

# Mini 4-H Pocket Pet



**Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

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, and guinea pigs are often called "pocket pets" because they are small, cute, and inexpensive. Their name is not meant to imply, however, that they're disposable or that they can be neglected. These small animals have specific diet, housing, and handling requirements, and they need care and attention just as much as a dog or cat. And if they're well cared for, they can also be just as much fun.

### **No place like home**

A safe, comfortable home is one of the most important things you can provide for your furry 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 freely and exercise, change their posture (most need room to stand on their hind legs), and be able to reach food and water easily. Cages should be clean and well ventilated; secure against cats, dogs, or other predators; and free of sharp edges. They should be made out of glass, stainless steel, or durable plastic that is easy to clean and resistant to chewing. They should also have a solid bottom: wire mesh floors can put

an uncomfortable and dangerous amount of pressure on animals' feet. Wood should be avoided as cage material because it is hard to disinfect and easy to chew. Remember, pocket pets love to gnaw, and they can easily destroy or escape from a poorly constructed home.

Your pocket pet needs some nice, soft bedding as well, to curl up in and nest. There are all kinds of bedding available at pet stores, ask what type is best for your pocket pet. Change the bedding twice a week to be sure it stays clean and dry. Once a week, empty the cage and clean and disinfect it with a solution of one part bleach to thirty parts water.

You can enrich your pet's environment and keep him comfortable and active with a number of accessories. A "hide box"--a small box, tube, or other enclosed area where your pet can conceal himself--will make him feel safe and comfortable. Plastic tunnels, wheels, hollow rolling balls with latching lids, and other toys are available that can let your pet exercise. Make sure your pet is safe and can't get trapped inside or catch his feet or tail on a seam or a corner. Also make sure that the toys are made out of metal or durable plastic so your furry friend can't chew and ingest them.

### **Dinner time**

Fresh, high quality commercial pellets or feed blocks, designed for each species of pocket pet, provide the most complete nutrition. They are widely available at pet stores and some grocery or drug stores. They are made from seeds and grains ground together in the right proportion to give

your pet the protein, vitamins, minerals, and fiber he needs. Be sure to feed your pet pellets made specifically for its species. Different kinds of pocket pets have very different nutritional needs.

All pocket pets should have fresh, clean water available to them 24 hours a day and it is best to use a sipper bottle hung from the side of the cage, as bowls of water left on the floor of the cage can quickly get contaminated. The sipper tube should be made out of metal or heavy plastic so that it can't be chewed or shattered.

### **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 pets. They should be approached slowly and never startled, as they can nip when frightened. If your pet is asleep, wake him gently and let him orient himself for a few seconds before you pick him up.

Mice, hamsters, and gerbils should be held in the palms of your cupped hands. Guinea pigs and rats should be lifted up with one hand wrapped around the shoulders and one hand supporting the back of the body.

You may have more questions that you may direct to your veterinarian or the following website could be helpful:

[http://www.la-sPCA.org/pre-katrina/education/others/pocket\\_pets.htm](http://www.la-sPCA.org/pre-katrina/education/others/pocket_pets.htm)

## **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. 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 in a secure cage with lid.

The judge may ask a question or two about the Pocket Pet project. Do not get scared if you don't know the answer. The judge will tell you the answer. Learning is what Mini 4-H is all about!

