



If you are under the age of 18, please find a responsible adult to help you,  
as the split tank process can be dangerous

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## Before you start



Before starting the split tank process, there's some important points that you should be aware of:

### **1. New animals should be quarantined**

- When bringing new animals into your home, you should first quarantine them to make sure they don't have any illnesses to pass to your other animals
- The vet recommended quarantine period is 45-90 days, depending on how worried you are about the conditions they came from
- If you decide to skip the quarantine, you're taking the risk of the new gerbil passing illnesses to your other animals
- If you really need to skip quarantine and go straight to bonding, you can minimise the effect on other animals by quarantining your current gerbil along with your new gerbil(s) - that way your gerbils would be the only ones getting sick, any other animals in the home would be protected

### **2. Gerbils can't just be put together straight away**

- Gerbils are generally very aggressive towards unfamiliar rodents and can (& do) attack on sight
- This means if you just put 2 unfamiliar gerbils together in a tank it's highly likely that they will fight (gerbils can fight to the death)

→ This is why it's important to follow a careful introduction method, designed to maximise the safety of the gerbils and humans as much as possible, such as the split tank method

### **3. Scent is the most important thing**

→ Gerbils primarily use scent to identify clan members, so swapping scents so that each gerbil smells like the other is the most important element of bonding gerbils

→ DON'T DEEP CLEAN while doing the split tank, this will undo the all the work getting their scents on everything, and effectively takes you back to the start

- you can spot clean if you notice particularly soiled areas, but make sure to only remove the soiled bedding, and leave most of it untouched, replace the soiled bedding with fresh if needed

→ I have heard stories of the neutral space method working for some people, BUT this seems to be the exception, and it could be very dangerous if it goes wrong, as well as stressful for the gerbils, so I don't recommend it

### **4. Split tanks can generally only be done 1-1**

→ Once a pair or group of gerbils have reached maturity, they will treat any new gerbil as an intruder to their clan

→ They will likely reject the new gerbil and possibly attack them, or the new gerbil could destabilise the bonds in the clan and cause them to fall out and fight with each other. And even if the bonding works initially, they often end up de-clanning later down the line

→ Additionally, the most stable "group" formation in gerbils is pairs, while pairs can still fall out and de-clan, it's less likely than in larger groups (3+)

→ Because of this it's recommended that split tanks only be done 1-1

- The only exception to this rule is introducing 2 very young (<8 weeks) pups to an adult – this usually works best with males as they're more accepting and less territorial, it could *possibly* work with females, if there's the right match of personalities, but for females 1-1 is best

## **5. A good match of personalities is key**

- When getting a new gerbil to bond with your current gerbil, it can be a good idea to look for another gerbil of a similar age, this is so that they have a similar match of energies (if an old gerbil wants to sleep more, they won't appreciate being climbed all over by an energetic pup). Unless you're getting a pair of young pups, then the two young ones can keep each other occupied while the older one rests
- In my opinion though, a successful bond, and a lasting one, depends more on the right match of personalities than on age. If you have a very pushy/anxious gerbil, they may benefit from being matched with someone who's more laid back, calm and happy to go with the flow, these more relaxed gerbils could probably bond with someone anxious or calm, but two anxious/pushy gerbils together could lead to fights for control

## **6. If you can't make a divider for a tank:**

- You can put a small tank topper inside a larger tank and weigh it down with something
- You could also use two small tanks or bin cages side-by-side
- With both of these alternatives, you can continue to swap "sides" and follow the split tank process as usual – scent swapping is the most important factor

## **7. Keep an eye out for signs of heat**

- Female gerbils can go into heat every 4-6 days (some of them at random intervals) for around 8-12 hours, and

when they're in heat they can get a bit pushier and weirder with their friends – I tend to avoid playdates or tank upgrades when I know one of them is due into heat or I've seen signs of heat

→ Signs of heat can include:

