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Skunks – Care sheet.

Domestic skunks are descended from animals originally kept and bred for their fur. The foundation stock was captured in the 1920s and due to the fear of introducing rabies, they have been line bred ever since.

This is a similar story to chinchillas, except it was not rabies, but a lack of wild animals, that prevented more being added to the original breeding stock. Thus they are not really wild animals. Pet skunks are usually available at 6 to 8 weeks of age, when about the size of a large tennis ball, and are usually de-scented. They will be weaned, but might still need their vegetables to be softened by a short boiling. They are very easy to damage when small. Dropping or stepping on them will result in bone fracture and great care must be taken. Although they can be given the run of the house, being very easy to potty train, it is best to invest in an indoor rabbit cage, with a soft plastic base and wire top. These cages usually open at the top and one side, allowing the animals to come and go through the side door. Newspaper on the base, a small litter tray and a blanket or soft towel to hide in, is what is required. When young, baby skunks are best kept caged, when you are not playing with, or holding them. They will mainly sleep throughout the day, but as they grow, they will often adjust their sleeping to your daily routine.

They are 'corner poopers' and you only need to put a litter tray in the corner they pick to house train them. If you don't like that corner, you can slowly move the tray to a better position. In large houses it may be better to use more than one tray. The more you handle and play with your new baby the better pet it will turn out to be.

To start with they need constant food and water. They often drink very little, but water must always be available. The breeder should give you details of the food that the baby is eating when you collect. It is most important to feed skunks correctly, as bad feeding will cause illness and dramatically shorten their lives.

We know in the wild, skunks eat a large proportion of insects and arachnids, the rest being mainly vegetation. In captivity, it is not possible to feed this quantity of quality live food, so we have to feed another way. Ideas vary slightly but a diet of 90% vegetables, 5% fruit and 5% low protein seems to work best.

Here are some examples:

VEGETABLES (90%)	FRUIT (5%)	PROTEIN (5%)
carrot	banana	boiled chicken
swede	apple	water packed tuna
turnip	grape	scrambled egg
sweet potato	pear	low fat cottage cheese
yam		19% protein complete dog food
radish		
peppers		
celery		
celeriac		
sprouts		
parsnips		

For complete lists of suitable foods, see the two recommended American Skunk web sites.

When feeding very young skunks the food needs to be cut up very small and the hard vegetables softened by a short boil. As they get bigger, leave it more chunky, up to 1 inch cubes. Young Skunks will need breakfast of scrambled egg, softened with a little milk, and fortified with a multi vitamin and calcium supplement. Then veg. and fruit, which is refreshed several times a day. Egg or other protein in the evening feed.

As they begin to eat properly you can reduce the feed to three or four times a day, reducing it again to two meals at about six months. As they grow you need to watch them to make sure that they are not getting too fat. Even a breakfast of scrambled egg and a balanced evening meal may be too much as they become adult at about a year old.

They need monthly worming throughout their lives and a regular clipping of the front claws. If you intend to take your skunk out for walks in public you need to train it to a harness whilst young. Regular trips out to meet other people will socialise you pet and make it more friendly to other people. At about 12 weeks, it is necessary to vaccinate your skunk against Distemper and Parvo, and you should consult your breeder and vet about this.

Pet skunks, like most other companion animals, are best neutered. This is very necessary for the females, as like ferrets, they are induced ovulators and they can fall ill if neither mated nor neutered. You should consult your vet about the best time to do this.

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