BASIC CARE SHEET

Thinking of getting a HAMSTER?
Correct preparation is vital to ensure a happy, healthy life for your hamster.
Already have a HAMSTER?
It is never too late to make any necessary adjustments.

HSA 'ENCYCLOPAEDIA': www.hamsterssouthafrica.com
HSA ONLINE SHOP: https://shop.hamsterssouthafrica.com

YOU WANT A HAMSTER?

A hamster can be a very enjoyable pet. However, much has changed in the last decade with updated and ongoing research in terms of correct housing, enrichment, safety, nutrition, etc.
We hope this guide will assist you with the basics. For in-depth information, please refer to the website.

HOW MANY HAMSTERS?

All species of hamsters available in South Africa are solitary & territorial by nature and NEED TO LIVE ALONE.
Secondly, you can also NEVER introduce hamsters to each other, even during play times.
In both cases, they will fight and it is often fatal!
If you want more than one, you will need to get a suitable habitat for each of them.
Please do not consider breeding simply because you think it'll be cute to see.
Responsible breeding requires a lot of careful research, genetic knowledge, experience, dedication and space!

SPECIES OF HAMSTER

Hybrid Dwarf Hamster

Usually very sociable, curious little hamsters and, while they are predominantly nocturnal, will readily appear during daytime when hearing their human nearby and will be accepting of some playtime once fully awake.
Can have the tendency to be a little nippy and can bite quite sore in moments of nervousness, particularly during taming, or if startled while sleeping. Once they know their human, the nips become gentler and are usually a way of sending a message that "I want to go back to my habitat" or "I've had enough of being handled, let me run free for a bit", etc. These little nips can sometimes put children off, and it needs to be explained to them.

Syrian Hamster

These larger hamsters make wonderful pets and are slower, easier to handle, & rarely bite once tamed.
Most do not like to be woken up during the day so may not be ideal for young children who go to bed early, since they only emerge after later.
The bite can be very sore but, once tamed, generally only happens if they are extremely frightened or in pain, or if you wake them up without warning.
Take note of larger minimum wheel sizes, etc.

LIFE SPAN OF HAMSTERS IN SA
Average 18-24 months

GET THE CORRECT HABITAT! The bigger, the better the life!

It is very important to provide your hamster with the largest safest space you can afford.
Plastic and wire cages sold in pet shops are in no way suitable for a hamster to live in permanently!
There are a few good options you can use as enclosures, from custom builds via local businesses, 120cm glass tanks, DIY and storage bins linked together, etc.

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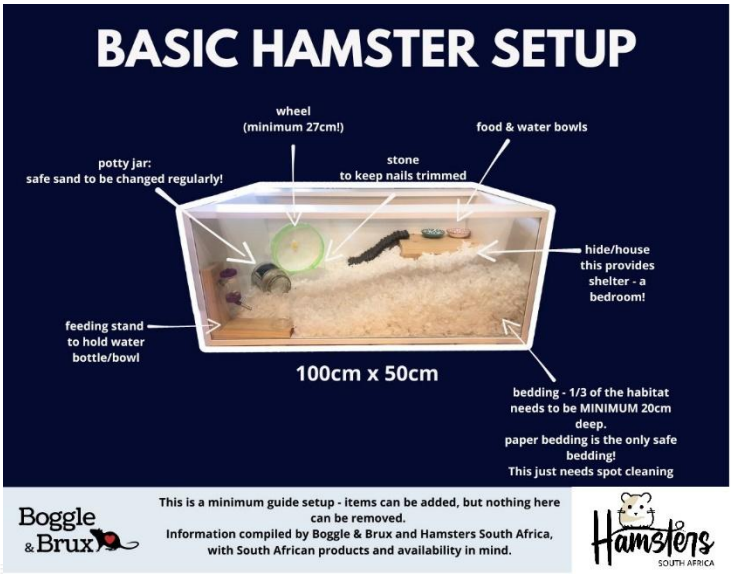
ABSOLUTE MINIMIM HABITAT SIZE *(preferably larger if you can)*
Dwarf or Syrian Hamsters 5000 cm² unbroken floor space (e.g. 1m x 50cm)
To calculate: Length x Width (cm) = cm² (shelves/platforms & extensions do not count).
Hamsters are ground & underground dwellers with poor eyesight, and tall cages or a multitude of high shelves are therefore not natural and can be extremely dangerous.

