

Breeding Gerbils

Before deciding to breed Gerbils it is important to consider what to do with any young produced. One pair of Gerbils may have more than 50 babies during their reproductive life. If considering pet shops ask yourself, "Is the shop clean?" Do the animals they already have look healthy? How much do they know about the animals they sell? If you are in any way unsure of how you will find homes for your pups you should not breed.

What is the best Age to pair Gerbils up?

It is best to pair them up when they are aged 6-8 weeks. It is very difficult to pair adult Gerbils up, any attempts to do so can result in fighting.

How do I sex young Gerbils?

The best age to tell the sexes apart is 5 weeks. It can be done earlier than this, but at this age the differences between the sexes is clearly visible. Sexing Gerbils is really very easy. There are two main things to look for. Most importantly, the distance between the urinary and anal openings in female Gerbils is much smaller than it is in males. This method can be used reliably from at least three weeks of age, additionally, adult males have a large bulge at the base of the tail which is their scrotum. This is totally absent from females. This bulge is obvious by 6 weeks of age and can be seen at least two weeks earlier.

At what age do Gerbils become sexually mature?

Most Gerbils become sexually mature by the age of three months old. However if you pair a young female up with an older male you may find that she has her first litter earlier than if you had paired her up with a Gerbil the same age. Some pairs will breed earlier than others. Some pairs may take a year or more to produce a litter.

How often do female Gerbils have seasons?

Once she is sexually mature, a Gerbil will come into season every 4-6 days, usually in the evening. Mating will occur several times. A female will come back into season immediately after giving birth.

How long is the reproductive life of a pair of Gerbils?

It can be as long as 18 months from the onset of sexual maturity. However it is not an exact science, one pair of Gerbils may have only one litter, whilst others may go on to have several. Females may become less fertile and have smaller litters as they get older.

How long is the pregnancy in a Gerbil?

Pregnancy normally lasts between 21-25 days but pregnancy can be delayed for as long as 43 days if the female is still feeding the current litter. Most Gerbils do not actually look pregnant until they are a few days from giving birth. Baby Gerbils are born naked, blind and totally reliant on their parents for all their needs. The average litter size is 5-6 young but anything between three and nine is normal.

My Gerbil has just given birth, do I need to do anything?

No, most Gerbils give birth without any problems. Gerbils usually give birth in the early hours of the

morning and labour can last for a few hours. There are rare occasions when there can be problems with labour. The Gerbil usually shows signs of being unwell and if Veterinary treatment is not sought immediately, the Gerbil will die. Always ensure that unlimited fresh food and water are available for your Gerbil, she will need extra food so that she can feed her babies.

Do I need to remove the male?

Not unless you want to stop breeding. The male plays an active role in bringing up the young. He will help clean and keep the babies warm whilst the female is foraging for food. Reintroducing him later could be very difficult.

I noticed my Gerbils mating again after giving birth, is this normal?

Yes, most rodents mate immediately after giving birth. This is normal behaviour and will do the parents no harm.

The mother seems to be kicking the pups around, won't they get hurt?

It is normal for mothers to seem a bit rough with the pups. They will often knock them out of the nest when remaking their bed etc. Don't worry, the pups will not be harmed and the mother will go and fetch the pups when she has finished what she is doing.

Aagh! I have seen the mother eating one of the pups!

Regrettably, sometimes a pup will die. This does not happen very often, as Gerbils are normally excellent parents. However, if a pup dies it is normal for the parents to eat it. This is because in the wild they need to keep their burrow clean. It is almost unknown for Gerbils to harm their pups.

How do I wean the pups?

You should not need to do anything special. Gerbils will naturally start eating solid foods from about three weeks of age. By the time the pups are 5 weeks old they should be totally independent

My pups are sick!

Gerbil pups suffer from few problems. The only two that normally arise are diarrhoea, or respiratory problems. Both of these will be apparent if the pup is listless and seems unwell. Diarrhoea is easy to check for, and respiratory problems will be characterised by a clicking sound. If there is any sign of either you must consult a vet immediately.

What can I do to stop my Gerbil breeding?

Obviously you need to separate the male and the female. However, Gerbils are social animals and should not be kept on their own. Consequently it is best to split a litter at 5 weeks of age and put a male pup with the father and a female pup with the mother. Because Gerbils mate the same day that they give birth, you may get a further litter after you separate the parents.

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