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The Pethamsters.co.uk guide to breeding Syrian hamsters.

Before you start breeding hamsters you should consider your reasons for wanting to do it:

**1. Is it because you think you can make a profit from breeding?**

If the answer to this question is yes then **think again!** There is little to no profit attainable for all but the largest commercial breeders who sell to pet stores.

You have to think how expensive it is to start up your breeding empire. You will need as a minimum: a cage for your mum, a cage for your stud and at least two spares for separating the different sexed babies into when they are ready to leave their mum. If you want to produce 1 litter every month you will need two females, each with their own cage.

Then you have to consider who you would sell them to. The larger pet stores such as Pets At Home only take babies from registered licensed breeders. Many of the more local shops will probably only give you a max of £2 per pup and will then sell them on for £6, but if you put an ad in your local paper at £6 or in a shop window you will not get much interest.

You also need to be confident at taming the babies and to not give up the first time you are bitten. Whoever you try to sell your pups to, be it friends, a pet shop or strangers who respond to an ad in your paper, NO-ONE will accept a timid or vicious little baby.

What would you then do if you had a litter of babies on your hands (probably 10 or more pups!) that you could not shift? You will need to purchase 10 more cages as Syrian hamsters can not live in groups and then look after them for the next 3 years. The other option is to give some away for free or have them put to sleep by a vet. Releasing them into the 'wild' is not a fair option to either the hamsters or your local ecosystem. It is likely that all the hamsters will be caught and eaten by cats or foxes, but consider what would happen if they survived: The introduction of non native species can have a devastating effect on the environment – you only need to look at the example of how the Grey Squirrel introduced into Britain has outcompeted our native Red Squirrel for habitats and resources and has pushed it to the Scottish highlands and isolated populations in England. Or what about the rabbit, introduced from Europe into England and Australia they have quickly multiplied and now devastate crop production.

**2. Is it because you want to see how a litter grows up and for you to see the creation of life?**

If the answer to this question is yes then having a one-off litter may be the option for you. But again you will need a female hamster and either a male of your own or a friend who has one. You also need to consider the points above on what you would do if you could not sell/give away your babies.

If you have read the points above but still think breeding hamsters is for you then read on:

### **Preparing for your litter:**

You will need the following:

1. A female hamster (and cage to live in) – she must be at least 3 months old before you attempt to mate her as although she can conceive before this age any litters she does have will probably suffer from complications as she is not big or strong enough to give birth successfully and any babies that do survive will probably be eaten by her.
2. A male hamster (and cage to live in).
3. Two spare cages to separate you male and female pups into on weaning from their mother, with toys to keep the young ones interested and occupied.

### **Mating:**

Due to the nocturnal nature of Syrians, matings are most successful when attempted at night, we normally try after 8pm. A female Syrian Hamster comes into heat on average once every 3 or 4 days. We have found that the easiest way to achieve a successful mating is to remove the female from her own cage – this way she won't get territorial when you introduce the male. Put her in a large deep sided cardboard box with no holes. The sort of boxes TVs or microwaves come in are a good size. You must watch constantly to make sure there is no fighting or escaping.

Introduce the male.

If the female is not in heat the male will keep chasing her round the cage trying to smell her genitals and mount her. She will most likely get very irritated by this and will eventually try and turn him on his back. At this point you should remove the male and try again the following night or a fight will result.

You will soon know if the female is in heat as when the male comes near her she will freeze on the spot and will adopt a low straight posture with her tail raised in the air. She will also start to produce a strong musky scent. This should happen fairly quickly. The male will mount the female many times without tiring, this can go on for over 30 minutes, in between mounts he will stop and wash himself. She will develop a white mucus around the entrance to her vagina that the male will clean off for her periodically and he may also gently bite her during mating.

An inexperienced male may not find the right position for mating straight away and sometimes the female will not like this.

When the mating is over return the hamsters to their respective cages.

### **Gestation:**

Hamster pregnancy is one of the shortest of all mammals at just 16 days. Over the next two weeks you will notice if your hamster is pregnant as she will start to resemble a barrel! During gestation you should provide your female with higher protein food such as boiled or scrambled egg, cheese, milk (preferably lactose free milk) or tofu. You can still handle her as usual but only up until about the 11th day of pregnancy, after this she should be left alone for her own preparations to give birth. At about 12-13 days after the mating, if your female is pregnant, give her cage a good clean (be very very gentle when handling her) and provide her with plenty (more than usual) of food, water and bedding material with which she can make a nest for her and the babies.

### **Birth:**

Before giving birth the female may become restless and lose a little blood from her vagina. However you will probably not see this as most births take place during the night. Litters usually range from 6 to 11 pups, although the female can give birth to more than 20! The pups are born helpless: hairless, deaf and with their eyes closed although they do have their teeth at birth.



Newborn baby hamsters.