HABITAT SAFETY

- Place the habitat in a relatively **peaceful** spot in the home, and not in a room where people may smoke or have loud parties, and preferably not too near electronic equipment.
- **Never place the hamster or habitat in direct sunlight or draughts, or below open windows.**
- Make sure that a light-weight bin cage setup **cannot be knocked or pulled down by children and other pets.**
- Ensure that the habitat has a **heavy, secure lid** that cannot be easily knocked/slid open (by other pets or people).
- **VENTILATION** is extremely important. The lid should be **at least 80% meshed with strong wire mesh** (drilled holes, even 1000, are not adequate for ventilation and airflow).

BASIC ESSENTIALS: These are a must – NOT OPTIONAL items!



WATER BOWLS should be small (max 50ml), sturdy flat-bottomed, glazed ceramic/thick glass, and placed on a platform in order to stay clean.

Bowls are more natural & kinder on the spine.

Bottles with stands may be used but can pose risks.

FOOD BOWLS: Any sturdy, small, glazed ceramic/thick glass bowls with smooth edges, approx. 2.5cm deep will be fine and ideally also placed on a platform.

An extra bowl will also be required for serving fresh foods.

AVOID PLASTIC

A **POTTY CONTAINER** should be provided as dedicated toilet area for urinating, which will assist in keeping the habitat cleaner & reduce odour.

Ideal containers: slanted cookie jars, any large wide-mouthed jar, glazed ceramic/thick glass dish, etc.

Refer to https://www.hamsterssouthafrica.com/pottie-training-tips for potty placements & training tips.

Most suitable as **POTTY SAND/LITTER** are plain Bentonite litter, silica-free sterilized Play Sand, and plain Reptile Sand.

Never use scented or coloured sands!

Refer to https://www.hamsterssouthafrica.com/sand-and-toilets for details about good & bad sands.

BEDROOM / NESTBOX

Do provide a little room/house for your hamster to make a cozy nest to sleep in.
A little plain cardboard box with a doorway or front cut out, or a fat cardboard tube, is perfect and easy to replace if necessary.
Wooden box houses & cabins can be used, but can get mouldy from humidity and/or body heat or if the hamster pees in it's nest box. Such boxes should be ventilated and sealed with a non-toxic sealant, and lined with cardboard.

AVOID PLASTIC HOUSES & DOMES

These get too hot in summer and too cold in winter, are not breathable and therefore unhealthy.

NESTING MATERIAL

Like us, hamsters like a soft warm bed. Strip up a lot of cheap **1-ply toilet paper** for your hamster to drag to his chosen sleeping place (not 2-ply or facial tissues, as these can make too much dust when torn up).

AVOID FLUFFY NESTING, WOOL & FABRIC

as this is incredibly dangerous - gets stuck in pouches, tangled around teeth, nails and limbs and doesn't disintegrate, which will cause intestinal blockages ingested, resulting in illness, and even death due to infection & internal complications, and a hamster will even chew off a limb to free itself from entanglement.

Refer to https://www.hamsterssouthafrica.com/nesting-substrates for info on bedrooms & nesting.

HAMSTER WHEELS

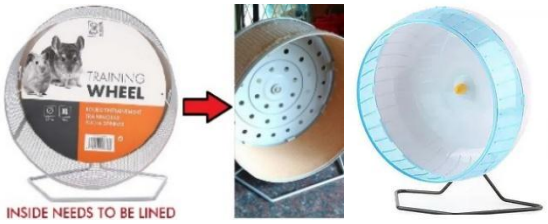
This is a very important item to provide exercise and stimulation for your hamster.

ABSOLUTE MINIMUM SIZES:

Dwarf Hamsters: 21 to 30cm *(8.3 – 11.8")*
Syrian Hamsters: 27 to 35cm *(11 – 14")*

Wheels must be SOLID.
Wheels with open rungs, mesh, framework and cross-bars are dangerous; causing painful bumblefoot, broken limbs and other injuries (even death).
Refer to https://www.hamsterssouthafrica.com/wheels-balls for the good & bad info about wheels.

ROLLING HAMSTER BALLS: NEVER!



PAPER BEDDING & ADDITIONAL SUBSTRATES

The only safe main bedding substrate is plain, clean PAPER-BASED.
Local small businesses are producing good quality paper bedding, as well as Oxbow Pure Comfort imported bedding available in shops.
The main bedding section should be at least 1/3 of the habitat and 25-30cm deep.
Refer to https://www.hamsterssouthafrica.com/bedding-nesting-substrates for the good & bad info and how to use.

