

# A Roomful of Rats: Teen Strives to Improve Rat Breeds

By Cheryl Reifsnnyder

Madoka McAllister loves fancy rats so much that she shares her room with thirty of them! She first met the playful rodents in her fifth grade classroom.

"I brought them home a couple of times and really loved them," she says. Madoka now breeds rats, raising them as pets for people across the country.

Madoka carefully chooses rats that will produce babies with the colors and markings she wants. "Like Russian silver," she says. "I just love the way they look, because they are a bunch of different blues put together."

She breeds only healthy, gentle parents. "My main goal is to get rats that are really healthy and really sweet."

Once pregnant, the mother needs special care. "I give her lots of bedding, extra litter, and shredded newspaper to make a nest," Madoka explains. "I feed her more high-protein food, like eggs, so she can gain weight before the babies come."

Babies are born after three weeks. "For the first couple of days you have to make sure that the mom is nursing them and that she's taking care of them," Madoka says. "For about a week, you can see the babies' bellies." That's because the newborns, called 'pinkies,' don't have any fur. "If they have milk, their bellies will be white." If not, Madoka helps feed them with kitten formula.

"I start handling them almost as soon as they're born," she says. This helps them get used to people. After one week, the babies grow fur; in two weeks, their eyes and ears open. "Once they start getting their eyes open, I just take them with me. Like, if I'm going to watch TV, I'll hold them in my lap and play with them." The babies love wrestling and nibbling solid food.

Caring for so many rats is a big time commitment. "If I have a litter, I'll spend about three hours a day, because I'll spend extra time with the babies." Madoka doesn't mind. "I just love playing with them. The hard part is cleaning their cages!"

When the babies are five weeks old, they're ready to go home with their new families. Only four inches long, they are curious and full of energy. "They grow so quickly!" Madoka says. "Seeing them grow up and placing them in pet homes makes me feel good about providing people with fine pets."

Madoka's roomful of rats is a roomful of fun – furry fun that she loves to share!



Madoka playin with some of the rats she shares her home with.



White, American blue or Russian silver, rats love to play and explore.