



2nd Edition

There are **2 types of taming** covered in this guide:

1. **PASSIVE Taming** (page 2)
2. **ACTIVE Taming** (page 5)

PASSIVE TAMING

- **Gradually building trust by showing the gerbils you're not a threat and you bring them good things like food**
- **GETTING THEM USED TO YOUR SCENT**
 - Gerbils rely very heavily on scent to identify members of their family/clan
 - We can use this to help them get used to us BEFORE we start interacting with them
 - Rub your (clean) hands on some kitchen/toilet tissue and add this to their enclosure so they can start to learn who you are before you begin interacting with them
- **ENCOURAGE THEM OUT INTO THE OPEN**
 - Initially gerbils will likely hide in their burrows where they feel safe for the majority of the time
 - We can start to encourage them out into the low bedding area (topper or low bedding side) by leaving highly valuable treats and toys there and only there
 - Using things like millet or other sprays, leaving seeds in the area (that they can't find anywhere else), and toys like rattan balls and foraging toys can all help to give the gerbils positive reinforcement for being out in the open while there's no people around
 - Over time they start to learn that this is the place where good things happen
- **SLOW BLINKING**
 - Closing your eyes slowly and deliberately to show them you mean them no harm

- Can also be achieved by winking or turning your head away
- In the first few days of being home it's a good idea to rely more on turning your head away to make sure they don't perceive you facing them as staring
- Make sure you **don't stare** at them for too long, eye contact in the animal kingdom is generally considered to be a threat

- **GERBIL'S ARE GOOD LISTENERS**

- Gerbils have very good senses of hearing, so talking to them helps them get used to your voice and the sounds you make
- Just by spending lots of time around the enclosure talking to them (even if they're hiding) can help them get used to the sound of your voice and start learning to trust you
- Over time as your gerbils begin to trust you more, you may even be able to soothe them when they're stressed by talking to them
- **Don't shout** or raise your voice at them, this will likely frighten them as they are sensitive prey animals

- **MOVE SLOWLY**

- Gerbils are very sensitive to movement, so in the early days you'll need to move very slowly and deliberately to avoid startling them
- Watch their behaviour after they get startled, as they start to come out to investigate, they will initially be very tense and not moving very much (stay still when they do this)
- Then when they start to feel safe again, they will come out further, their body tension will reduce, and they will start

moving more regularly – this is when you can start slowly moving again

- If you try to move when they're still in a startled/tense state, it will likely scare them all the way back underground, effectively ending the training session
- But, if they only go halfway into their tunnels when they run away you may have a chance to continue training, make sure you keep still and talk to them in a reassuring voice, they may decide to come out again
- If they go further into their burrows after this, they are signalling that they are done with training for now, so leave them be and try again later
- It could take a long time for gerbils to get used to lots of movement, but housing them in a higher traffic area of your home (after they've settled in somewhere quiet) may help them get used to movement more quickly

- **HANDFEEDING**

- Don't feed them their daily food from a bowl, instead weigh it out in the morning and offer them some of it from your hand when you see them throughout the day
- This shows them that you are the DIRECT source of their food and shows your gerbils that you bring them good things
- Whatever food is leftover at the end of the day, SCATTER throughout the enclosure for them to forage for during the night
- Gerbils can eat up to 18 times throughout the day & night, so it's important not to restrict their ability to forage during the night

ACTIVE TAMING

- **Actively encouraging your gerbils to interact with you by using lures and positive reinforcement**
- **REWARDS**
 - The best reward I've found is broken up pumpkin seeds (breaking them up helps stop overeating, makes them less likely to run away with the treats, and gives you more opportunities for reinforcement)
 - You could also use sunflower hearts or other treats they enjoy
 - These should **ONLY** be used when you're asking them to DO something or to encourage the use of foraging toys – this helps to make the treats seem more valuable to the gerbils
 - You can also use a TINY bit of peanut butter (100% peanuts) on a spoon and use this to lure them out onto your hand, weighing scales etc.
 - Don't use peanut butter more than 2x per week though as it's very high in calories and fat
- **REDUCE THEIR DAILY FOOD IF YOU'RE DOING A LOT OF TAMING**
 - If you're doing a lot of active taming (and thus giving them a lot of rewards) you should reduce the amount of daily food you give them slightly to compensate
 - About 10% reduction should be enough, a 30% reduction is considered a weight loss diet

- **BE PATIENT: BUILDING TRUST TAKES TIME**

- The process of active taming is broken down into many steps (sometimes even more steps for shyer animals)
- It takes time for gerbils to learn new things, and you may need to reward very small steps at first (e.g. one foot on your hand, then two, then three, then sitting in your hand)
- You need to watch what your gerbils are telling you with their body language – if they're pulling away a lot, that's their way of saying they don't feel comfortable doing what you're asking right now, just be patient and give them a little more time to get comfortable, it's important to go at their pace

- **EVERY ANIMAL IS DIFFERENT**

- Some are shyer than others, so take longer to tame
- And some will never be totally happy with being held or stroked, and that's okay, we should respect their preferences as much as possible
- Shyer animals may also benefit from access to a playpen/free roam area to help boost their confidence