Including ADDITIONAL SUBSTRATES and/or a sandpit in the habitat will not only reduce costs, but also provide enrichment & stimulation for your hamster.
Refer to https://www.hamsterssouthafrica.com/enrichment for ideas.

NEVER USE PINE SHAVINGS, SCENTED, PRINTED PAPER, STRAW, HAY, FABRIC, OR PELLET BEDDINGS!

Adding **ACCESSORIES & ENRICHMENTS** will provide stimulation for your hamster's mental wellbeing & health, as they alleviate boredom and depression, and will also be a source of keeping teeth & nails trimmed.
Multiple carboard tubes & boxes, sterilized grapevines, bridges, rocks, gnaw treats, foraging mixes, etc. are great!
Refer to https://www.hamsterssouthafrica.com/enrichment for ideas.

FOOD

Correct nutrition, from as young as possible, even during gestation, will make a big difference in your hamster's well-being and longevity.
The diet needs to consist of (1) GOOD QUALITY DRY FOOD MIX, (2) FRESH FOOD (fruit, veggies & protein), and (3) FRESH WATER. Hamsters with poor nutrition usually suffer from various ailments as a result, especially as they age.

Syrian Hamsters and Dwarf Hamsters have different nutritional needs & it is therefore preferable to get a species-specific mix.

RECOMMENDED BRANDS:
HSA Dwarf or Syrian Hamster Mix,
Oliver's Burrow Hamster Mix, Bunny Nature Dream Expert (Hamster or Dwarf).

OTHER COMMERCIAL BRANDS & MIXES are not highly recommended due to lack of healthy balances and/or ingredients, e.g. high levels of black sunflower seeds, corn, peanuts, hay & other pellets, etc.
In desperation, you could combine Puur Hamster/Dwarf Versele-Laga Hamster/Mini, and Harry Hamster together with additional safe seeds & grains.
Note that these mixes are loaded with pellets that most hamsters do not favour.

Refer to https://www.hamsterssouthafrica.com/nutrition-food for details, and info re. good & bad.

HAMSTERS REQUIRE A BALANCED DIET IN ORDER TO THRIVE:
Quality Dry Mix at all times + Fresh Veg & Fruit daily + Fresh Proteins 2-3 times a week
Note that Dwarf hamsters are prone to diabetes. Fruit & high sugar veg should therefore only be occasional treats.

SAFE FRUIT & VEG *(OFFER A VARIETY EVERY 1 to 3 DAYS)*

***PINK** = High sugar foods. Be conservative.* ***GREEN** = Cruciferous foods. Small amounts only unless cooked.*
***ORANGE** = High in oxalic acid. Small amounts only.*

Alfalfa *(small quantities for young & pregnant hamsters only)*, Apricot & Apple *(no pips)*, Asparagus.

Baby Marrow/Courgette/Zucchini, Baby Spinach, Baby Corn, Banana, Barley Grass, Bean (Mung) Sprouts - shoots only, Blackberry leaves & fruit, Blueberry, Broad beans, Broccoli *(florets & leaves - no thick stems)*, Butternut *(incl. pips)*.

Carrot, Cauliflower *(florets & leaves - no thick stems)*, Chard/Spinach *(small amount only)*, Cherries *(no pips)*, Chickweed, Cornflowers, Corn (baby corn, mealies), Cos Lettuce *(dark tips)*, Courgette/Zucchini/Baby Marrow, Cranberry *(not dried)*.

Dates, Dandelion flower/leaf/roots *(not the milky veins)*, Dill 'leaves' *(not bulb)*.

Endive *(leafy parts only)*.

Fennel 'leaves' *(not bulb)*, Fig, Flowers *(see topic on Accessories & Enrichment page)*.

Green Beans, Gem Squash (incl. pips).

Hemp (seeds & leaves).

Kale, Kiwi *(without seeds)*.

Lentils *(cooked or sprouted only)*, Loganberry, Lychee, Mange Tout (snap peas/snow peas), Mango, Marigold petals, Melon, Mealie kernels *(avoid for pregnant/nursing mums & babies)*, Millet, Mung Beans *(sprouted or cooked only)*.

NUTS - shelled, plain: Sweet Almond, Brazil, Cashew, Hazel, Pecan, Pistachio. Walnut can be in the shell.