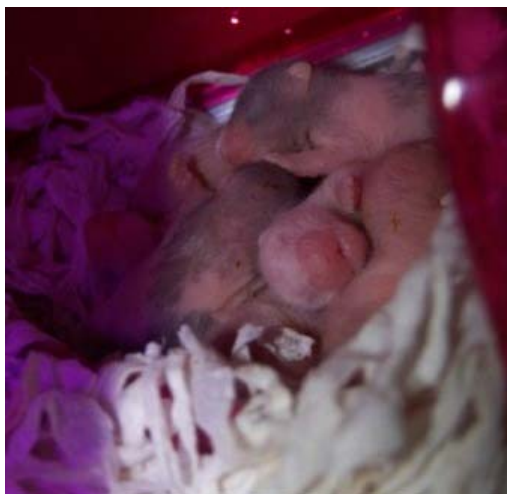
It is imperative that you do not disturb mum and her babies close to and after the birth. The young should not be touched or handled until they are at least 7 days old as if they smell of you they may be rejected and even cannibalised by the mother. In short DO NOT put your hand into the cage or poke the cage for at least a week after birth (this can be hard to do if you have inquisitive young children). Failure to regard these cautions, especially with females nursing their first litters, most often results in cannibalism of the young.

If the new mum is excited or disturbed you may notice her stuffing pups into her cheek pouches and releasing them a short time later when she believes the danger has passed. Occasionally, pups suffocate as a result of this activity, especially during lengthy periods of disturbance, another reason why she should be left in peace at the beginning.

If mum notices any sick or injured pups she will most likely eat them. It sounds horrible but it is nature's way of ensuring any surviving babies are strong and healthy. She may also eat some of her young if she give birth to more than she can cope with.

#### **Rearing and weaning:**

Young hamsters usually start eating solid food at 10 days of age but are usually weaned at about 3 weeks of age. At around 12 days you should be able to safely (but quickly) clean the cage out as by now it will be quite messy. When the babies are old enough to start eating solids we often give them small bowls of regular hamster food soaked in water to make it softer. They also enjoy bread soaked in milk, hard boiled egg, and a favourite mix of milky bread, finely diced ham and finely diced cucumber. Be sure to only give small amounts and remove anything not eaten after 24 hours. Water bottles must be positioned low enough so that the smallest pups can reach them. Some pups will not be strong enough to use bottles so a shallow dish of water or milk should be provided – it must be shallow to minimise risk of the babies drowning.



5 days old and beginning to show fur growth.



10 day old babies eating milky bread.



14 days old – babies are still tiny but eyes open.

Once the babies' eyes have opened is the time to start taming them. Rub clean hands in their sawdust to make yourself smell like the cage then handle each one for a short period of time. Do not give up if you get bitten as you need friendly hamsters if you are to sell or give them away. If you are gentle and handle the babies regularly it is unlikely that you will get bitten at all. Baby hammies are fragile so pick each one up by scooping it from underneath onto the palm of your hand and putting your other hand on top to protect it. Always handle the babies close to floor level, or sit on a chair or sofa as they like to jump!



21 days old and fully weaned – time to leave mum.

At four weeks old (3 at a minimum, although most breeders recommend 4) the different sexes **MUST** be separated into different cages or tanks (see [www.pethamsters.co.uk](http://www.pethamsters.co.uk) for how to sex Syrians) or they will all start mating. At this stage they can go to new homes.

Three weeks on from separating the babies from mum you will need an individual cage for each hamster if you have any left or they will end up fighting and hurting (even killing) each other. It is a good idea to start advertising or looking for new homes as soon as the babies are born.

### **Baby Syrians Timeline:**

**Day 1: Hairless, blind, deaf. A thin protective film of skin covers over eyes**

**Day 2: Begin to develop skin colour**

**Day 5: Fur begins to develop, babies begin grooming**

**Day 7: Babies exploring cage**

**Day 10: Start trying solid food and exploring cage**

**Day 14: Eyes open**

**Day 17: Leave nest and play with other hamsters**

**Days 21-28: Can leave mum**

**Days 28: Must leave mum if not done already – separate different sexes.**

**Day 49: Must separate all remaining hamsters into individual cages.**

If after reading all of our advice above you still want to breed from your hamster then we wish you the best of luck. Watching the babies grow up is a magical experience but REMEMBER it is only for those who are very serious about it and are prepared to care for and love any babies that they can not find new homes for, for the rest of their lives.

Please note we are unable to take in any babies that you have and can not rehome.

If you purchase a hamster from a breeder or pet shop that is already pregnant, they should be willing to take back the babies, sometimes with pet shops they may pay you for them but this is rare.

**Good luck with your hamsters.**



*This factsheet is dedicated to the memory of Mavis.  
The friendliest hamster you could ever meet and a wonderful mother.*