

GUIDE TO CARING FOR DEGUS

FOOD AND WATER

Degus eat by holding their food in their front paws, but although they will eat almost anything their diet has to be carefully controlled as they are sugar intolerant, which may lead to diabetes.

Special pellets should be available from your pet shop and their diet should be supplemented with hay.

Soft fruits, peanuts, sunflower seeds and starchy foods should be avoided. Turnip and dandelion leaves can be given in small quantities as a treat.

Fresh clean water must be available at all times and is best provided by a gravity-fed bottle.

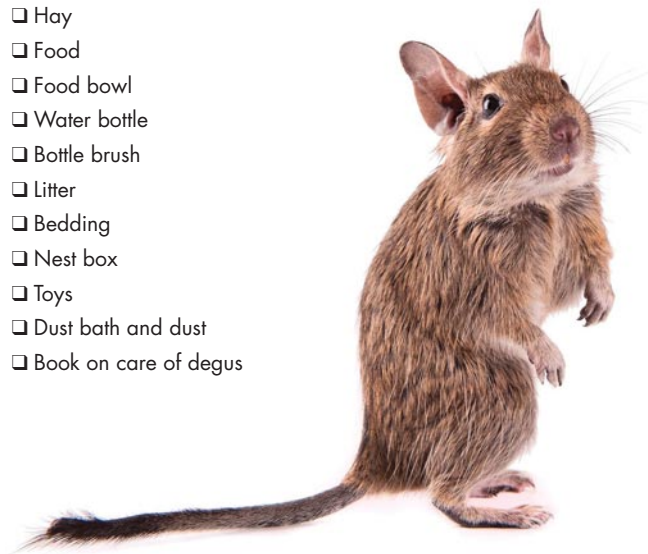
HANDLING

Degus need to be handled with care. The tail is easily injured and if damaged the animal will nip off the affected part. Degus can shed part of their tail as a defense mechanism, which can pose a serious problem as they use their tails for balance. For this reason, you must never pick up or restrain a degu by its tail.

Handling your degus often will help them build up a relationship with you. When you first take your pets home, allow them 24 hours to get used to their new environment, then allow them to sniff your hands before handling them. This will get them used to your smell. Stroke your degu and be sure he is facing you, then cup both hands around him and pick him up.

SHOPPING LIST

- Suitable cage or enclosure
- Suitable exercise wheel
- Hay
- Food
- Food bowl
- Water bottle
- Bottle brush
- Litter
- Bedding
- Nest box
- Toys
- Dust bath and dust
- Book on care of degus



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.

The Five Animal Welfare needs:

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.



Remember – you should never release your pet into the wild.

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

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The Pet Charity www.thepetcharity.org.uk

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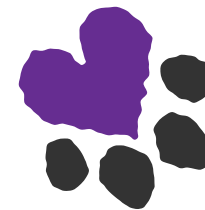


This leaflet has been produced with the help of Degutopia. If you require further help or advice please visit www.degutopia.co.uk

The British Veterinary Zoological Society supports the aims of The Pet Charity to secure and enhance the welfare of pet animals. For more information visit www.bvzs.org



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Degus are curious animals and are active during the day, known as diurnal.

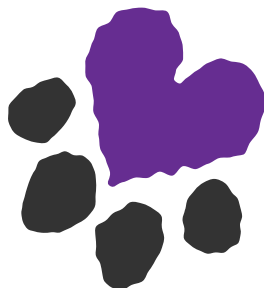
Degus originate from Chile where they live in small colonies. They live in burrows and feed on the ground but love to climb. They are slightly vocal animals and make chattering and warbling sounds.



THE PET CHARITY GUIDE TO CARING FOR DEGUS

They are highly social animals and should not be kept on their own as they may become depressed. Two of the same sex and from the same litter will generally live happily together.

Degus will typically live for around 6-8 years so you must be sure you are ready for a relatively long-term commitment.



GENERAL CARE

Degus will groom themselves with their paws, and a dust bath should be provided. Provide a dust bath for at least twenty minutes every other day.

Degus normally stay healthy throughout their lives, but they can suffer from sneezing and breathing problems. Be sure to use appropriate dust-free bedding in their cage to help prevent these problems occurring. If sneezing and breathing problems persist, seek the attention of a vet.

If you want to make your degus happy try to scratch behind their ears. As they become tamer, they may eventually allow you to scratch their bellies, and many really enjoy this.

Degus' teeth constantly grow and need to be worn down to a healthy length. A mineral block or wooden chew can help wear down front teeth but a constant supply of hay is required to wear down their back molar teeth. Overgrown teeth will result in weight loss and must be corrected by your vet.

If you are concerned about your pets' health speak to your vet. It is recommended to find a vet that has experience with degus or similar animals such as chinchillas.

CHOOSING YOUR DEGUS

Your degus should be at least 5 weeks old before you can bring them home.

A healthy degu should be:

- Bright, alert and inquisitive**
- Have no signs of discharge from eye, ears, mouth and nose**
- Have a clean anal area**
- Have a glossy coat with no bald patches and no sores on the skin**
- Should have orange teeth**



DID YOU KNOW?

The teeth of healthy degus over six months old are orange – white teeth can be an indication of serious disease.

- Should have no signs of breathing problems**
- Should move around the cage easily with no stiffness or staggering**
- Shouldn't feel too skinny or bony**

HOUSING

In common with other rodents, degus keep their teeth from overgrowing by constant chewing, therefore wooden cages are not ideal. However, many wooden cages offer several different levels, which degus

appreciate, but be aware that wood will be chewed and may need replacing from time to time.

Cages suitable for rats and chinchillas are suitable for degus, providing the base is metal and there are few mesh surfaces for your degus to walk on. Degus can develop a painful condition known as "bumblefoot" if they regularly walk on uneven or mesh surfaces.

Recycled paper makes a good litter and a nest box lined with hay or shredded paper should be provided as a place to rest and hide.

Degus are clean in their habits but will need their bedding changed and their cage cleaned with a pet-safe disinfectant at least once a week.

As degus are indoor pets they should be kept at an even temperature ideally between 16°C and 22°C. You should avoid putting the cage in draughts, direct sunlight or in damp or humid conditions.

Degus are inquisitive and active, therefore they should be provided with as much stimulation as possible. A large, solid exercise wheel and a selection of toys to avoid boredom should be provided. Degus love to carry things around and will appreciate non-plastic toys.