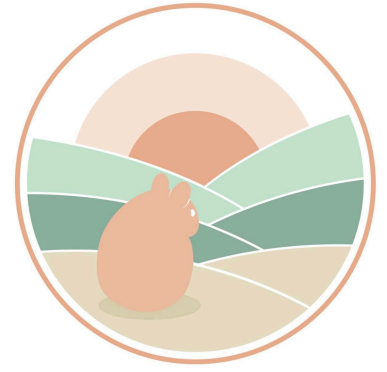


BRIGHT HORIZON HAMSTER RESCUE

CARE GUIDE



Chinese Dwarf Hamster

Cricetulus Griseus

ABOUT US

Chinese hamsters are members of the genus known as “ratlike hamsters”: biologically, they’re quite different from other popular captive hamster species, but they’re the least recognised. They’re regularly mistaken for Russian or Campbells dwarfs.

They originate from the plains of China and Mongolia, and like Roborovski’s hamsters, are evolved to make efficient use of water resources. They are the most territorial captive species.

Chinese hamsters have uncommonly long tails compared to other hamster species, and longer bodies. Males are well known for having especially large scrotums, that can be up to 20% of their body mass.

You can find out more about their wild habits here, but here are some quick facts <https://animalia.bio/chinese-hamster?letter=h>

Average size:	80 to 130mm (20-30mm is tail)
Average weight:	30-45g
Waking cycle:	Nocturnal, though often active at intervals during daylight
Lifespan:	2-3 years (longer in proper care)
Diet:	Omnivore (Chineses need LESS protein than other captive species, and more iron)
Homes:	Deep burrows, solitary though territories are small and close to others

CHINESES AS COMPANIONS

Chinese hamsters are unusual in the UK, though there are some geographic areas where backyard breeding makes them more numerous. Most conventional pet stores do not sell them. Their rarity makes them desirable: hamster lovers often acquire a Chinese for novelty, without properly researching their needs, and assuming their care to be the same as Russian/Campbells.

Chinese hamsters are naturally reclusive, and rarely eat in the open unless they feel completely safe. Their natural burrows are complex, often only have one entrance/exit, and are where they eat, sleep and groom. If a Chinese knowingly lets you watch them eat and clean themselves, you are tolerated, if not yet completely trusted..

To be friends with your Chinese, you need to first create them a living space in which they feel safe, secure, able to fulfil their natural instincts and thrive. Once they feel at home, their natural curiosity will draw them out and they become tame quickly. Pushing them to interact before they choose to can have lasting damage.

We’ll help you make your chinese’s home completely suited to their needs, but first, let’s demystify them!

CHINESE HAMSTERS MUST NOT LIVE TOGETHER IN CAPTIVITY

This is an inarguable fact, often ignored by breeders, pet shop sellers and owners, with tragic results.

In the wild, Chinese hamsters live in solitary burrows. They build their burrows close to other Chinese territories, which has in the past created the false impression that they live in colonies. Chinese mark their relatively small territories with their strongly scented urine, and defend it fiercely.

If forced to share a cage, Chinese hamsters will take their own version of a territory - as much of the cage as they can - and once boundaries are established, they will remain, in a permanently stressed and fearful state, in that small space. Forays into each others' space can end in fatal fights; the very best outcome is every hamster surviving, in a traumatised state, without harming each other. This affects health and lifespan: in labs, cohabiting hamsters who survive to natural death have a hugely reduced life expectancy.

MATING

Chinese hamsters only ever come together briefly, and only to mate: courting can just as easily end in a serious fight as a pregnancy, and the males are not welcome on the female's territory after mating.

Chinese hamsters are incredibly easy to sex. Males have huge scrotums, very visible in any pose. Their testicles are tucked inside, and are protected by the tough skin of the scrotum. They become visible occasionally, when the hamster is relaxed or can smell a female. Chinese hamster pregnancies are 18-21 days: pups are weaned at 3 weeks, and sexually mature at 6 weeks but unlikely to choose to mate until 4 months old. The mother will evict her offspring from the burrow at 6-8 weeks: the youngsters then need to survive their neighbours' aggressive defence of their territories to find a spot to establish their own territory.

SMALL HAMSTER, SMALL SPACE?

The complete opposite.

In nature, Chinese hamsters find and aggressively hold a territory large enough to provide them with enough food. In an arid landscape this needs to be a large space, and there are constant fights at the boundaries. They've evolved to respect urine markers, and from what little research has been done into this, they will mark their cages at their furthest corners, and only then settle.

In smaller cages, they are more likely to spend most of their time hiding: their instincts tell them that they're not safe and don't have enough resources, but they have nowhere to expand to and become stressed. They will also pee a lot more, which causes issues with ammonia buildup and ammonia burns, as well as encouraging the overconsumption of water, which can damage their kidneys.

Chinese need at least 100 x 50cm of unbroken floorspace, just like all other captive hamsters.



HOW DO I CREATE A PERFECT CHINESE ENCLOSURE?

The minimum requirements, and a little more detail:

100 x 50cm+ enclosure: bigger is ALWAYS better.

Barless highly recommended, or under 7mm bar width, with screening so the bedding can be deep. Chinesees are climbers!

Climbing enrichment: Chinesees have good grip and enjoy climbing. Safe natural branches over soft substrate are ideal.

28cm+ wheel: Chinesees have long bodies and need a larger wheel than other dwarf species

Large sand area: this replicates their natural environment and they love bathing, digging and rolling in it

At least 30% deep burrowing substrate (30cm minimum): Chinesees build deep and complex underground burrows

Substrate that holds tunnels: a mix of soft (eg: Kaytee), Megazorb and hemp (eg: Aubiose) holds burrows perfectly

Moss: Chinese hamsters love to collect and nest with moss. Provide plenty of hamster safe moss: we can help find this.

Multiple hides/clutter: Chinesees don't stay out in the open a lot and feel safest where they know they can easily shelter

A varied, optimal diet: we can help you to get this right - protein levels are often too high in dwarf food mixes



CHINESE HAMSTER TIPS FROM THE BRIGHT HORIZON FOSTER TEAM

Chinesees love coco soil, a big deep digging box goes down well

Haku can't resist sunflower seeds!

Ginny is always climbing on her bamboo root - they need some sort of branch to climb

Ron hangs onto my fingers when he wants to stay out - their grip is amazing

Leave chicken and egg out of what you offer them fresh: dried crickets are better for protein

Chinesees have a distinctive smell, it's really comforting

Kushina likes taking all her food into her sand so I put a hide in there, she uses that