



BEDDING AND LITTER

A. Bedding

It is very important that your rats have the right bedding. Pine and cedar bedding should never be used, as they are toxic to small animals. The long term effects can be liver disease, a depressed immune system and respiratory illnesses. If you wish to use wood shavings, **aspen** shavings are a good, safe choice.

Corn cob bedding is also not recommended as sometimes rats will eat it and it may cause them to choke.

Carefresh and **Eco-Bedding** are paper beddings and are good alternatives to wood shavings. They are economical and rats love to fluff, build nests, and burrow in it.

MRR recommends using **fleece** to line the shelves of the cage. Rats love to snuggle up in fleece! It is safe and flexible, with no small strings for ratty feet to get caught in. The fabric has some stretch to it so there is less of a chance that rats will hurt themselves by getting their head stuck in the holes.

Caution: Rats have died when they have chewed holes in inflexible fabric and gotten stuck so we do not recommend using old clothing, towels, etc.

Some people use a combination of beddings – perhaps fleece on upper shelves, and a paper or wood shaving bedding on the bottom of the cage. Feel free to experiment and see what your rats enjoy!

B. Litter Boxes

Rats can also be litter box trained. A litter box on every floor aids in training. For smaller cages, you can often find a shallow, rectangular food storage box that can serve as a litter box. For larger ones, a small cat litter box can do the job. 9 x 13 baking pans also work very well and cannot be chewed by rats! Small-animal-specific litter boxes are also available through many pet supply stores, and are made to fit into the corner of a cage.

Choose the litter carefully. Avoid clay cat litters – they are very dusty and the dust can clump in the moisture of the lungs. Do not use scented or self-scooping litters – these contain chemicals to control odors and create the clumping and may be harmful to rats. As mentioned above, litter made from corn cobs, whether pelleted or ground, should be avoided.

MRR recommends several choices for a rat litter box:

1. **Fresh News** – a pelleted, recycled newspaper litter often found in supermarkets and big box pet stores. Make sure to get the unscented variety! You may also certainly use an off-brand version of the same.
2. **Rabbit food** – pelleted alfalfa or timothy sold as feed for rabbits. Rats won't eat it and the rabbit food is nearly identical in appearance to the more expensive Yesterday's News. Don't spend extra for small bags or "gourmet" versions – the most basic rabbit pellets sold at Blue Seal and other feed stores can be had for about \$8-9 for a 25-lb. bag.

3. **Wood stove pellets** – these are made of mostly hardwoods (but make sure there is no accelerant in them) but can be hard to find in the summer months so you'll want to stock up! This is by far the most cost effective product to use as litter, usually selling for \$5-\$6 for 40-50 pounds. It is similar in size and shape to Yesterday's News and the rats have no problem using it.
4. **Gentle Touch Aspen Cat Litter** – a safe and healthy choice for the litter box. It is made of 100% aspen.
5. If you don't use them in other parts of the cage, you could also place a **paper litter**, such as CareFresh or Eco-Bedding, in the litter box.

C. Tips on Litter Box Training

Tip #1: To help your rats get the idea of where they should go, place a few of their poops in the litter box every time you clean the cage.

Tip #2: Place the litter box under the ramp by putting the end of the ladder right in the litter box. For some reason rats tend to go to the bathroom when they are going up and down the ramps.

Tip #3: When starting training, use whatever you will be using in the litter box on the floor of the cage as well as in the litter box. After a week or two, use something different on the floor and keep the same litter in the box.

Tip #4: A trick some people have found helpful in encouraging their rats to use the litter box for pee as well as 'raisins' is to put a brick or smooth, clean rock(s) into the litter box. For some reason rats really like peeing on rocks!

Tip#5: if you notice your rats using a particular corner of the cage to do their business, move the litter box there.

***PLEASE FREEZE ALL FOOD AND BEDDING THAT MAY HAVE BEEN STORED IN WAREHOUSES FOR 48 HOURS PRIOR TO USING AS YOUR RATS CAN GET PARASITES OR MITES FROM ANYTHING THAT MAY HAVE COME IN CONTACT WITH WILD RODENTS.**