- **Excessive foot thumping when seeing the other gerbil** - although, if they do this consistently and in the absence of other heat signs, then it likely means they're anxious instead
- **Running towards the other gerbil then turning back (may also stick their rear end in the other gerbils' face)** - like previously, in the absence of other heat signs, this could also mean they're unhappy with their partner
- **Excessive scent marking (including other gerbil sometimes)** - they will likely be more active and scent mark things in their enclosure (including their new friend) more often than usual – in a split tank, this can also mean they're stressed by/not fully accepted the presence of the other gerbil in the absence of other heat signs
- **Mounting** – the gerbil in heat may attempt to mount the other gerbil, the recipient gerbil will tend to run away, make absolutely sure that they're both the same gender if they appear to be mating
- **Lordosis posture (raised rear end when lower back is touched)** - may not see when they're separated unless you touch their back (don't do this more than once to check, ideally not at all, as it stresses them out), this confirms the gerbil is in heat

## The Split Tank Method

### Step 1



- The first thing we need to do is set up our split tank
- The tank can be any size, it doesn't seem to make much of a difference. You can use a glass tank, or a large plastic tub, as long as the plastic has completely smooth sides with no ridges that they could chew
- Ideally this will be a new tank that neither gerbil has seen before, but if you're using a tank that they've been housed in previously you can remove the old scents by cleaning with a 50/50 white vinegar and water solution, followed by some pet safe disinfectant – the same applies to items
- While they're bonding the bedding doesn't need to be too low, as long as it's low enough so that they can still access their water bottles, this will likely only be a maximum of 3-4 inches before they start burying them! If the bedding gets too high (from all their shredding), simply take a few handfuls out and keep it to the side (it'll come in handy later)

- You can also include a hide on each side, I like to use open-ended wood bridge hides so that they can go back-to-back against the divider – this way, even when they're hiding from people or something else that spooked them, they're still close to each other
- You can try and include a chew-proof wheel if you're able to, but it may just end up getting buried! If you use a wooden wheel, be prepared for the gerbils to try and destroy it, I had to remove mine
- As well as bedding, hides and water bottles, you'll also need a plentiful supply of chew toys, such as: hay, cork bark, popsicle sticks, cardboard tubes, plain packaging paper, plain cardboard, paper pulp egg cartons, paper pulp plant pots and drinks holders, dandelion roots, mixed leaves & flowers, pinecones and apple wood sticks - we want to make sure they have plenty to do, a stressed and unhappy animal won't be good at making friends



## Step 2



- Put the gerbils on opposite sides of the split
- Scatter their daily food near the divider to help build up a positive association with each other
- Swap them over once per day (ideally when they're already awake)
- For at least the first week keep them completely separate during swaps, you can use a pet carrier to hold one of them while you swap the other
- You'll also need to add new chew toys regularly to keep them entertained (it may be a good idea to ask friends, family or neighbours to help with cardboard provisions, they go through them at lightning speed!)



### Step 3

- After a MINIMUM of a week in the split tank with daily swaps, if there's positive signs (see below) you can attempt a playdate
- You'll need to remove all hides from the calmest gerbils' side, and you may need to take out some bedding so they can't hide under it (just keep the bedding aside to put back in after the meets) - and make sure to wear thick gardening gloves to protect your hands in the event of a fight that needs separating
- Put the pushy gerbil on the calm gerbils' side to minimise territorial behaviour
- Don't push the meet for too long, if you put them together and one immediately tenses up or starts back arching or relentlessly chasing, separate, you may only get a few minutes on the first day, if that (with Luna & Pumbaa I got a minute or two, with Luna & Misty it was 20 minutes)
- If there are lots of negative signs on your playdate, give them at least a couple more days in the split (and without negative signs) before trying again
- **Positive signs**
  - In split:
    - Friendly sniffs at divider
    - General disinterest in one another
    - Sleeping in each other's nests after swaps
    - Hanging out near divider, near each other
    - Attempted grooming through divider
    - Progressively less scent marking
  - On playdates:
    - General disinterest in one another
    - Grooming

→ **SNUGGLES** – this is the major positive sign we look for and generally indicates a successful bond, more so than the other signs

- **Negative signs**

**In split:**

→ Constant foot thumping when seeing other gerbil (if only every few days, could be a sign of heat instead)

→ Constant scent marking that hasn't reduced since starting the split

→ Attempting to attack the other gerbil through the divider

**On playdates:**

→ Lots of body tension

→ Constant, fast, aggressive chasing (a short, slow chase is okay, as long as it's not persistent and unrelenting)

→ Side arching (this would be the equivalent of growling in dogs)

→ Fighting (not-so-affectionately known as a “death ball”) -  
**SEPARATE IMMEDIATELY**



Image 1: Friendly sniffs



Image 2: Snuggles!