Pansy/Viola flowers, Papaya, Parsnip, Patti-Pans, Peach *(not the pip)*, Pear *(no seeds)*, Peas (ordinary garden peas), Peppers *(sweet/salad kind - red, yellow, green)*, Pet Grass, Plum, Prune *(no pips)*, Pumpkin (incl. pips).

Raspberry, Rice Cakes *(unsalted)*, Rocket leaves, Rose Petals.

Snap/Snow Peas (mangetouts), Spinach/Chard *(little of leaf part)*, Sprouts (Lentils, Mung beans, micro herbs), Strawberry.

Tomato *(flesh only)*, Turnip. Water Cress, Watermelon, Wheat Grass. Zucchini (courgette/baby marrow).

SAFE PROTEINS *(OFFER A VARIETY EVERY 2 TO 3 TIMES A WEEK)*

COOKED/STEAMED; PLAIN (NO SALT, SPICES, BUTTER, ETC.); SMALL CUBE PORTIONS.

Beef – Lean/Extra-Lean mince (plain, steamed/cooked)
Chicken meat (plain, steamed/cooked), Crickets (clean & specially bred)
Egg (hard boiled/ well scrambled)
Fish (fresh, not tinned; bland, not very salty kinds of fish - steamed/cooked)
Hills Restorative Care (chicken) tinned food
Mealworms (dried or live) max. 2 to 3 at a time
Shrimps (Gammarus) - small freshwater kind, Silkworms (dried or fresh 3 to 5 at a time)
Turkey meat (plain, steamed/cooked)

SAFE TREAT OPTIONS (ONE SMALL PORTION ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK)

Artichoke (raw flesh only).
Basil leaf, Beetroot, Bread (w/wheat toasted or not), Brussels Sprouts.

Celery, Cheese (only ricotta and low-salt cheeses), Chicory, Coconut (fresh or flakes, not sweetened desiccated), Coconut Milk (unsweetened; not cream), Coriander (leaves & stems), Cornflakes (unsweetened & salt-free), Couscous (cooked, plain), Cucumber (small piece).

Dog Biscuits (Plain, home-baked style only)
Flax/Linseeds - preferably crushed for better absorption and mixed into wet food (quarter tsp).
Mint leaf.
Oats & Barley flakes (soaked).

Peanut (out of shell), Parsley (as a tonic), Pasta (pref. cooked, plain), Potato (FLESH ONLY; really well cooked), Provita.
Quinoa
Rice (brown, cooked, plain)
Sunflower Seeds (hulled, not in shell)
Tofu (rinsed and/or cooked) - high in fat and calcium, so only a tiny piece.
Weetbix
Yogurt - tiny amount, plain unsweetened, pref. organic (however, in the case of babies & nursing moms, a daily lick of yogurt is particularly good)

UNSAFE FOODS

Acorns, Alcohol, All-Bran Flakes, ALL FRUIT SEEDS & PIPS, Artificial Sweeteners, Aubergine, Avocado.
Bacon, Biltong, Bindweed, Bitter Almonds, Bran, Brinjal, Bulbs (of any sort), Butter.

Citrus Fruits (lemon, orange, naartjie, etc.), Cabbage, Cayenne, Cheese (strong/yellow/salty), Chilli, Chives, Chocolate, Cinnamon, Coffee and Ceylon Teas, Coriander seeds, Cream, Crocus, Currants, Chickpeas (unless REALLY well cooked).

Deadly Nightshade, Dragon fruit.
Eggplant, Elderberry leaves & branches, Evergreen plants.
Garlic, Gooseberry, Grapefruit, Grapes, Greenies (dog chews).
Ham, Honey, Jam, Jelly.
Kidney Beans.
Laurel, Leeks, Lemon, Lettuce (particularly Iceberg & light green), Lime, Liver.
Macon, Milk & Cream.
Naartjie, Nutmeg.
Oak, Onion (all types), Olives, Orange.

Peanuts in the shell, Pepper (spice), Pepper, Pickles, Pineapple, Pips from fruits, Pomegranate, Pork, Potato (raw), Processed meats (bacon, ham, macon, polony, viennas, etc.)

Radish, Ragwort, Raisins, Rhubarb.

Salt, Sausages, Seeds from fruits, Spices, Sugar, Sultanas, Sunflower seeds in shell (black or white), Sweet Potato (unless really well-cooked, & flesh only - as a treat), Sweets/Candy.

Tomato seeds, green parts & flowers, Tomato Paste (too strong and concentrated).
Vinegar.

IF IN DOUBT, DO NOT FEED IT TO YOUR HAMSTER!