

Small Critters

(Not a State Fair Project)

(To enroll in the Small Critters project, select Animal Education: Small Critters in 4HOnline.)

Introduction:

Raising and caring for small animals can be fun as well as a learning experience. There are many different types of small animals. Small Critters are any animal you are caring for as a pet. This project is concerned with small animals that are not classified as production animals. The most popular small critters related to this project can be divided into four categories:

1. Rodents- such as chinchillas, gerbils, guinea pigs, hamsters, and white mice.
2. Birds- such as canaries, finches, parakeets, and parrots.
3. Others- such as ferrets, fish, reptiles, sugar gliders, or turtles.
4. Wild animals- such as deer, monkeys, raccoons, and wolves.

So you want a pet?

If you are interested in a pet, there are several steps to consider:

1. Caring for a pet is a responsibility. All animals require regular care, and this something that should be seriously considered before deciding to commit yourself to them. Your animal will need food, fresh water, and clean cage, even if your best friend invites you to visit for the weekend. Discuss the care and feeding chores with other members of your family before you obtain a pet. You will also want to discuss the money involved with your family. Keeping a pet does cost money.
2. Does your home offer enough space for the animal that you are interested in? Are you able to provide an appropriate environment for your pet? Hamsters may be happy in a small cage in your bedroom, but other animals will require more space for their happiness.
3. After you decide on the type of animal you want, you can obtain him from dealers, pet shops, or from humane society shelters.
4. Select a healthy animal. To be sure that it is healthy, if possible, have it examined by a veterinarian before you take it home. You should have an agreement with the seller than you can return the pet if it is unhealthy. Ask the veterinarian to advise you on what foods will give your pet a balanced diet. Your veterinarian can also tell you what vaccinations your pet will need, and when these should be given. Also ask what symptoms to watch for in case of illness, and when your pet will need treatment.
5. Learn as much about your pet as possible. There are books available from department stores, libraries, pet stores, etc., that will give you detailed information. Talk to other people who raise small animals, and don't forget to observe your own animal. Learn about its habits, its likes and dislikes, and how you can help in making it comfortable and happy.
6. Most Important-if you do get an animal and later decide that you don't want it, take it to an animal shelter for adoption, find a new family that wants it, or have a veterinarian humanely destroy it. Never let an animal suffer from neglect, and never turn an unwanted pet loose to suffer or to annoy others. Animals that have relied on human care cannot survive in the wild.

Selecting Your Small Critter

There are many different types of animals that make excellent pets. You should make a study of several small animals, their living habits, and what is involved in raising and caring for them before you select one as a pet. The following information may give you some ideas on where to start in your search for the right Small Critter.

1. **Rodents-** Can adapt to almost any household, are easy to care for, and cost little to keep.
 - ❖ Chinchilla
 - Small South American rodent with soft gray fur and a long bushy tail
 - Recommend a mesh cage with a solid floor. The cage should be well ventilated and kept dry and cool in temperatures from 60 to 70F.
 - They do not tolerate hot weather or high humidity well.
 - They are omnivores: they eat both plants and meat. Besides commercial pellets, chinchillas like hay, dried fruits and nuts, carrots and green vegetables in moderation.
 - ❖ Gerbil
 - Small brown rodents.
 - Require little care and make good pets.
 - Have natural curiosity, a gentle disposition, and no fear of people.
 - May be kept in a wooden, metal, or wire cage, or a glass aquarium. The cage should be 14 or more inches square and about a foot deep.
 - Food and water should be available at all times. They like commercial pellets, grain, cereals, and fresh fruit or vegetables.
 - ❖ Guinea pig
 - Weigh about 2-2 ½ pounds.
 - Have short, stocky body, short legs and no tails.
 - Easy to keep and an excellent pet for children.
 - Quite, gentle animals that usually do not climb or jump.
 - Easy to handle and become very tame, but must be handled frequently for them to remain tame.
 - Besides commercial pellets, guinea pigs like green cabbage, lettuce, kale, lawn clippings, or similar plants.
 - ❖ Hamster
 - About 6 inches long.
 - Active, playful pet that is easy to keep.
 - Care and feeding similar to other rodents.
 - ❖ White Mice:
 - Require little care and make good pets.
 - Should be kept in a metal cage at least one foot square and one foot deep.
 - In addition to commercial food, mice need cabbage, lettuce, oats or wheat, sunflower seed or bran.
2. **Birds-** Can adapt to almost any household, and are clean, easy to care for, and cost little to keep.
 - ❖ Canaries
 - A type of small yellow finch.
 - Noted for their singing, make entertaining pets.
 - Will need cage equipped with perches, bird bath and containers for food and water.
 - ❖ Finches
 - Active, flighty little birds with feathers of many bright colors.
 - Finches need company, and you can keep several in the same cage.

- ❖ Parakeets
 - Among most popular birds kept as pets.
 - Feathers are usually green, blue, yellow or white.
 - Can be taught to talk.
 - ❖ Parrots
 - Brightly colored birds that make entertaining pets.
 - Can be taught to talk, laugh, cry and whistle.
 - Needs a larger cage than most other birds.
 - ❖ Wild Birds
 - Should not be captured and kept as pets.
 - Encourage them to live near your house by installing birdhouses, baths and feeders.
3. **Other Animals**- There are a variety of other animals which have been domesticated for pets. Check your pet store, veterinarian, and animal owners to learn about the care of these animals.
 4. **Wild Animals**- Animals such as deer, monkeys, raccoons, and wolves and so on should not be captured and kept as pets. You can encourage animals to live near your home by feeding them nuts, peanuts or grain. Caution- food left outdoors overnight may attract rats and mice, small animals you probably don't want.

Exhibit Requirements: Projects will be judged in Levels. All Levels have the same requirements.

Level 1: Grades 3-5

Level 2: Grades 6-8

Level 3: Grades 9-12

- Poster exhibits must be displayed horizontally, sized 22" x 28" foam-core board or poster board mounted on a firm backing, and covered in clear plastic or other transparent material. Your exhibit should demonstrate what was learned and provide viewers with educational information. Examples of topics might be: Selection of Small Critter, Care of Small Critter, Feeding of Small Critter, Equipment needed for care or others of your own choosing. To repeat this poster project, you must select a different topic each year.
- All poster exhibits **must** include a reference list indicating where information was obtained, giving credit to the original author, to complete the 4-H member's exhibit. This reference list should/might include web site links, people and professionals interviewed, books, magazines, etc. It is recommended this reference list be attached to the back of a poster or display board, be the last page of a notebook, or included as part of the display visible to the public. A judge is not to discredit an exhibit for the manner in which references are listed.
- All levels **MUST** submit a completed record sheet signed by your 4-H Club Leader along with your exhibit at project check-in at the fair.