

Mouse (Fancy Mouse)

Care Guide for New Owners

Fancy Mouse

Exotic Pet

Social Animal

Nocturnal

Quick Facts at a Glance

Species	Mus musculus domesticus
Lifespan	1.5 to 3 years
Adult Size	3 to 4 inches body length; 1 to 2 oz
Activity Cycle	Nocturnal; most active from dusk through the night
Temperament	Curious, quick, and entertaining; variable tameness depending on socialization
Housing	40-gallon tank or equivalent minimum for a group; floor space plus height
Social Needs	Females thrive in groups; males must be housed alone or in bonded pairs with caution
Diet	Omnivore; seed mix base with fresh foods and occasional protein
Odor	Males have a strong musky odor; females are much less odorous
Wheel	Solid-surface wheel required; 8 inch minimum
Lifespan	1.5 to 3 years; a short but rewarding relationship
Good with Kids?	Older children with supervision; very fast and can be difficult to handle

Meet the Fancy Mouse

Fancy mice are endlessly entertaining to watch. They are fast, curious, creative little animals who climb, burrow, build elaborate nests, explore everything in their environment, and interact with each other in ways that are genuinely fascinating to observe. A well-set-up mouse enclosure is like having a living

display of constant activity and personality.

They are also more of a watch-and-enjoy pet than a hold-and-cuddle pet, particularly for the average owner. Mice are very fast, can be difficult to catch once they are out, and while many do become comfortable with handling over time, they are naturally quick to startle and bolt. For owners who appreciate the behavioral richness of a small, active animal and enjoy setting up interesting environments, mice are a wonderful choice.

Male vs. Female Mice

Female mice are social and thrive in groups of three or more. They rarely fight and are much more manageable when housed together. Male mice are highly territorial and in most cases cannot be housed together without serious fighting, injury, and death. Males should be housed alone or in very carefully monitored bonded pairs introduced at a very young age. Males also have a strong musky odor that is significantly more noticeable than females. Most people who want multiple mice choose to keep female groups.

Where They Come From

The domestic fancy mouse is descended from the house mouse, *Mus musculus*, one of the most successful and widely distributed mammals on earth. House mice originated in the Indian subcontinent and spread globally alongside human agriculture and settlement. They are exceptionally adaptable omnivores capable of surviving in an enormous range of environments.

Mice were kept as pets in China and Japan as far back as the 1600s, where selective breeding for color varieties began centuries before Western fancy mice breeding clubs emerged. The National Mouse Club in the United Kingdom, founded in 1895, is one of the oldest small animal fancy clubs in the world. Today, fancy mice come in an extraordinary range of colors, coat patterns, and coat types including standard, satin, long-haired, and rex.

Despite centuries of domestication, fancy mice retain most of their wild behavioral repertoire. They still burrow, nest, forage, and navigate their environment using their extraordinary sense of smell. Understanding their wild origins helps explain why large enclosures with deep substrate and complex environments produce happier, more behaviorally healthy mice.

Housing and Habitat

Mice are active, agile animals who need more space than most people initially provide. They climb, jump, dig, and run, and their enclosure should support all of these behaviors.

Enclosure Size

The minimum recommended enclosure for a small group of female mice is equivalent to a 40-gallon breeder tank, which provides roughly 36 by 18 inches of floor space. More space is always better. Mice appreciate both horizontal floor area and vertical height for climbing. A 20-gallon tall tank or a large bin cage with height works well. Mice kept in inadequate enclosures are more likely to show stereotypic behaviors like bar-chewing and repetitive circling.

Recommended Enclosure Types

Glass Aquariums

Glass tanks are a very popular choice for mice because they hold substrate well, prevent drafts, and allow full visibility of the animals. They also contain the significant amounts of substrate that mice fling around during burrowing. A tightly fitting mesh lid is essential. Mice can squeeze through incredibly small gaps, so ensure no gap exceeds quarter of an inch anywhere around the lid.

Bin Cages

Large storage bin cages are cost-effective and allow for generous floor space. Choose a bin that is at least 15 inches tall to accommodate both substrate depth and some vertical climbing space. Secure mesh ventilation panels on the inside surface of the lid to prevent chewing and ensure the mouse cannot push the mesh out. Bin cages for males should have particularly secure ventilation given that the odor concentration in a poorly ventilated bin can be significant.

Wire Cages

Wire cages with solid bottoms can be used for mice, but bar spacing must be no more than quarter of an inch to prevent escape. Most commercially available wire cages have bar spacing that is too wide for mice. If using a wire cage, verify the spacing carefully and cover the bottom solid tray with a deep layer of substrate in a solid-sided insert or tray to allow burrowing.

Substrate Depth

Mice are natural burrowers and benefit from at least 4 to 6 inches of substrate. Deep substrate allows them to build tunnels and sleeping nests beneath the surface, which is a natural and satisfying behavior. Providing additional nesting material on top, such as torn tissue paper, unscented paper towel strips, and hay, gives them material to build elaborate above-ground nests as well.

