

GUINEA PIG GUIDELINES

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Guinea pigs can make great companions for both first-time or experienced pet owners. Every guinea pig has a unique personality and can provide you with hours of joy and love. They are charming and talkative little animals! Given that they are prey animals, guinea pigs require time, patience and a gentle hand. Once they are comfortable with you and their new surroundings, their personalities really shine. Just like any other pet, guinea pigs require a lot of care and attention. It is important to familiarize yourself with their daily and long-term needs before adding one to your family.

Housing

The majority of commercial cages you will find in pet stores are going to be too small for your new four-legged friend. Just like any other pet, guinea pigs need exercise and space to move around and relax. Additionally, these cages tend to have wire grid floors which can be painful for your guinea pig's feet. Ideally you should have the biggest cage you can manage in the space you have available. The size is also going to depend on the number of guinea pigs you have; multiple guinea pigs are going to need more space than a single guinea pig.

Here is a general guideline for cage space based on the number of guinea pigs you have:

1 pig = 5.7 sq. feet, 2 pigs = 7.3 sq. feet, 3 pigs = 10.5 sq. feet, 4 pigs = 13 sq. feet

**Suggestions taken from Metropolitan Guinea Pig Rescue, <http://www.mgpr.org/MGPR/PigCages.htm>*

When choosing a cage for your guinea pig, make sure it has a solid bottom. You should line the bottom of the cage with unscented litter, such as Care Fresh, to soak up urine and control odors. Avoid cedar or pine shavings as the strong smell can irritate your pet's respiratory system. Always provide a place for the guinea pig to hide, such as a cardboard box or a commercially made small pet house. Make sure to purchase sturdy, ceramic bowls for food and water. A water bottle hanging from the side of the cage is also an option as long as it is frequently cleaned. Lastly, make sure to provide plenty of chew toys for enrichment and mental health. Your guinea pig's teeth are constantly growing and having wooden sticks or blocks to chew on will also help to keep them nice and trim.

Diet/Feeding

Fresh water – You must provide fresh water for your guinea pig on a daily basis. A heavy ceramic bowl or a water bottle on the side of the cage are two options for supplying water to your pet. Make sure to change the water daily and thoroughly clean the bowl or bottle at least once a week.

Fresh hay – Your guinea pig should be provided with unlimited amounts of hay at all times. Timothy hay is preferred, as it is high in fiber and low in calories and calcium. Try to avoid Alfalfa hay as much as possible.

Fresh vegetables – Fresh, leafy greens should be given every day. A variety of vegetables, with at least one containing Vitamin A, is ideal. Feed these greens two or three times a day in small amounts.

Fresh fruit – Guinea pigs love a good piece of fruit! Be very careful about limiting the amount of fruit that your pet consumes. It is high in sugar and can lead to unnecessary weight gain. Fruit should be limited to 1-2 tablespoons per 2 pounds of body weight.

Vitamin C – It is common for guinea pigs to be nutritionally deficient in Vitamin C. It is therefore important that you include extra Vitamin C in their daily feeding regimen. Lack of an appropriate amount can lead to a rough coat, anorexia, diarrhea, lameness, pain, delayed wound healing, and bacterial infections. There are many vegetables and fruit that contain a good amount of Vitamin C. You can also purchase a Vitamin C supplemental tablet. We recommend the Oxbow Daily C tablet.

Commercial guinea pig food – There are a variety of commercial guinea pig foods on the market to choose from. If you decide to feed your guinea pig some form of pelleted food, look for a brand made with Timothy hay, which will contain plenty of fiber. We recommend Oxbow's Cavy Cuisine. Make sure not to feed your guinea pig more than ¼ cup of pellets per day.

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Grooming & Health Care

Guinea pigs need to be brushed regularly to maintain a healthy coat. Long haired guinea pigs should be brushed daily. Short haired guinea pigs should be brushed about once a week. You will want to purchase a small brush and a comb for your pet. Many guinea pigs do not mind being brushed, and this gives you the opportunity to bond with your pet as well as check them out for any problems.

All guinea pigs will require a nail trim about once a month. You should purchase a pair of pet nail clippers from your local pet supply store. It is important not to clip the nails too short as you will probably hit the quick (the vein in the nail). This can be very painful for your guinea pig and will bleed quite a bit. If you accidentally cut the quick there are a few things you can do. You can purchase Kwik-stop powder or another type of styptic powder to keep handy. Otherwise cornstarch or flour will sometimes work as well. If none of these options are available, simply apply pressure to the nail until the bleeding has stopped. Make sure the bleeding has stopped before putting your guinea pig back in their cage.

Just like any other pet, your guinea pig needs to be seen by a veterinarian at least once a year for a general check-up. When looking for a vet for your guinea pig, make sure to find one who specializes in exotics and is therefore familiar with guinea pigs. Many of the websites listed below can help you to find a local veterinarian for your guinea pig.

Behavior & Sounds

Guinea pigs communicate through a variety of behaviors and sounds. Here are some to look out for!

Wheeking – a squealing/whistling sound used to communicate anticipation or excitement. Most often heard just before feeding.

Purring – a deep sounding purr indicates contentment and comfort. A shorter, higher pitched purr may indicate annoyance or fear.

Teeth Chattering & Hissing – these two may happen simultaneously and generally indicate anger, annoyance or forthcoming aggression. It may be accompanied by a showing of the teeth.

Shrieking – high pitched intense sound that indicates alarm, fear or pain.

Begging – your guinea pig may stand up on their hind legs in anticipation of food. This is very cute!

Freezing – when your guinea pig is scared they may stand very still for a short amount of time, hoping to become invisible to any dangers. This might be accompanied with loud, sudden, unfamiliar noises.

Licking – it is somewhat unknown exactly why guinea pigs might lick their human companions. Some might like to believe it is out of affection, others think it is probably because your skin tastes good. Either way, this is a normal behavior!

Popcorning – a particularly happy guinea pig may run fast and randomly jump into the air.

Running away/hiding – as a prey animal, running and hiding is the guinea pigs first form of defense. This is a normal behavior but may diminish slightly once your guinea pig comes to know and trust you as their companion. This will take some patience on your part!

Poop eating – although this behavior is somewhat unattractive, it is in fact normal! The poops that they eat are actually a bit smaller and softer than what they normally leave in their cage. They eat these poops in particular in order to re-ingest some of the nutrients that weren't absorbed the first time around.

Helpful Links

Fruit and Vegetable Chart – <http://www.guineapigcages.com/food/Veggie-and-Fruit-Charts.pdf>

Metropolitan Guinea Pig Rescue – <http://www.mgpr.org>

Oxbow – <http://www.oxbowanimalhealth.com/>

Cavies Galore – <http://www.caviesgalore.com/>

Sweet Meadow Farms – <http://www.sweetmeadowfarm.com/>

Guinea Lynx – <http://www.guinealynx.info/>

Cavy Spirit – <http://www.cavyspirit.com/>

General Guinea Pig Information – <http://www.jackiesguineapiggies.com>