

Prairie Dog Care Guide

(Most commonly kept: *Black-Tailed Prairie Dog* — *Cynomys ludovicianus*)

Species Overview

- **Common Name:** Prairie Dog
 - **Scientific Name:** *Cynomys ludovicianus*
 - **Lifespan:** 8–12 years (in captivity)
 - **Size:** 12–16 inches, 1–3 pounds
 - **Temperament:** Social, vocal, and intelligent — requires time and interaction
 - **Legal Note:** Ownership may be restricted in some states—check local laws
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Housing

Enclosure

- **Minimum Size:** 4 ft x 2 ft x 2 ft (bigger is better)
- **Style:** Large, secure wire cage with solid flooring (multi-level if possible)
- **Escape-Proof:** Prairie dogs are **strong diggers and chewers** — enclosures must be secure
- **Outdoor Time:** Supervised outdoor play in a secure pen is beneficial (weather permitting)

Bedding

- **Type:** Paper bedding, aspen shavings, or fleece liners
 - **Depth:** Provide a deep area (4–6 inches) for digging and burrowing
 - **Enrichment:** Add tunnels, hides, chew toys, and digging boxes
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Temperature & Environment

- **Ideal Range:** 70–78°F
 - **Avoid extremes:** Below 50°F or above 85°F without proper adjustments
 - **Lighting:** Natural light cycle preferred — no special lighting needed
 - **Humidity:** Moderate; avoid overly humid environments
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Diet

Main Food

- **High-Fiber Hay:** Timothy hay, orchard grass — should be available at all times
- **Grasses & Greens:** Dandelion greens, clover, romaine, collards (avoid iceberg lettuce)
- **Pellets:** Prairie dog-specific pellets or timothy-based guinea pig pellets

Treats (Occasional)

- Carrots, apples (no seeds), sweet potato, fresh corn
- Avoid high-sugar and high-fat foods

Water

- Provide **fresh, clean water daily** in a bottle or heavy bowl
 - Clean water container frequently
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Cleaning & Grooming

- **Cage:** Spot-clean daily, full clean weekly
 - **Bedding:** Replace weekly or more often if soiled
 - **Grooming:** Generally clean animals — brush lightly if shedding
 - **Nails:** Trim monthly or as needed
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Socialization & Handling

- **Social Creatures:** Prairie dogs live in large family groups in the wild — they **need daily interaction**
 - **Best in Pairs/Groups:** Keeping at least **two** is ideal (if possible and legal)
 - **Handling:** Start slowly; be calm and gentle. They may nip if startled or untrained
 - **Vocalizations:** They bark, chirp, and chatter to communicate
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Health & Veterinary Care

- **Exotic Vet Needed:** Must have access to a vet experienced with rodents or exotic mammals
- **Common Issues:**
 - Overgrown teeth (need chew toys)

- Obesity (from poor diet or lack of exercise)
 - Respiratory issues (from poor ventilation or dusty bedding)
 - Dental abscesses or GI blockages
 - **Checkups:** Annual vet visits recommended
 - **Neutering/Spaying:** May help reduce aggression or marking
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Fun Facts & Tips

- Prairie dogs have **complex social structures** and greet each other with “kisses”
 - They are **burrowing animals** — give them deep bedding or a dig box
 - Without proper enrichment, they can become **bored or depressed**
 - Use puzzle feeders and rotate toys for mental stimulation
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What to Avoid

- **No cedar or pine shavings** (toxic)
- Don't house with other small animals
- Avoid processed human food, dairy, chocolate, caffeine
- Don't ignore them — they can become destructive if lonely or neglected