Temperature

Mice are comfortable between 65 and 75 degrees F. They are sensitive to drafts and cold, and temperatures above 85 degrees F can cause heatstroke. Keep enclosures away from direct sunlight

and heating and cooling vents. Female mouse enclosures generally tolerate temperature variation better than male enclosures, where odor concentration becomes a secondary concern.

Bedding and Substrate

Bedding choice directly affects mouse respiratory health and enclosure odor management. Mice have sensitive respiratory tracts and are vulnerable to dust and aromatic compounds.

Recommended Substrate

Unscented paper-based bedding such as Carefresh, Small Pet Select, or similar products is safe, soft, and holds burrow shape reasonably well. Kiln-dried aspen shavings are also appropriate and burrow well. A mixture of paper bedding and aspen or coconut fiber gives a good combination of softness and structural stability for tunnels. Freeze all new bedding for 48 hours before use to eliminate potential mites.

For males especially, bedding with good odor absorption is important. Hemp bedding is increasingly popular as a substrate for male mice because of its excellent odor control properties. Spot-cleaning the enclosure every few days and doing a full clean weekly for males, or every one to two weeks for females, keeps ammonia levels from building up.

Substrate to Avoid

Cedar shavings: Toxic aromatic oils cause serious liver and respiratory damage.

Raw pine shavings: Similar concerns to cedar. Kiln-dried pine is safer but not ideal.

Scented beddings: Fragrances irritate mouse respiratory tracts.

Fluffy cotton or wool nesting products: Fibers cause intestinal blockage if ingested and ring injuries on limbs. Never use these.

Cat litter: Too dusty, causes respiratory damage.

Diet and Nutrition

Mice are omnivores with relatively flexible dietary needs. A varied, balanced diet keeps them healthy, active, and at a good weight. Obesity is common in mice kept on seed-heavy diets without enough variety.

Lab Blocks and Seed Mix

High-quality lab blocks formulated for mice and rats make an excellent dietary foundation. They provide balanced nutrition and eliminate the selective eating that occurs with seed mixes, where mice eat only their favorite pieces and leave the rest. Mazuri Mouse Diet, Harlan Teklad, and Oxbow Essentials Mouse and Young Rat are all well-regarded options.

A varied seed and grain mix can be offered alongside lab blocks or as the primary food with careful monitoring. Choose mixes that are not heavily weighted toward sunflower seeds or peanuts. Scatter feeding, placing food across the substrate rather than in a bowl, encourages natural foraging behavior and provides mental stimulation.

Fresh Foods

Safe Fresh Foods

- Small pieces of broccoli, carrot, courgette, cucumber
- Leafy greens: romaine, kale, parsley
- Small amounts of cooked plain chicken or egg
- Mealworms (live or dried)
- Small amounts of fruit: blueberry, strawberry, apple (no seeds)
- Plain puffed rice, oats, or millet spray

Never Feed These

- Onions, garlic, leeks (toxic)
- Chocolate or caffeine (toxic)
- Rhubarb (toxic)
- Avocado (toxic)
- Grapes and raisins
- Raw beans or peanuts (toxic uncooked)
- Sugary or salty processed human food
- Citrus fruit (too acidic)

Water

Fresh water must always be available. A sipper bottle attached to the enclosure is preferred over a bowl, as mice will quickly fill bowls with substrate. Change water daily and clean the bottle every few days to prevent algae and bacterial growth.

The Wheel

A solid-surface exercise wheel is essential for mice. They run extensively at night and without a wheel, boredom and obesity are common outcomes. The minimum wheel diameter is 8 inches. The running surface must be completely solid with no gaps, mesh, or bars. Flying Saucer wheels and similar designs are popular choices. Mice urinate while running, so a solid surface that is easy to wipe clean is

important for hygiene.

No Exercise Balls

Exercise balls are not appropriate for mice. They are stressful, disorienting, prevent the mouse from stopping when tired, and provide no ventilation. A solid-surface wheel and supervised out-of-cage exploration in a safe, enclosed space are the appropriate alternatives.

Enrichment

Mice are naturally investigative animals who need a stimulating environment to thrive. A richly set-up enclosure with climbing structures, burrowing depth, nesting material, and rotating objects keeps mice mentally active and behaviorally healthy.

In-Cage Enrichment

- Solid-surface exercise wheel (8 inch minimum)
- Cardboard tubes, boxes, and crinkle paper
- Wooden hideouts and climbing structures
- Deep substrate for burrowing
- Tissue paper, hay, and paper strips for nest building
- Foraging: scatter food across the substrate
- Small amounts of sand in a dish for digging

Interactive Enrichment

- Supervised out-of-cage time in an enclosed play space
- Rotating new objects into the enclosure weekly
- Treat foraging: hiding food in cardboard rolls
- Gentle daily handling during active hours
- Female group social interaction and play

Handling and Interaction

Mice can become comfortable with handling but they are naturally quick and can be challenging to keep hold of. Patience, consistency, and starting young make a significant difference. Mice that are handled daily from a young age are noticeably calmer and more confident than those handled rarely.

