

## Small Animal Enrichment

Rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, ferrets, and other small companion animal are busy, active, intelligent creatures who require daily enrichment so that they can be physically and mentally healthy. Luckily, providing daily enrichment can be incredibly easy, and created from items that you already have around your home.

## DIY Small Animal Enrichment

There are lots of small-animal-safe options that can be created from items found around your house. Cardboard boxes, toilet paper tubes, paper towel tubes, cardboard egg cartons, paper bags (never plastic), and phone books can all be used for creating enrichment for your small animal. It is very important that you carefully remove any tape or labels that would be dangerous for your animal to ingest before you use them as a part of your small animal's enrichment.

They will love chewing up and destroying these items all on their own! You can make these items even more dynamic by putting food items inside of them. A paper bag stuffed with hay and a few treats is great enrichment for your small animal. Larger critters like guinea pigs and rabbits love to fling and throw toys, and will enjoy toilet paper or paper towel tubes stuffed with hay or a few tasty treats (just pinch them closed at each end). These same items will give your hamster or mouse the opportunity to chew through the paper tube until they find the tasty treat inside.



Cardboard boxes can be made into houses, mazes, or stuffed with other enrichment items and hay for your small animal to chew through and explore. Many rabbits love digging in phone books and it is a great alternative to them digging in less desirable places, like your carpet.

Be creative and try different configurations so that your small animal has the opportunity to solve a new problem each day.

## Commercial Small Animal Enrichment

While most of your enrichment can be created from household items, there are other excellent complements to your enrichment plan that can be purchased. [Nina Ottoson puzzles](#) are great, sturdy options for rats, rabbits, and guinea pigs ([www.nina-ottosson.com](http://www.nina-ottosson.com)). Many rabbits and guinea pigs also enjoy navigating Kong Wobblers, as well. You can also purchase hard plastic puzzle toys for small animals by searching online. [Busy Bunny](#) has an array of rabbit specific toys, treats, and enrichment items, as well ([www.busybunny.com](http://www.busybunny.com)).

## Outdoor Enrichment

Larger critters such as rabbits, guinea pigs, and ferrets may also benefit from the opportunity to have supervised time outside. Be sure to NEVER leave your small animal outdoors unattended, and always ensure there is no chance that they will encounter a dog, cat, or any other animal during their time outside. Rabbits and ferrets can be acclimated to harnesses and leashes, but it is important to ensure that the fit is

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appropriate so that they cannot wiggle out of them. Be sure the item you're purchasing is designed specifically for your pet's species. You can also use folding or collapsible pens as long as they are unable to climb or jump out of them, or a dog crate as long as the spacing of the bars is small enough that they cannot escape. While many small animals will enjoy laying in the sun, be sure to also provide shade (this can be as simple as a cardboard box on its side) and water any time you take them outdoors. If your small animal will have access to grass, be sure to avoid grass that has been treated with any pesticides. Do not take your small animal outside if it is extremely hot or cold. If they have not been outside before, they may become easily frightened, so go slowly, take them out in quiet spaces, avoid startling them, and be sure there is no way they could escape. If your animal does become afraid and panics, take them back inside and consider a more gradual approach. Next time, try letting them see and smell the world through a secure screen door before attempting to take them outside again.

## Additional resources

If you are seeking additional support with your small animal, please contact our Behavior Line at 414-431-6173 or email [asktheexpert@wihumane.org](mailto:asktheexpert@wihumane.org).