Image 3: Side arching



Image 3: Fight aka "death ball"

### Step 4

- If they were okay together yesterday, you can attempt another playdate (if they were immediately and/or extremely aggressive give it at least a day, possibly a few days more)
- Keep them together for up to a few hours if they're not showing aggressive signs, and scatter their food around to give them a distraction and positive reinforcement – you can also add some cardboard
- Once they've had a few hours together successfully WITH snuggles (this is the most important sign), spilt overnight one last time, and move on to step 5 tomorrow (or a day where you can monitor them all day)



## Step 5

- Choose a day that you can stay with them and watch them all day, then put your pushy gerbil on the calm gerbil's side first thing in the morning and watch them closely all day
- If you see lots of positive signs **ESPECIALLY SNUGGLES**, you can let them have a sleepover
- I like to keep them in my room overnight the first few nights so I can hear any shenanigans



## Step 6



- After a successful sleepover you can remove the divider to give them more space to explore – give the bedding a mix when you remove the divider to integrate all their scents
- Stay near the tank with gloves at the ready for the first 20 minutes or so, just in case something goes wrong
- If there are minor disagreements, try and distract them by calling them, adding a new chew toy, or offering them food. But if there's lots of aggressive chasing that doesn't let up, severe side arching or ball fights, you may need to split them again and go back to step 2
- If they're good, and show lots of positive signs, you could maybe add something like an open top sand bath – monitor them closely and watch out for any arguments over it
- If you find them arguing over something, remove it for today, and try and add 2 tomorrow so they don't have to share – this applies for all future item additions too

## Step 7



- After another successful day, I like to upgrade the space before adding anything else (if you're bonding in their regular tank, and they already have all their space, you can skip this step), so you can upgrade them to their main tank, add their bonding bedding (this is where your stash comes in handy) and a sand bath
- Make sure to keep the bedding low for now so you can monitor them closely

## Step 8



- After a successful day in the upgraded tank, you can start adding hides
- Add one at a time each day, observing closely for any arguments, until you've added all you want to add underground
- **Make sure hides have MULTIPLE exits** – this is so that if a fight were to break out, no one could get trapped inside

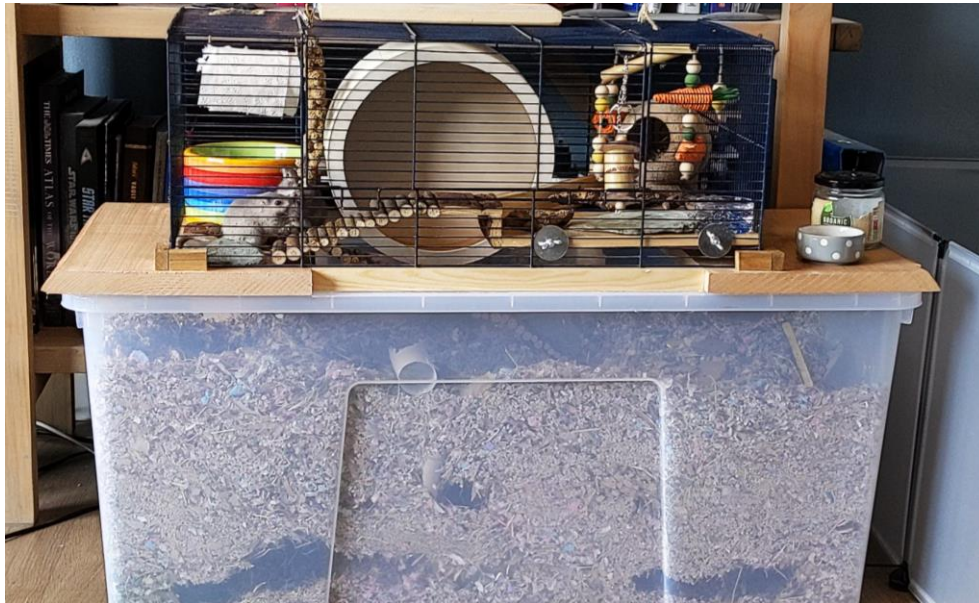
## Step 9



- If they're okay with all the hides and there were no fights over them, you can start increasing the bedding
- Layer the new bedding with bedding from their split tank
- I tried to do this slowly, but they ended up burying everything and destroying the divider, so the tank got filled, but I kept the smaller topper for a couple of days so I could see through it easier and make sure there were no issues
- If you've got a divider setup you could partially fill the burrow side on one day, then fully fill it the next



