



Prairie dog

Prairie dogs, a type of ground squirrel, are native to the grass prairies of Mexico, Canada and the United States, where they live in tightly knit communities. Prairie dogs can be engaging, loyal and affectionate pets, but they are not for everybody. They are very social little animals that can strong form bonds with your human family, and they require attention, commitment and vigilance. By following some guidelines for good prairie dog care, you can ensure that your lively, lovable prairie dog will thrive. Take your prairie dog to a vet experienced with these animals as soon as you get it for an initial checkup, which should include a clean bill of health for monkey pox disease, a rare viral disease that can be transmitted to humans from prairie dogs. The visit should also include a screening for parasites and a follow-up appointment for spaying or neutering. To avoid seasonal aggressive behavior, your prairie dog should be neutered or spayed during the fall of its first year. Provide a cage that is roomy enough for your prairie dog to play in, and put it in an area out of direct sunlight, drafts and temperature changes. Cage dimensions should be at least 2 feet by 2 feet by 3 feet, with [flooring](#) composed of strong wire that is spaced no wider than 1/2 inch by 1/2 inch, and a tray underneath that can be pulled out for cleaning. Set up the cage with the proper prairie dog furnishings. Provide an untreated wood or metal box for nesting, a litter box with a 2-inch layer of aspen shavings or newspaper pellets, soft white T-shirts for bedding, and a rough cinder block or brick to help wear down your pet's nails naturally. Add a pan filled with play sand so your prairie dog can dig to its heart's content. Offer other toys that provide mental and physical stimulation, such as parrot toys, rope dog chews, tunnels to crawl through, and bunches of grass and hay to burrow through and munch on. Do not use alfalfa hay, and make sure any wooden toys are made from untreated wood, with no varnish or paint. Keep your prairie dog's claws trimmed to avoid your pet catching its nails on fabrics or inadvertently scratching you. Cut only the very tip, using a toenail clipper designed for cats or ferrets, and have styptic powder on hand to prevent bleeding. Give your prairie dog chemical-free, untreated branches from maple, willow or mulberry trees to provide proper gnawing materials, which will supply necessary tooth wear. Since prairie dogs' incisors continue to grow throughout their lives, they develop serious medical problems if teeth are not worn down naturally. Feed your prairie dog a diet of good-quality commercial pelleted prairie dog food containing timothy and oat hay. Fresh vegetables can be offered as treats in moderation, but avoid offering gassy foods like broccoli or cauliflower. Dried pig ears and corn on the cob are good choices for treats. Provide fresh drinking water in a sipper-type hanging bottle, and change it daily to prevent algae buildup. Confine your prairie dog when you aren't able to directly supervise it--even if you believe you have prairie dog-proofed your [house](#), your pet can still find plenty of mischief--and keep a close eye on it when it is loose. Chewing electric cords, escaping through screens and getting into toxic household chemicals are only a few of the dangerous activities these curious animals are prone to.

- To avoid your prairie dog feeling isolated or lonely, place its cage in a room where the family congregates, such as a recreation room.
- Because of their social structure and communal nature, they

can become quite protective of their human families, sometimes to the point of exhibiting aggression toward visitors; you will want to contain your prairie dog when you expect company. • Prairie dogs can deliver a painful nip. Wear gloves when handling your prairie dog until you are sure it is socialized. • Do not use cedar or pine shavings for bedding for your prairie dog--they can cause eye irritation and respiratory problems. • Limit your prairie dog's access to furniture and surfaces that are up high to protect it from serious falls and injury. According to the Prairie Dog Lover website, prairie dogs lack both depth perception and fear of heights, as well as the proper claws for gripping.