

Guinea Pig Care Guide

DIET & FEEDING

Unlimited grass hay and fresh water should always be available to your guinea pig. In addition to grass hay, such as timothy hay, 1/8 cup of pellets should be fed daily for adult guinea pigs. Avoid any pellet mixes with added treats (such as fiesta or muesli mixes), as they will pick through the pellets and eat only the treats! Guinea pigs need Vitamin C supplemented daily as they cannot produce it on their own.

Many owners use fresh leafy greens and/or vegetables high in vitamin C, such as bell peppers, kale or parsley. There are also vitamin C tablets you can give to ensure they get the appropriate amount of vitamin C. Fruits should be given only as treats as they are high in sugar, which can lead to obesity and other health issues. Follow any feeding or diet directions from your veterinarian if your guinea pig is underweight, overweight, or has any other conditions.

Baby guinea pigs (under 6 months) should be fed an alfalfa-based pellet labeled as “Young Guinea Pig Food”. Baby guinea pigs can also be offered alfalfa hay in addition to unlimited timothy or grass hays.

BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

Not all guinea pigs enjoy being held. We recommend taking it slow and building trust with your pig first before picking them up and carrying them around. Since they are prey animals, be sure to support their whole body and hold them securely against your body so they feel safe.

Just like dogs & cats, guinea pigs show how they are feeling with their body language and sounds they make! For shy or fearful guinea pigs, it's recommended to speak softly, move slowly and to get low to their level when interacting with them so they do not get startled. Offering treats, fresh leafy greens, or fruit is a great way to befriend them and earn their trust.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS

Guinea Pigs are prey animals and do not always show symptoms if they are feeling ill. Bring your pig to a guinea-pig-savvy or exotic veterinarian annually for wellness visits and to monitor their dental health.

If your guinea pig stops eating, contact your vet as this can be a sign of GI stasis which is an emergency. Other signs of illness include hair loss, lethargy, inappetence (not eating), or diarrhea. Older male guinea pigs often can develop GI blockages. As your guinea pig gets older, it's recommended to closely monitor them with your veterinarian. Guinea pigs should have their nails trimmed every 4 to 6 weeks, and guinea pigs with long hair or (like Peruvians or Silkies) should be groomed daily.

HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT

An indoor 2ft x 4ft cage or pen is the recommended minimum for a single guinea pig. Most cages and pens sold in pet stores do not meet this minimum. Since guinea pigs are not good climbers, it's best to avoid enclosures with levels or steep ramps. Grid cages (also called C&C cages) or modular cages are commonly used and can be a suitable low-cost alternative. Make sure the location of the cage is away from drafts and extreme temperatures, as guinea pigs are susceptible to heat stroke in temperatures over 80 degrees Fahrenheit. When letting your guinea pig out to roam an area, be sure to “guinea pig proof” it to keep your pig, as well as your furniture, safe. Move any cords or houseplants out of reach and block off any areas you don't want the guinea pig to get access to (such as under the couch or bed).

Most people will offer hay either from a hay feeder or by placing it in a litter box but be sure if it's in a litter box that they always have access to clean hay to eat. Use heavy ceramic dishes for the water & food pellets so they cannot flip the bowls, and make sure to clean the water dish often. Water bottles are not recommended. It is more natural for them to drink from a dish, and they tend to stay more hydrated this way. Guinea pigs do best with multiple hides and tunnels, as well as a variety of guinea pig safe toys to aid in wearing down their teeth and providing enrichment.

Since guinea pigs are low to the ground, the bedding should be both soft and absorbent to keep their undersides and feet clean and dry. Many owners use newspaper or newspaper with fleece blankets over the

top to help wick the moisture away and keep them dry. Unscented paper bedding such as 'Carefresh' is also commonly used. Wood shavings are not recommended, as they do not offer appropriate absorption or odor control, and the dust from wood shavings can cause respiratory disease in small animals.

Guinea pigs are social herd animals and do best with other guinea pigs. Spaying and neutering small rodents is complicated, so keeping them in same-sex groups is most common. Like all pets, a pair may not always be compatible, and some guinea pigs may prefer to be "roommates" in side-by-side enclosures instead. This is so they can still get the social interaction without having to directly share space and compete over resources.

GUINEA PIG SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- Enclosure or cage (minimum 8 square feet)
- Grass hay (Timothy, Orchard, Oat, etc.)
- Hay-based food pellets
- Bedding (fleece or unscented paper bedding)
- Heavy ceramic food & water dishes
- Nail clippers (cat claw trimmers work!)
- Guinea pig safe toys
- Fresh leafy vegetables
- Plastic carrier for vet visits
- Source of Vitamin C