

HOW TO SELECT AND PURCHASE A FERRET FROM A PRIVATE BREEDER

The decision to purchase a ferret from a ferret breeder starts by selecting the breeder. Choosing a ferret breeder is a matter of research, common sense, and knowledge about ferrets.

This short guide may help you in selecting a responsible ferret breeder, one who is concerned with the betterment of the Domestic Ferret.

General Considerations

To start your search for a ferret breeder, you must first know what you are seeking in terms of a ferret. What do you want in a ferret?

1. Make a checklist of your Search Parameters:

- Are you looking for a particular coat color, or pattern?
- Should it be male or female?
- Whole or altered?
- A very young ferret, a young adult, or older adult?
- Are you willing to wait until a kit is born, or weaned?
- What is the maximum you are willing to spend?
- How far are you willing to travel to see or pick up a new ferret?

Not all ferret breeders may have an animal for sale that meets your requirements. It is important to visit their website (if they have one), and to call each one ahead of time to confirm that they may have one or more ferrets that fit what you are looking for.

Ferret breeding is not as common as breeding cats or dogs. The breeder that might have a ferret that meets your list of characteristics may not be close to you.

2. Locating Ferret Breeders

A search of the Internet may be a great start. You can search the AFO website, or do a general search. Talk to people who own ferrets. Ask them about their ferrets. Everyone loves to talk about their ferrets. Check with local ferret clubs. Attend ferret events. Participate in ferret forums.

3. Screening Breeders

Now that you have a list of breeders, the following considerations may narrow your search.

Compile a short list of potential breeders you would like to interview.

Initial criteria may be those breeders within a certain distance from where you live, as most breeders will not ship a ferret.

A second criterion may be whether the breeder has (or is planning to have) ferrets available for purchase.

Cost may be a third factor to consider. Whole animals suitable for breeding may come with a much heftier price tag than neutered animals.

Set up an interview with each breeder that you are interested in visiting.

4. Interviews with Breeders

A quality ferret breeder should be happy to answer all your questions. While you're in the process of finding the right breeder to supply you with the newest member of your family, that breeder should feel as strongly about the well-being of your ferret as you do. Here are some questions that you should ask a potential breeder:

About the Facility:

- How long have you been breeding ferrets?
- How large is your breeding operation?
- Do you have a United States Department of Agriculture certification? [Most arger breeding facilities should have this documentation.]
- Do you show? Why-- or why not?
- Where do you house your ferrets?

Raising Kits:

- Are the kits raised in the house?
- How often are they handled?
- Have they been socialized daily on an individual basis?
- Have they become accustomed to being handled by strangers?
- For kits over 3 months of age: Does the kit run around the house on a daily basis or playpen at least 2 to 3 times a week?

About their Breeding Practices:

- What is the average life-span of the ferrets bred by the breeder? Are there any trends (longer/shorter life-spans) observed over time?
- What are the breeder's Strengths and Weaknesses? Ask about what kinds of health problems has the breeder observed in his/her ferrets? At what ages did the health problem(s) start?
- Has the breeder had genetic defects in their stock?
- How does the breeding program address observed genetic defects?

Ideally the breeder has been breeding ferrets long enough to know what they are doing. One sign of a good breeder might be a discussion of how he or she works to improve upon the ferret.

Reputable breeders are honest about the Strengths and Weaknesses of their breeding stock and kits. The breeder should be knowledgeable about what kinds of common genetically transmitted diseases occur in ferrets, and have some approach to minimize their occurrence in the breeding program. This is often approached by good record-keeping, and avoiding a focus of specific physical characteristics (e.g., specific coat-color, shape of head or body, etc.) if the particular line is fraught with significant abnormalities (e.g., early blindness, kidney or heart disorders, early genetic disease such as adrenal hyperplasia or cancer, or beta-cell tumors, other cancers, or shortened life-span).

Breeders often advertise that their ferret stock has champion ferrets, based on points won at ferret shows. Reputable breeders usually show their ferrets as a way of learning more about their animals, as well as to enhance their reputations and sales. However, just because a breeder has show-winning ferrets, does not necessarily mean that the breeder breeds a "better ferret." Winning a ferret show is not a guarantee that the ferret will be healthier and/or have a better temperament.

