

# Opossum

Short Tailed opossum

*Monodelphis domestica*

Adult Size	4 to 6 inches plus tail	Life Span	3 to 4 Years
Male/Female Differences	Males have obvious testicles from an early age. Females have a smooth opening near her tail.		
Compatibility	Opossums are solitary animals and each one needs a separate cage. This is an animal that does not need a "friend".		
Origin	Brazil, Paraguay, and Bolivia		
Climate	Tropical climate: warm and relatively humid. They adapt to most home temperatures. An under tank heater or non-UV heat lamp can ensure they have the right temperature if the home gets cooler than 70 degrees.		
Day Cycle	Nocturnal (works the night shift, sleeps during the day.) May be awake and more playful in the evening hours.		
Temperature	70 to 80 degrees. They like it warmer while sleeping, conditions met in their sleeping box.		
Lighting	Being nocturnal, bright lights should be avoided.		
Humidity	40% to 60% ideal. Low humidity risks dehydration and excessively high humidity can speed the development of bacteria.		
Habitat/Territory	Tropical jungle, everything from terrestrial to arboreal. They sleep in small holes in the ground or in trees.		
Substrate/Bedding	Provide a safe and soft bedding, the less dusty the better. Cedar bedding can be toxic and pine too dusty. Good litters are shredded or pelleted aspen or recycled paper products. Supply nesting materials and dry hays.		
Hiding Place/Den	A bird nesting box makes an ideal retreat and sleeping den.		
Cage Type	At least a 30 inch aquarium with a locking lid with numerous		

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	branches and climbing places. Bird cages work well, with plenty of places to hang toys and perches – just make sure all the doors are locked. The cage must be large enough for a safe running wheel, a litter pan, a nest box, a food bowl and a water bottle with plenty of room for jumping and climbing.
Diet	Opossums are omnivorous in the wild. Offer them variety! Start with a basic ferret, cat, or hedgehog dry diet. Superworms and crickets are a favorite treat and by offering them by hand you speed the bonding process. Offer fresh or thawed fruits and vegetables – they love grapes! Give small bites of scrambled or boiled egg, baby food (both fruits and vegetables), and cooked lean meats. Dairy, like yoghurt and cottage cheese, need to be offered sparingly.
Supplements	Variety in the diet will prevent any nutritional deficiencies. Calcium powder can be added to crickets and other insects before feeding. Vitamins, such as bird or hamster vitamins, can be added to food or water.
Diet Precautions	Overfeeding of fatty foods can lead to obesity. Do not offer too much dairy as it can cause diarrhea. Avoid foods with high fat, sugar, and salt content.
Feeding	Feed at night. Remove the food in the morning to prevent spoilage. Offer insects by hand to bond with your opossum.
Water Source	Water bottles work because they are not as easily soiled as water bowls. Some opossums, however, have difficulty operating the bottle, so offer a small bowl of water. Make sure the opossum can drink from the bottle (training might be necessary) and check water bowls frequently so they stay clean.
Grooming	Opossums groom themselves and are quite clean. Occasional dust baths, using chinchilla dust, or bathing using gentle pet shampoo can remove excess oils from their fur.
Oral and Foot Care	Opossums have little problems with oral problems, and nails tend to stay short from the exercise. Use manicure bird perches to naturally trim their nails. Running wheels must be safe to prevent foot injuries.
Proper Handling	New opossums are nervous; ply with treats like crickets and superworms. Pick up familiar opossums around the waist. Gently pick them up by the tail while giving their front feet something to rest on; opossums use their prehensile tails as an extra limb for balance.
Habitat Maintenance	Empty and change litter box daily. Opossums sometimes use the bathroom when running in their exercise wheel; choose a wheel that is easy to clean. Some owners place litter boxes

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under the wheel. Regardless of your solution, clean this area daily. Replace the bedding and wipe down cage once a week.

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Health Concerns

Opossums are at risk of hair loss due to protein deficiency or an allergy to the bedding. Diarrhea is possible due to new foods and dehydration can be a real danger. Older opossums are at risk of respiratory illness, digestive problems and tumors. Opossums are the only other mammal that can develop skin cancer from too much sunlight!

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