How to Handle Safely

Always sit on the floor or over a low surface when handling mice. They can fall or jump from height and injure themselves. Scoop from underneath using cupped hands and let them walk between your palms. Never grab a mouse by the tail, particularly the tip, as this can cause a degloving injury similar to that seen in gerbils. If you must pick them up quickly for safety, grasp gently at the base of the tail only, very briefly, while getting your other hand underneath.

Offering treats from your hand during the taming process helps mice associate your scent with positive experiences. Start with your hand resting in the enclosure with a treat on your palm and wait for them to approach. Progress to cupping them in your hands as they gain confidence. Some mice

become very tame and enjoy being handled for extended periods. Others remain skittish and prefer to be observed rather than held. Both are normal.

Common Health Issues

Mice have short lifespans and health issues can develop and progress quickly. Knowing your mice well and checking them daily gives you the best chance of catching problems early.

Respiratory Infections (Mycoplasmosis)

The most common health issue in pet mice, caused by the bacteria *Mycoplasma pulmonis*, which most mice carry. Stress, dusty bedding, drafts, and ammonia buildup from a dirty cage all trigger flare-ups. Signs include clicking or rattling when breathing, runny nose, lethargy, and a hunched posture. Requires veterinary treatment with antibiotics during active infections. Appropriate bedding, regular cleaning, and a stress-reduced environment are the best ongoing management.

Tumors

Mice, particularly females, are very prone to mammary tumors. These can appear anywhere along the belly and flanks and grow quickly. They are often benign but grow to a size that impairs movement and quality of life if not removed surgically while small. Check your mice regularly for any new lumps. Males are prone to other tumor types as well. Annual vet checks are worthwhile, especially for mice over 18 months old.

Obesity

Common in mice fed seed-heavy diets or housed in enclosures with no exercise wheel. An obese mouse has visible fat rolls and reduced mobility. Switch to lab blocks as the primary food, reduce high-fat seeds, and ensure the wheel is in good working order.

Skin Mites

Signs include excessive scratching, hair loss, and skin irritation. Mites are common in mice and require veterinary diagnosis and treatment. Freeze new bedding before use to reduce introduction risk. Treat all mice in the same enclosure simultaneously.

Wet Tail (Proliferative Ileitis)

Less common in mice than in hamsters but can occur, particularly in young animals under stress. Signs include severe watery diarrhea, a wet soiled bottom, lethargy, and loss of appetite. A veterinary emergency that requires same-day attention.

Fight Wounds

In male mice especially, territorial fighting causes bites and wounds that can become infected. Signs include scabbing, open sores, hair loss around bite sites, and swelling. Any mouse showing signs of being bullied or attacked must be separated immediately. Fight wounds require veterinary cleaning and often antibiotics.

Heatstroke

Mice overheat quickly at temperatures above 85 degrees F. Signs include limpness, rapid breathing, and unresponsiveness. A medical emergency. Move to a cool area immediately and contact a vet.

Dental Overgrowth

Mouse incisors grow continuously. Insufficient gnawing material or a soft diet can lead to overgrown incisors that prevent eating. Provide wooden chews, cardboard, and varied food textures. Signs of overgrowth include dropping food, weight loss, and drooling.

Things Every New Mouse Owner Should Know

Their lifespan is short.

Mice live 1.5 to 3 years. You are signing up for a brief but full relationship. Make every day count, and go in with realistic expectations about the timeline.

Females are almost always the better choice for groups.

Female mice live happily in groups of three or more and are much less odorous than males. Unless you specifically want a solo male, a group of females will give you a richer, more entertaining, and more manageable experience.

Males smell. Significantly.

Male mice have scent glands that produce a persistent musky odor. If you are sensitive to animal smells or live in a small space, a male mouse may not be the right choice. Frequent cleaning and good ventilation help manage it but do not eliminate it.

Fluffy bedding is dangerous.

Cotton and wool nesting products are still widely sold for mice. Do not use them. They cause intestinal blockage and ring injuries. Torn tissue paper and hay are safe alternatives.

Never grab by the tip of the tail.

Tail degloving is a painful, preventable injury. If you must pick up a mouse quickly, grasp gently at the very base of the tail only, momentarily, while getting your hand underneath. Better yet, train them to walk onto your hand voluntarily.

The wheel is not optional.

Mice run extensively at night. A solid-surface wheel in the right size is one of the most important items in the enclosure. Set it up before your mice come home.

Find an exotic vet who sees rodents.

Not all vets have meaningful mouse experience. Locate one in your area before you need one. Mouse health can deteriorate very quickly, particularly with respiratory infections and tumors.

Check for lumps regularly.

Run your hands gently over your mice once or twice a week. Finding a mammary tumor early while it is still small gives a much better surgical outcome and longer comfortable life.

Questions? We're Here!

Boggy's Buddies is always happy to answer questions and support you throughout your mouse ownership journey. Reach us at boggysbuddies@gmail.com or find us on Facebook and Instagram.