

GUIDE TO CARING FOR GUINEA PIGS



Guinea pigs can be excellent pets due to their hardy nature. They typically live for approximately 4 – 8 years.

FOOD AND WATER

Guinea pigs are herbivores so they must have vitamin C in their diet. Commercial foods may contain vitamin C, but these levels will decline if the food is stored above 22°C. Broccoli and carrots are excellent sources of vitamin C. Small amounts of these fresh foods can be fed daily, along with sprouts, parsley, dandelions, chicory and apple.

Guinea pigs should also be fed on commercially-produced guinea pig pellets. Do not change your guinea pig's commercial feed suddenly as it can cause fatal digestive upsets. This change should be done gradually over a period of at least two weeks. Care should be taken not to over-feed guinea pig pellets as this could lead to obesity and teeth overgrowth. Pellets should be stored in an airtight container and in a cool place, for a maximum of one month.

An unlimited supply of good quality fresh feeding-hay everyday is essential for the health of the digestive system and to wear teeth down.

Fresh water should be available at all times. Water is best provided in a gravity-fed bottle attached to the side of the cage and it should be emptied, rinsed and refilled daily.

PET CODE OF PRACTICE

Never release a pet (companion animal) into the wild. It is illegal and for most species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death, as they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment. This includes the need to properly dispose of soiled substrate, so that eggs and live food can't escape into the wild.

SHOPPING LIST

- hutch/cage
- food bowls
- run
- water bottle and bottle brush
- absorbent bedding
- pet-safe disinfectant
- feeding hay
- guinea pig care book
- guinea pig food-pellets
- fresh vegetables
- brush and comb
- treats



THE FIVE ANIMAL WELFARE NEEDS

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 means all pet owners have a legal duty of care to their pets. Anyone who is cruel to an animal or is found not to be providing the five animal welfare needs, as listed below, can be fined and sent to prison.

- 1 Environment:** pets should be given the correct housing according to its size, this includes shelter, space to exercise and a secure, comfortable place to rest.
- 2 Diet:** pets should be offered the correct type and volume of food to cover all their nutritional needs alongside access to clean, fresh water.
- 3 Behaviour:** all pets should be allowed to exhibit normal behaviour patterns and should be provided with the facilities to do so.
- 4 Company:** some animals require the company of their own kind, whilst others should be kept on their own.
- 5 Health:** all animals should be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease, and given veterinary treatment if they become sick or injured.

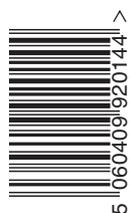


This leaflet is produced by The Pet Charity, a national charity which promotes the joy and benefits of pet ownership.

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These organisations support the aims of The Pet Charity to promote the welfare and responsible keeping of pet animals.



The Pet Charity

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Registered charity no: 1052488

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THE PET CHARITY GUIDE TO CARING FOR GUINEA PIGS

Guinea pigs are social animals and should not be kept on their own. It is recommended to keep guinea pigs in same sex pairs (although males kept together may fight), or in small groups of one male and a group of females. The males should be neutered to prevent unwanted breeding.

Guinea pigs originate from Peru where they roam the countryside in family groups, usually comprised of one male with a group of females and their young.

Pet guinea pigs can be kept indoors or in an outside hutch. Although they are naturally nervous creatures, they soon become used to gentle handling.

GENERAL CARE

Grooming your guinea pigs helps to keep them healthy and allows you to bond with your pet. A long-haired guinea pig will need grooming with suitable coat-care equipment, which your pet shop will be able to advise on.

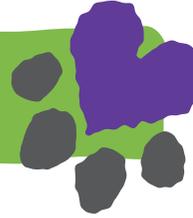
Your guinea pig's nails will require regular clipping and you can do this using small-animal nail clippers. Your pet shop or vet will be able to advise or do this for you if you're not comfortable.

Guinea pigs are prey animals so they tend to hide their symptoms when ill. If you are concerned about your guinea pig's health or behaviour, contact your vet as soon as possible.



DID YOU KNOW?

A guinea pig is also known as a cavy. This is due to their latin name, *Cavia porcellus*.



CHOOSING YOUR GUINEA PIG

There are three basic types of guinea pig – smooth-haired, coated and long-haired. The smooth-haired types include Self, Marked and Ticked. The coated types include Abyssinian, Rex, Teddy and Crested. The long-haired types include Peruvian, Alpaca and Sheltie.

Whichever one you choose, your guinea pig should be at least six weeks old when you buy him.

A healthy guinea pig:

- should be bright and alert
- should have no signs of discharge from eye, ears, mouth or nose
- should have a clean anal area and produce firm, oval-shaped droppings
- should have a glossy coat with no bald patches or sores on the skin
- should move around the cage easily without stiffness or staggering
- should not feel too skinny or bony
- should have no signs of drooling, which may indicate dental disease or abnormal tooth growth

To find out more interesting facts and advice on keeping guinea pigs, why not visit The National Cavy Club website at: www.nationalcavyclub.com



HOUSING

Guinea pigs should be provided with as large a cage as possible. An outdoor hutch should be sturdy, waterproof and raised off the floor by about 25cm, placed in a sheltered position or inside a shed. Guinea pigs must be protected from inclement weather as well as strong sunlight and draughts. A hutch cover, blanket or piece of old carpet will often offer added protection on cold nights.

If you decide to keep your guinea pigs indoors then a cage similar, but much larger than those used for hamsters, is suitable. The minimum recommended space for a pair of guinea pigs is 120 x 60cm, but more space is desirable. Male pairs benefit from larger housing to minimise the risk of rivalry.

All guinea pigs benefit from access to a covered pen or run in the garden. Avoid using pesticides nearby and ensure that the enclosure is secure enough to keep them in as well as other animals out. An outdoor run should be moved regularly to allow for a fresh supply of grass.

A hutch or cage should have a layer of shavings on the floor. Avoid pine or cedar-based shaving which can be associated with skin and respiratory irritation. There should be plenty of hay provided for bedding and food. A hay rack can be provided for them to feed from. You should also provide wooden toys, tubes, plastic bell balls and huts to prevent boredom.

Hygiene is extremely important especially in the summer. If not kept clean the hutch or cage will attract flies. As a general rule, cages should be cleaned thoroughly at least once a week. A good quality, pet-friendly disinfectant should be used and all the bedding and shavings replaced with a fresh supply.

HANDLING

It is advisable to let your new guinea pigs settle in for a few days before you start handling them. Using smooth and gentle movements, reach under your guinea pig's belly, then place your other hand underneath the back legs and lift. Hold the guinea pig close to your body as this will make him feel more secure and this will prevent kicking.