## Step 10



- If you have a topper, you can add this a day or two after increasing your bedding
- Monitor them closely to make sure there's no fights over anything – if there is, remove it until you can add 2
- You can then add single entrance hides one at a time to the topper or low bedding area if you want, keep a very close eye and remove it if there's any tension or squabbles over it
- DO NOT put single entrance hides underground for bonded pairs, it's too risky as you can't monitor them

## Maintenance Tips

- Approach free roaming **WITH CAUTION**, it can cause bonded pairs to argue more
  - Give them at least a week together in their full setup before attempting free roaming
  - Try and free roam them in a neutral area that neither have seen before (you may need to get a new playpen) and make sure there's no scents of other gerbils/animals, this could possibly trigger them to fall out
  - The bathtub seems to work well even when other areas fail
  - ALWAYS supervise free roam time, if there are scuffles, try and distract them
  - Pairs may need to be free roamed separately if there's constant or severe arguments, but keep an eye on them when they're back in the enclosure and make sure there aren't any issues (some gerbils may get angsty even when only one of them has been out)
  - You may be able to train them to be more accepting by using positive reinforcement training (contact me for more help with this, I can offer behaviour consultations if needed)
- When changing bedding make sure to ALWAYS keep some of their old bedding (unless there's a medical issue that means they need to be on kitchen roll for a time)
- NO single entrance hides underground, you may be able to use them in topper/low bedding area or free roam area if you monitor them closely and there's no arguments
- Try to make sure there's multiple ways in and out of all areas (including topper/low bedding area) so one gerbil can't prevent the other from accessing them
- Watch them carefully when adding a new item, if they fight over something, remove it until you can add 2

- ALWAYS scatter feed to prevent fights or resource guarding (you can also hand feed a little as long as you make sure they both get access), or if you need to give soft food, use multiple bowls placed as far apart as possible
- Consider using 2 water sources
- If offering one a treat, make sure to offer the other one too so they learn to come to you for food, rather than steal – initially, you may need to wave the treat in their face to get their attention if they instinctively chase the other gerbil, but over time they should learn to come to you instead
- DON'T separate them for more than a few hours
  - for separate free roam time mice get a maximum of 30 minutes each (usually 15), with brief time together in the tank in between
- If you notice tension develop between the pair and there's lots of arguments and chasing happening, pre-emptively put them back in the split tank for a few days
  - it's better to do this than to wait for it to escalate into a possibly severe fight and fall out that can't be repaired

### If it fails

- If there's a fight, but **NO blood is drawn**: put them back into the split and don't attempt another meet for at least few days, continue swapping sides as usual
- If there's a fight, and **blood is drawn**, but there are only mild injuries: completely separate them for a week or so, into their own enclosures and treat their injuries. Then, once they've fully healed, try again with the split tank – If there was severe fighting to the point of mauling, don't attempt to continue bonding them, it's unlikely to work and puts the gerbils at too much risk (a mild fight with only mild injuries may still have a chance at success)
- If there are constant aggressive signs (in split or on meets) that don't let up after a month or so, separate them into their own enclosures (possibly own rooms if they're stressed by the other gerbil), you could maybe try again with the split one more time after they've had a week or so separated
- If the split fails multiple times: try a different pairing if you're able to, the gerbils that failed may just not be compatible
  - but if you're not able to try a different pairing, consider setting them up as neighbours (ideally with toppers so they can interact through the bars, a split playpen could also work for some interaction time)
  - but if they are showing signs of stress or aggravation (such as attacking the bars when the other gerbil is nearby), move them apart until they're comfortable
  - if you only have one aggressor who gets angry living as neighbours, it may be best to leave the aggressor solo, and find a new friend for the friendlier gerbil
  - this is unlikely to happen in most cases, I'd estimate around 1-5% of gerbils may fit into this category