



Milwood Animal Clinic

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Pet Fox Care

Natural History and Basic Facts

Foxes are small-medium canines that, similar to dogs, are omnivores. There are multiple species in the fox group, including fennec foxes, red foxes, and arctic foxes.

In the wild, the life span of a fox is a handful of years, but a true lifespan is suspected to be closer to ten years. Unlike wolves, foxes generally do not hunt in groups and prefer solitary life.



Foxes are considered wild animals, but in more recent years, attempts to tame them have been made for the pet trade. One of the most well known efforts originated in Russia as an experiment to look at the domestication process (in this case using silver foxes) and breeding for tameness. Nonetheless, there are people that still consider them to be a nuisance.

Foxes as Pets - Legality aspect

Foxes are quite interesting small mammals with a dog-like body but with a cat-like personality. This makes them quite popular in the exotic pet world. However, this does not equate them to being good pets.

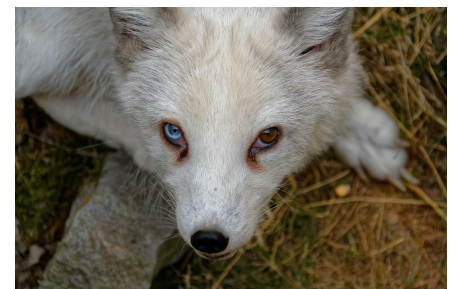
Foxes are not domesticated by any means (they are not like dogs or cats). A fox kept as a pet is still a wild animal that is partially tame (more acclimated to human living but with quite prominent instincts).

They may also not be legal to own. Fox species that are legal to own in the US (in general, not state by state) include the arctic fox, the grey fox, and the red fox. Within these species, there are sub-species and different colors as well (especially the red fox).

States have their own jurisdictions regarding the owning of exotic animals. Some states require licenses to own, some will not allow any exotics animals kept as pets, and some are very free with what can be owned. Prior to purchasing a fox, check with your state laws to see if you can legally own one, then also check the city/county. Some cities/counties have their own by-laws as well regarding exotic animals.

The state of Michigan states that no large cats, hybrids or wolves may be owned in the state. An entry permit must be obtained for any exotic animal not regulated by fish and wildlife prior to entering the state, and a health certificate (as seen by an accredited veterinarian) may be required.

In the state of Michigan - owners of red foxes with natural, wild coloration are required to have a permit for ownership, while other colors do not require a permit. Arctic foxes (as they are a non-native species)



can be owned without a permit but **MUST** to be purchased from a USDA breeder with a health certificate. Gray foxes are similar to red foxes and they may require a permit. Fennec foxes are considered non-native and do not require a permit in the state of Michigan

Handling & Overall Ownership

Foxes are not domestic like cats or dogs. They require constant supervision as they will get into everything. Some foxes will tolerate petting and want attention, while others will not want to be handled much.

However, you will want to work with socializing your fox. You will want it to be acclimated to people, to the car, to a harness (this will make travel easier). It is important to know that in the state of Michigan, while foxes can be vaccinated for rabies (this is off-label), if they do bite a person they must be tested for rabies, which requires euthanasia (putting the animal down). Clicker training is recommended (similar to dogs) to help train a fox.

Foxes can be quite loud (they vocalize more than other pets do) and can "stink". It is possible to house train a fox, but they generally aren't completely ever house trained. Similar to a cat, you will want to place a box with a pee pad in it where they like to go and work to convince them urinate/defecate there. However, foxes mark things as theirs, so in all likelihood, you will still have accidents in the house.

Foxes are generally regarded as outdoor pets (though that doesn't mean they have to always be outside). They are generally very active in the evening and at night, so having an outdoor safe enclosure for them to run off excess energy is important. You will want an enclosure that is at least eight feet long by eight feet wide by six feet tall. The floor will either need to be dig proof or have mesh that goes under to prevent burrowing out, and the top needs to be enclosed as well. Foxes are excellent climbers and diggers. If its chain link, be cautious as they can chew through it (you will want something no more than 14 gauge).

Enclosures should have enrichment such as toys, ramps, platforms, sandboxes, etc. You will want to clip the food dish and water dish to the side of the enclosure to keep them from marking it as their and keeping them from knocking it over every few minutes. A dog house/nesting box is also a necessity to keep them out of the elements and give them a place to hide/relax/sleep.

Fox Diet

Everyone has their own "fox diet," and it can be difficult to figure out what is best. Foxes are prone to either being very underweight from a bad diet to completely obese from being overfed. They're omnivores, similar to dogs, but dog food is not generally the best thing for them. Raw diets can also get difficult due to inadequate vitamins. The best way to feed a fox is offering a base diet with added components. Thus, feeding a base of Mazuri Exotic Canine Diet or a high quality dog food (such as Science Diet or Royal Canin) that makes up approximately 30-50% of the diet, with 10-20% vegetables/fruit (fresh) and 5-15% vertebrate prey (such as mice) and 5-10% invertebrate prey (such as gut loaded insects) - what many zoos do. However, these diets are constantly changing as we learn more. Taurine should be supplemented in all cases. It can be found in the vitamin section of most health food stores. Chicken hearts are a also good source of taurine.



Foxes are foragers in the wild so they get plenty of exercise and don't overeat. In a home situation, food is plentiful and there is not as much opportunity for exercise. This can lead to obesity so care must be made not to over feed or under exercise your fox. You can provide mental stimulation for them by hiding their food in various puzzle feeders.

What to Expect at a Veterinary Visit?

Foxes need vet care just like all animals. A yearly physical with a fecal examination is recommended to monitor for any issues.

Since foxes are generally kept outdoors, parasites are a concern, including fleas. However, most foxes can be kept on dog products for flea prevention. Speak with a veterinarian prior to starting any flea prevention.

Just like dogs, they can also get the internal parasites - the most serious being heartworms. This can be a deadly condition, but thankfully, they can be kept on a heartworm prevention like man's best friend, and do need yearly heartworm tests to check for continual negative status. An annual fecal parasite screen is also recommended to test for intestinal parasites.

Foxes require regular vaccines. Rabies vaccines are not approved for foxes but are routinely used off label to protect against the disease. Distemper (something we vaccinate for in dogs) is a disease that is 100% fatal if a fox contracts it. Thus, they need to be vaccinated for this as kits and receive a yearly booster. However, the vaccine for distemper generally used in dogs (a modified live vaccine) can actually trigger the disease in foxes so care must be used to find a killed virus vaccine for this disease. They need to use a different type of vaccine for safety. Foxes are also susceptible to canine Parvovirus so vaccination for this is also recommended.

Neutering and spaying a fox can reduce unwanted reproductive behaviors such as urine marking and aggression. This is done in a similar time frame as a dog/cat (around 6 months of age), and can be discussed with your veterinarian.

Fox Quick Guide

- Foxes are still, in general, considered wild animals that are tame
- Foxes are unique pets, but require a lot of socialization and interaction to keep their destructive behaviors in check
- Foxes should have an outdoor pen with appropriate stimuli.
- Diet is ever changing and what we think may work today may be improved upon tomorrow
- Foxes need regular vaccinations and veterinary care

