

BONDING WITH YOUR RAT

THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

Give your rat time to settle in

Rats are a prey species and thus earning their trust can be a long process; even well adjusted rats from breeders take time to warm up to their new families. Keep in mind that there has been a lot of change in your new rat's life and he has to learn that these are good changes, not scary ones! Your rats may hide from you, shy away from your hand, or even test nibble your fingers to make sure that you aren't going to hurt them. Don't give up! Take the bonding period slowly and consider your rat's individual history and needs. Avoid the urge to reach into your pet's new home on the first day, but rather sit in the room and talk to him or her so they can get used to your voice. It is important for them to have autonomy and feel in control, so give them the choice to interact with you or not.

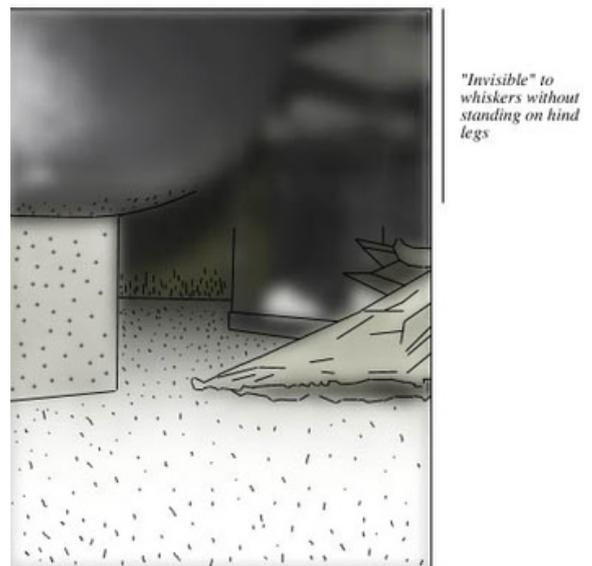
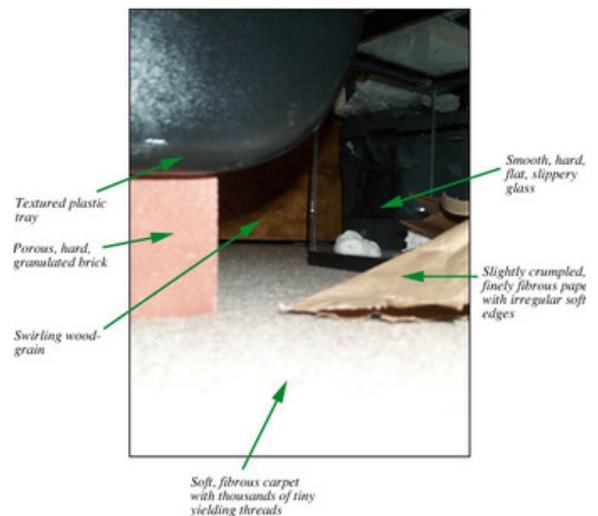
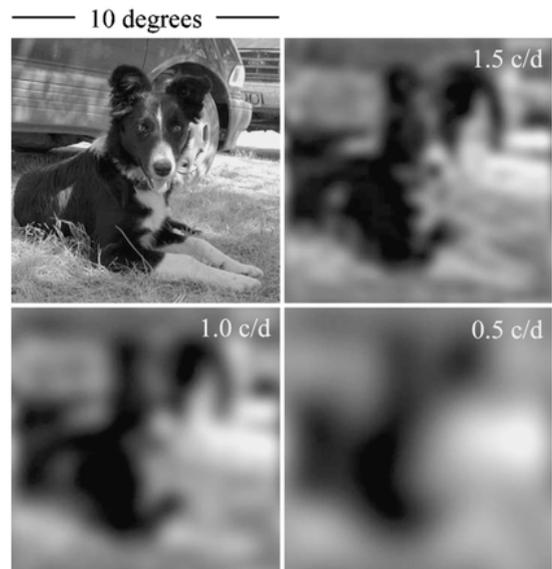


TAKE A PEEK AT WHAT'S INSIDE:
Best treats for building trust

UNDERSTANDING YOUR RAT

Rats rely on their sense of smell and touch more than vision. Albino rats are virtually blind and experience a “dazzling” effect when exposed to bright light. This is why rats prefer slow movements and being approached from the front, not above.

You may notice that your rat walks around the room as close to the walls as they can be. This is called **thigmotaxis**, or “wall-hugging.” Because rats’ whiskers are sensitive to touch, they slide their whiskers. In order to make your rats comfortable, it is important to understand how they experience the world. In the above image, the top left square represents how humans would see the dog. The top right is what a Norway rat (the type we keep as pets) with normally-pigmented eyes would see. The bottom left is what wild rats and hooded rats. Lastly, the bottom left represents what an albino rat will see.



Human vision



Normally-pigmented rats have blurry dichromatic vision with a little color



Albino rats may see a very blurry, light-dazzled world

UNDERSTANDING YOUR RAT CONTINUED

You can see from the images that rats have blurry vision compared to humans. Albino and red-eyed rats have worse vision than rats with dark eyes. Now consider that rats also do not see colors the same way – easier to understand how picking a rat up from above might look to the rat like a predator picking them up from the sky. To have a strong bond with your rats, it is critical to understand how they experience the world. across the walls to they can be sure they are not walking out in the open, which in the wild would make them more vulnerable to predators. Rat whiskers are so sensitive that they can feel vibrations of sounds – for example, they may be able to feel the air conditioning in your home at work just by sliding their whiskers across the walls.

Give your rats the **choice** to interact with you on their own terms. Try resting your hand in the cage in a space where the rats can avoid it if they desire. Let them approach and sniff your hand without trying to pet them. Once they learn your hand won't try to grab or hurt them, they will feel more confident to approach you. Take advantage of your rats' love for food.

Try giving your rats a treat every time you walk into the room. They will quickly associate you with the positive of getting good treats! It is important to make your rat **feel safe**. Try putting a piece of fabric that smells like you in your rat's favorite sleeping spot. Make sure your rats have several boxes and hides where they can retreat if they begin to feel scared. Soon they will associate your smell with the safety of their favorite sleep spots and hides.

For the first few weeks that your rats are in their new home, give them a high value treat every time you walk into the room. Rats are so food motivated that they will quickly learn that you are the wonderful delicious food bringer! Try putting your rats' cage in an area of your house where you can open the cage door and allow them to venture out at their own pace to explore their new world. This space should be rat-proofed; they should not be able to sneak under a piece of furniture or have cables to experiment chewing on. The top of a dresser can be a good option. Use a gentle, soft voice when speaking to your rats. Avoid the urge to squeal and use loud baby talk as you might with a puppy.

Always remember that rats are prey species and **loud noises and quick movements can be very scary** for them.

Never try to pick your rat up from above. Always move slowly and scoop them up from beneath their feet. This way they do not feel like a bird of prey is lifting them away. If you have a rat-safe area in your house like a playpen, bring your rats out in their carrier and set it in the pen. Sit in the pen with them and allow them to explore you, walk across your lap, without attempting to pick them up. Remember that **your rats are individuals with unique personalities and preferences**. What works with one rat may not work with another. Don't give up. Be **patient and understanding**. With enough time and love, your rats will learn to trust you.



Build your treat arsenal

