

Fancy Mice as Pets

When people think about pet mice they inevitably think about “white mice”, but in fact there are well over 40 varieties. Exhibition quality mice, which are the “thorough-breds” of the mouse world, can be found in exotic shades such as Sable or Pearl, Cinnamon or Himalayan, Blue or Silver. They are as far removed from the common house mouse as a racehorse is from a Dartmoor pony. Pet shop mice are somewhere in the middle - often they are white, or piebald, or “brown”. (By the way, the word “Fancy” in “Fancy Mice” is an old word meaning “hobby”, particularly when applied to animals.)

These days you may be lucky to find mice in a pet shop at all, since mice are not as popular as rabbits or guinea pigs. This is a shame, because the beauty of the pet mouse is that it requires very little space, can be kept indoors, and is extremely cheap to feed. Mice will sit on your hand, wash themselves, and generally explore. They make excellent pets.

Housing

Female mice make the best pets, because their urine does not smell like that of the male - if you are keeping pet mice then it is sensible to keep two female mice (does) together, to provide company for each other. Two males will fight bitterly, as well as smelling pretty rough, and a male and a female will keep producing babies.

You should keep your pet mice in a wooden box or cage, but ensure that there is adequate ventilation to prevent condensation. If the cage has a glass front then make sure that there is a gap to let air in, or drill little holes in the roof of the cage. If there are no cats about you can keep mice in a fishtank (or plastic washing-up bowl), putting a metal grill over the top.

They need sawdust for the cage bottom, and hay or paper to nest in. Shredded paper isn't very warm - newspapers are thick and cosy. You should clean your mice out at least once a week, and it is a good idea to have two cages so that you can alternate.

They love fun, and an old toilet roll tube or kitchen towel tube can amuse them for ages. The old mouse wheel is also popular, but make sure it is big enough. And remember to wash it now and again.

Handling

Learn to pick mice up gently but firmly by the root of the tail (not the tip) and transfer them to your hand. You may need to keep a hold on the tail to prevent a nervous mouse leaping from your hand. Contrary to popular belief picking up mice in this way does not hurt the mouse - if it did the mouse would squeak!

Feeding

Mice should be fed on a basic diet of whole or rolled oats, with a little hamster food and budgerigar seed given very occasionally for variety. Feed bread, preferably wholemeal, daily (soaked in water and squeezed out). Dog biscuits are good for their teeth.

You should always have water available, and nursing mothers will appreciate milk.

In the summer they love the yellow Dandelion heads, and also seeding grass, but don't overdo this. They also nibble a little carrot and mice are also partial to boiled rice (remains of the Chinese takeaway) and pasta. Mice are basically omnivorous, but it is a myth that they love cheese. It doesn't do them any good and is only used in mousetraps because it smells strongly and has a good texture for putting on the little spike.

House-mice will, of course, eat anything (which is why they are such a pest).

Breeding

Mice can live for up to two years. They are ready for breeding when about 8 weeks old, and they can deliver a litter of up to 12 babies in three weeks.

The babies are born pink and blind, and you should not disturb the nest too much. If you want to pick up the babies (they look like little pink prawns) then remove the mother, press your palm into the sawdust in the cage to disguise your scent, and do not keep them out of the nest too long. After about 6 days or so the fur will start to grow, and colour will appear. After about 10 days the mice will open their eyes, and at this age it is safe enough to handle them. In fact you should handle them in order to make them tame - mice that are not handled when very young will become nervous and may jump off your hand when you pick them up.

Ailments

Mice are affected by very few ailments. If you suspect that your pet is not well, do seek your vet's advice without delay. However, mice are generally healthy animals and if looked after properly throughout their life are likely to remain fit and active.

Shows

Many owners are happy to keep their animals solely as pets. However, others obtain great enjoyment from exhibiting their animals at shows. The London & Southern Counties Mouse and Rat Club holds shows on the first Saturday of the month at the Fourth Enfield Scout HQ, Gordon Road, Enfield, Middlesex - most of these shows start at 1pm.

Ian Langmead 1992 - revised 1998

For more information

If you would like to know more about Fancy Mice write to
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or look at our World Wide Web page on www.miceandrats.com

Other leaflets in this series:

This leaflet in German
Fancy Rats as Pets



Fancy Mice as Pets

A leaflet produced by the London &
Southern Counties Mouse & Rat Club



*For more information on Fancy Mice and
the Club have a look at our World Wide
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