

# ALL ABOUT GUINEA PIGS



Larger than hamsters, but smaller than rabbits, guinea pigs can weigh a couple of pounds and generally live for five to seven years. Guinea pigs make wonderful companions. These docile members of the rodent family rarely bite and are known for squeaking with delight when their favorite humans enter the room. Guinea pigs are excellent starter pets for older children who have mastered proper handling techniques. We recommend getting your guinea pig from a responsible breeder or, even better, adopting one from a shelter or small-animal rescue group.

## *Housing*

Guinea pigs are social animals that prefer to live in small groups. If you keep two or more females together, they will become great friends. If you want two males, it's smart to choose two babies from the same litter. Since guinea pigs, like all rodents, multiply rapidly, keeping males and females together is not recommended. As a rule of thumb, you'll need to provide a minimum of four square feet of cage space per guinea pig, but please try to get as large a cage as possible. You'll need a solid-bottom cage with no wire floors, as they can irritate your pets' feet. Never use a glass aquarium, due to the poor ventilation that it provides. Always keep the cage indoors away from drafts and extreme temperatures, as guinea pigs are very susceptible to heatstroke. They'll prefer an environment kept at 60-80 F°. 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 as the oils they contain can be dangerous to your pets. Guinea pigs love to hide when they play, so be sure to place cardboard or PVC tubes in the enclosure for this purpose. All guinea pigs need a cave for sleeping and resting, so please provide a medium-sized flowerpot or covered sleeping box.

## *Diet*

Commercial guinea pig pellets should make up the bulk of your pet's diet. Nutritionally complete, they're available at pet supply stores, and are made from plants, seeds and veggies. Feed your guinea pigs twice daily, in the morning and in the evening. Offer small amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables to your guinea pigs every day. Try grapes, cucumbers, corn, peas, carrots and pears. Always make sure to clean up any leftover fresh food before it spoils.



Unlike other animals, guinea pigs cannot manufacture Vitamin C, so you'll need to ensure that your pets get enough of this essential nutrient every day. A quarter of an orange will do, but you can also include some fruits and veggies that are high in Vitamin C to their daily ration of fresh foods, such as kale, dandelion greens and strawberries. Fresh, clean water should be available at all times. Use an inverted bottle with a drinking tube, and change the water daily.

## General Care

Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale food from the cage daily. Clean the cage completely once a week by replacing dirty bedding and scrubbing the bottom of the cage with warm water. Be sure everything's dry before adding fresh bedding. Guinea pigs' teeth grow continuously, so it is important that you provide yours with something to gnaw on at all times. Branches and twigs from untreated trees will work, as will any small piece of wood that hasn't been treated with chemicals. It's crucial that you get your pets used to you and used to being handled. Start by feeding them small treats. When they're comfortable with that, you can carefully pick up one pig at a time, one hand supporting the bottom, the other over the back. Once you have hand-tamed them, you should let them run around in a small room or enclosed area to get some additional exercise every day. You will need to carefully check the room for any openings from which the guinea pigs can escape, get lost and possibly end up hurt. These animals must be supervised when they are loose, because they will chew on anything in their paths, including electrical wires. Guinea pigs are very conscientious about grooming themselves, but brushing them on a regular basis will help keep their coat clean and remove any loose hairs. Long-haired guinea pigs should be brushed daily in order to prevent tangles and knots from forming.



## Male vs. Female

The male guinea pig has an outgoing personality. This tends to make the male friendlier and calmer. He is interested in what's going on around him and is eager to greet his owner to see if he can get a special treat or his head scratched. This outgoing nature usually means that two male guinea pigs will argue if kept together. Male guinea pigs are larger than females, but do not usually weigh more than two pounds. Although female guinea pigs are more nervous, once they settle into their new home and learn the routine, they calm down. But loud noises and / or unexpected movements may still frighten them. However, females are non-aggressive and can

usually be kept together without squabbling with each other.

## Veterinary Care

If you think one of your guinea pigs is sick, don't delay! Call us at 737-7387 immediately. Common signs that something isn't right include sneezing, coughing, diarrhea, loss of appetite and lethargy. Guinea pigs are also susceptible to external parasites such as mites and lice. If you think your pet is infested, head to the vet for treatment and remember that you will need to treat the pigs' environment, too.

