



Humane Society

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Guinea Pig Care

About your Pig:

Guinea Pigs are actually shy, gentle rodents that can be taught tricks. Although shy, the guinea pig loves company and will actually vocalize about 11 different sounds to communicate with other pigs or humans. Without stimulation from other guinea pigs or humans, these pocket pets will pine away and their health will suffer.

Male guinea pigs are called “boars,” females are “sows”. Adult female guinea pigs weigh about a pound while males are slightly larger (around a pound and a half). They are short haired, long haired, straight haired or swirled. With good care and nutrition a guinea pig lives from 4 to 7 years.

Be careful when pairing guinea pigs. Unfixed males and females can produce endless litters. Two immature females are usually the best mix, but beware; females can become pregnant at two months of age so they can be already pregnant if you purchase them at a pet store.

Housing:

Guinea pigs left to roam the house will get into trouble—so penning them while unsupervised is a must. Wire cages, large aquariums, or plastic storage containers all make good cages but follow these tips

- Allow two and a half feet of floor space per pig.
- Pigs don't jump so no cage lid is necessary (unless you need to keep children or other pets out) and walls 18 inches tall should suffice.
- Solid flooring is important—standing on mesh or raised wire grids will inflame a guinea pig's feet (ouch!).
- Provide small houses or hiding places where your pig can get away —guinea pigs are uncomfortable with people and other pets hovering over them.
- Line the bottom of the cage with aspen or hardwood shavings or some other form of safe bedding, such as grass hay. Do not use cedar or pine chips—the oils they contain can be dangerous and potentially toxic to guinea pigs.
- Keep the cage in an area that is a steady 65 to 75 degrees fahrenheit and out of direct sunlight. (Guinea pigs handle the cold ok, but they're very susceptible to heat stroke.)
- Allow pigs *supervised* exercise time outside the cage, but always in a pig-proofed area free from electrical wires, houseplants, and other pets.
- Provide safe wooden or bone objects in their cage on which to chew. (Guinea pig teeth constantly grow and they need to gnaw to keep teeth under control.)
- Water crocks can quickly fill with bedding—try a water bottle with a heavy stainless ball bearing.

Nutrition:

Like us, guinea pigs need a daily supply of vitamin C or ascorbic acid. Without it, they can get scurvy which causes eye infections, hair loss, and pneumonia. Most guinea pig food is fortified with Vitamin C but after a few months in storage its potency wanes. If you buy food in bulk you can crush 500 mg tablets of vitamin C and mix with food. One tablet should suffice for between one and two pounds of food.

Treats:

Guinea Pigs can live on Guinea Pig pellets alone, but variety is the spice of life! Pigs also love timothy hay, kale, spinach, collard and turnip greens. Iceberg lettuce provides NO nutrition but romaine lettuce is good. Watch out for alfalfa hay or cubes—they are too rich to be fed in bulk. Likewise fruits, starchy vegetables, and sweet items can upset your pig's stomach. Make sure basic “guinea pig chow” makes up two thirds of your pets diet and he'll get the proper nutrition.

Remember, the more you interact with your guinea pig, the more comfortable he will be with you, and the more fun BOTH of you will have! If you notice any sudden changes in your pig's eating or activity levels, or suspect your pig has health related concerns—consult your veterinarian.