" and read reviews that mention rat care
- Ask local rat groups on Facebook or Reddit for regional recommendations

STAY CONNECTED & SUPPORTED

Your Journey Starts Now...

Message Us!

If you have questions, concerns, or just want to share cute photos of your new rats (we love that!), don't hesitate to reach out:

📧 **Email**: info@renorats.com
📱 **Text**: 408-888-2484
📷 **Follow us on Instagram & Facebook**: @RenoRats
🌐 **Visit**: www.renorats.com

Whether it's your first rat or your fifth, we're always happy to chat.

Keep Learning:

There are countless ways to create a fun, enriching life for your rats,, and inspiration is just a click away:

- **YouTube** – Great for DIY cage hacks, foraging ideas, bonding techniques, and more
- **Reddit: r/RATS** – A supportive community sharing tips, photos, and advice
- **Instagram & TikTok** – Search hashtags like #rattok or #ratcageinspo for creative enrichment ideas

Don't be afraid to experiment and get creative, your rats will thank you for it!

We're so grateful you've chosen to adopt from Reno Rats – High Desert Rodentry. Every rat that leaves our rattery takes a little piece of our heart with them, and we love seeing how they blossom in their new homes.

Thank you for being part of our extended rat-loving family.

Warm wishes and tiny whiskers,

-Reno Rats