

Mini 4-H Pocket Pet



Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd Grades

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Dear Parent:

As a Mini 4-H parent, your job will be to guide and encourage your child through the activity. It is highly suggested that you do not complete the activities for them. Instead, help them, guide them, work with them, and let them do all that they possibly can. The 4-H motto is “Learn by doing” ... and is the best educational tool that we can provide for youth.

It is the policy of the Purdue Extension Service that all persons shall have equal opportunity and access to its programs and facilities without regard to race, color, age, sex, religion, handicap, or national origin.



Welcome to Mini 4-H! You are now a member of the 4-H family. Mini 4-H'ers have lots of fun. There are many activities for you to explore. You can try new things. You can share it with your friends and family.

Mom, Dad or another adult can help you with your project, and you can bring your project to the 4-H fair. Many people will be able to see what you have done. You will receive a ribbon made just for Mini 4-H.

Important Things to Learn

The 4-H Symbol: A four leaf clover with an H in each leaf

4-H Colors: Green and white

The 4-H Motto: To make the best, better.

The 4-H Pledge: I pledge my *Head* for clearer thinking;
my *Heart* for greater loyalty;
my *Hands* for larger service;
and my *Health* for better living
in my club, my community,
my country and my world.



Mini 4-H Pocket Pet

From the moment you hold a soft ball of fluff cupped in your hands, you're smitten. The nose twitches, the whiskers wiggle, and the eyes shine. A fragile, furry bundle of love has put its trust in you, and you have made a new best friend. Welcome to the world of pocket pets.

Hamsters, gerbils, rats, mice, guinea pigs, ferrets, chinchillas, sugar gliders and even hedgehogs are often called "pocket pets" because they are small, cute, and inexpensive. Although more common, fluffy little critters are not the only type of pocket pet. Some pocket pets can live in water, have more than four legs, have slimy skin or maybe even scales. These unique pocket pets include frogs, turtles, lizards, hermit crabs, salamanders, bugs and fish. These small animals have specific diet, housing, and handling requirements. They also need care and attention just as much as a dog or cat. Well cared for pocket pets can live for many years and be just as much fun.

There is no place like home....

A safe, comfortable home is one of the most important things you can provide for your little friend. Pet stores sell a wide range of cages for pocket pets.

The correct size for your pet can vary. The cage should be large enough for pets to move their body freely, like standing up, spinning around and laying down. They should be able to reach food and water easily. They also

need enough space to have separate areas for fooding, sleeping and using the bathroom. A good rule of thumb is your cage should be at least four times the size of your pocket pet when they're full grown. Cages should be clean and well ventilated; secure against cats, dogs, or other predators; and free of hazards like sharp edges. Even aquarium pets need to follow these same safety rules. Some cages are made from glass, stainless steel wire, or durable plastic that is easy to clean and resistant to chewing. They should also have a solid bottom because wire mesh floors can be uncomfortable and can put dangerous amounts of pressure on animals' feet. Wood should be avoided as cage material because it is hard to disinfect and easy to chew. Remember, some pocket pets love to gnaw, and they can easily destroy or escape from a poorly constructed cage.

Most pocket pets require nice, soft bedding as well so they can curl up in and nest, except for our aquatic critters of course. There are all kinds of bedding available at pet stores, ask what type is best for your pocket pet. Change the bedding at least once a week to be sure it stays clean and dry. Make sure to empty the cage completely so you can properly clean and disinfect it.

You can enrich your pet's environment and keep them comfortable and active with a few accessories. A hideout will make your pet feel safe and comfortable. Hideouts are usually small boxes, tubes, hollow rocks or other enclosed areas where your pet can be concealed. Plastic tunnels, wheels, climbing ropes and branches, hollow rolling balls with latching lids, and other toys are available that can help

your pet exercise. Aquatic pets can have live plants, fake plants, bubblers and decorations with openings added to their tanks for enrichment. Always make sure your pet is safe and can't get trapped inside or caught on anything you add to their home. Also make sure the toys and enrichment items are safe for your pet. Items are usually made from metal or durable plastic so your little friend can't chew and ingest them.

Dinner time!

High quality commercial food provides the most complete nutrition for your pocket pet. They are widely available at pet stores and some grocery and department stores. Commercial food is made from the proper proportions of protein, vitamins, minerals, and fiber that have been grounded together. Be sure to feed your pet food made specifically for its species. Different kinds of pocket pets have very different nutritional needs. Some pocket pets can even eat insects, like crickets or mealworms. Many can be given small amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables. Please carefully research your pet's diet and limit the amount of treats you give them each week.

All pocket pets should have fresh, clean water available to them 24 hours a day. Some pets do better if you use a sipper bottle hung from the side of the cage. The sipper tube should be made from metal or heavy plastic so that it can't be chewed or shattered. The ball at the end of a sipper tube should be checked daily to make sure it's working correctly. Bowls of water on the floor of the cage

can be used if your pet can't drink from a sipper bottle. Make sure to clean your bowls daily because they can quickly become contaminated. This includes your pet's feeding bowls too.

Holding them close.

As cute as they are, and as much as you want to cuddle them, you should use some care when you handle your pocket pet. They should be approached slowly and never startled, as they can bite when frightened. If your pet is asleep, wake them gently and give them a few seconds before you pick them up. Remember some pocket pets are nocturnal so they may be harder to wake up and take longer before they're ready to be handled.

Smaller pocket pets like mice, hamsters, and gerbils should be held in the palms of your cupped hands. Larger pocket pets like guinea pigs and lizards should be lifted with one hand wrapped around their shoulders and one hand supporting their underside of their body. Hold them close to your chest so they feel safe and secure.



Have more questions?

Your local veterinarian, library, pet store, rescue and Purdue Extension Office are great places to contact with more questions about how to properly care for your new tiny best friend.



What Will I Do?

To complete the project, you will learn to care for and show a pocket pet at the Hancock County 4-H Fair. The pocket pet must belong to you, and you must be enrolled in the Mini-4-H Pocket Pet project by **May 15th**. Your parent or guardian will also need to sign the **Mini 4-H Liability Waiver**. Please see the **Hancock County Mini-4-H Handbook** for specific requirements and materials needed, etc. Due to space limitations, pocket pets will be released after judging. They must be brought to the pocket pet show in a secure cage with a lid, food and water.

You are also asked to fill out the attached paper about your pet and bring it with you to the pocket pet show. This helps the judge get to know you and your pet. The judge will ask you a few questions about your pocket pet. Do not get scared if you don't know the answer. The judge will help you. Learning is what Mini 4-H is all about!



Mini 4-H Pocket Pet

4-H Member's Name: _____

Pet's Name: _____ Age of Pet: _____

Type of Pet: _____ Adoption Date: _____

Caring for your pocket pet....

What do you feed your pet? _____

How often do you give your pet snacks? _____

What type of snacks do you give your pet? _____

What type of bedding do you use for your pet? _____

How often do you clean their cage? _____

What type of toys do you have for your pet? _____

Tell me a story about your pocket pet?