About the Breeder and Breeding Facility:

- Request a list of References from others who have purchased a ferret from the breeder. It is preferable if they purchased the ferret within the past two years.
- Call the references. Ask if breeder was a fair dealer. Ask if they are happy with the transaction, and ask if they are happy with the animal that they purchased. Do ask if ferret had any problems, and if so, how the breeder handled the issue.

5. Meeting Your Ferret

Some breeders may allow you to select from one or more animals, while others have a particular animal picked out for you, based on what you told them before you visit, and based on what they are willing to sell you. Meeting your ferret for the first time should be a happy and exciting experience, but it is also is your opportunity to review the health of the ferret and its potential fit in your family.

Although only a veterinary expert can screen for nonobvious health problems, certain clues may point you to a potentially healthy ferret:

- Is the ferret active and responsive to your handling?
- How does the ferret interact with other ferrets? With the breeder?
- Does it have clear eyes?
- Does it see and hear?
- Is its coat clean and appropriate for the time of year?
- During the time that you are with the ferret, you may have the opportunity to see the ferret eat and drink, and to urinate and defecate. Do observe each of these activities for any abnormalities. In particular, noting the consistency of the stool is important, to avoid a ferret that has severe diarrhea.

Baby ferrets can play roughly and may need to be taught not to bite their owners. However, a ferret should have a lively, friendly temperament, not bite out of fear or anxiety, as the latter may be much more difficult to correct.

6. Your Ferret's Family History

A key to selecting a ferret that may have a long and healthy life is to choose one whose parents, and ancestors lived long, healthy lives. A sign of a good breeder is one who keeps records from generation to generation, called a "Pedigree."

- Ask the breeder for your ferret's Pedigree.
- Do review the ferret's Family Tree, as far back as it may go. Hopefully it includes siblings and littermates. How old was the ferret when it died, and what was the cause of death? If there were health problems, at what age did these begin?
- If one or both of your ferret's parents reside at the facility, ask to see these animals.

7. Health Record

Before you purchase a ferret, you will want to have a record of your ferret's general care, and know about its health history:

- Ask for the ferret's immunization history. How many immunizations for Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) has the ferret had, and with which vaccine product(s)?
- Has the ferret been vaccinated against the Rabies Virus? If so, obtain the documentation of the entire list of vaccines the ferret has received, and the dates when the vaccine was given. Be sure to ask if the ferret has had any vaccine reactions, as this will be important to know prior to the next vaccination.

- Has the ferret been spayed or neutered? If so, also obtain dates and places where the surgeries occurred.
- What type of food has the ferret been eating? Do ask for a small bag of the food to feed your ferret, until you can purchase food for the ferret.
- If the ferret has been fed raw or whole prey, the ferret may need to be tested for parasites.
- Does the ferret have an embedded microchip?

8. Meeting the Ferret Breeder

One advantage of buying a ferret from a knowledgeable ferret breeder is the support and help she or he can offer you and your ferret. Therefore, you should ask yourself the following:

- Do you like the breeder as a person?
- Will you feel comfortable replying on this person as a resource to help you, if you ever run into problems with your ferret?

If you feel that the breeder is rude, ignorant, or disagreeable, look elsewhere to purchase your ferret.

9. Purchase Contract

Most ferret breeders will present you with a contract. **DO READ THE ENTIRE DOCUMENT BEFORE SIGNING.** Do ask questions if there are provisions that are unclear to you.

The contract may require that you return the ferret to the same breeder should you not want to keep the ferret. Some breeders who sell whole ferrets destined to be pets (non-breeding ferrets), may require a substantial deposit that is only returned to the owner once the ferret is properly altered. While there are no guarantees in purchasing any animal, you may still want to ask the following questions:

- What sort of health guarantees does breeder offer? For example, does the sales contract allow the return of a ferret within a specified time period (e.g., 1 or 2 weeks) for a full refund or replacement if the temperament, personality, or health is unsatisfactory?
- Does the contract stipulate the breeder's rights? What are those rights?

Good luck in your search!