

# Guinea Pig Care



## Background

Also known as: Cavy

Weight: Up to 2 pounds

Lifespan: 5-7 years

Cost per year: \$635

Good with kids?: Great pet for older children who've mastered proper handling techniques.

Fun fact: A happy guinea pig will jump straight up in the air—this is called popcorning!

## Food

- Guinea pig pellets are the basis of your pet's diet. An average guinea pig will eat about 1/8 cup daily. Timothy hay-based pellets are recommended for adults, and avoid those made with nuts, seeds, dried fruits and corn products.
- Grass hay and fresh, clean water should be available to your pet at ALL times.
- Offer small, bite-sized amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables daily; half a handful of veggies and a slice of fruit per pig is plenty.
  - >> Recommended: green leafy vegetables, green peppers, peas, apple, blueberries, oranges and grapes.
  - >> Avoid: iceberg lettuce, potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, anything that's old or spoiled.
- Guinea pigs cannot manufacture vitamin C, so make sure your pet gets enough of this essential nutrient. A quarter of orange will meet the requirements; other high-C foods include kale and strawberries.

## Cage & Environment

- Guinea pigs are social animals who prefer to live in small groups. Two or more females will become great friends. If you want two males, it's best to choose two babies from the same litter. Since guinea pigs multiply rapidly, keeping males and females together is not recommended.
- Provide a minimum of four square feet of cage space per guinea pig—but please try to get as large a cage as possible. Make sure it's a solid-bottom cage with a wire cover—no glass aquariums, which don't provide adequate ventilation.

- Keep the cage indoors, away from drafts and extreme temperatures, in an environment maintained at 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Line the bottom of the cage with bedding (see Supply Checklist for recommendations). Do not use cedar or pine chips, which contain oils that can be dangerous to your pet.
- Your pig will need a cave for sleeping and resting, such as medium-sized flower pot or covered sleeping box, readily available at pet supply stores.

## Behavior & Handling

- Guinea pigs are known for their expressive vocalizations. They'll whistle and grunt when they're excited, and squeak with delight when their favorite humans enter the room.
- Guinea pigs rarely bite, but they can nip if mishandled or fear a threatening animal. It's important to get your pet used to you—and used to being handled. Start by feeding her small treats in her cage. When she's comfortable with that, carefully pick her up, one hand supporting her bottom, the other over her back.

## Exercise & Toys

- Once your pet is hand-tamed, let her play in a small room or enclosed area for additional daily exercise. Carefully check the room for any openings from which she could escape. You'll need to supervise at all times, because guinea pigs will chew on anything in their paths—including electrical wires.
- Your pet will also enjoy playing in her cage. Provide cardboard tubes, empty oatmeal containers and/or coffee cans with smoothed edges for hide-and-seek, and bricks or rocks for climbing.
- Provide your pet with appropriate chew toys to help wear down her teeth, which grow continuously.

>> Recommended: branches and twigs from trees that have not been sprayed with pesticides, small pieces of unpainted, untreated wood.

## Daily Care

- Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale food from the cage daily.
- Scrub the cage with warm water and mild soap weekly; let dry before adding fresh bedding.
- Brush your pet regularly to keep the coat clean and remove tangles or loose hair; long-haired guinea pigs should be brushed daily to prevent knots.

## Signs of Illness

- Bring your guinea pig to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly appointment if you think your pet is sick—seek help immediately. Common signs that something isn't right include sneezing, crusty eyes, dirty ears, severe diarrhea, hair loss, weight loss, change in behavior and bloody or gritty urine.

## Guinea Pig Supply Checklist

- Solid-bottom cage with wire cover or plastic bottom "tub" cage
- Guinea pig pellets
- Cage bedding (aspen or hardwood shavings, timothy hay or processed paper products)
- Small, heavy food dish
- Grass hay
- Bricks, rocks, cardboard boxes, plastic pipes & other safe toys
- Medium flower pot or covered sleeping box
- Brush and comb
- Attachable water bottle with drinking tube
- Unpainted, untreated piece of wood or safe chew toy