

# Guinea Pig

Guinea pigs are lively, lovable pets that require relatively easy care. They make great family pets and get along well with other guinea pigs.

## Housing/Enclosure

Guinea pigs are social, active creatures and should be housed in cages with a large surface area. The enclosure should include an area to hide and space to move around comfortably. Since guinea pigs are not able to climb or jump well, the sides of the enclosure do not need to be very tall. Guinea pigs should not be housed in aquariums, since they do not provide adequate ventilation.

- Timothy hay should always be available.
- Provide water bottles or heavy water bowls that cannot be tipped over.
- Flooring should be solid, non-slip, and lined with towels, carpet remnants, carefresh® bedding, and/or newspaper. Avoid pine and cedar shavings, as these can cause respiratory issues.
- Provide hide spots for your guinea pig. Guinea pigs are a prey species and need a safe space to escape potential stressors. Cardboard boxes or commercially available huts make good options.

To provide enrichment and to satisfy a guinea pig's inherent chewing behavior:

- Offer willow and apple branches and/or chew toys. **Do not offer cherry, peach, apricot, plum, or redwood, which are all poisonous.**
- Paper bags, cardboard boxes, and tunnels provide hide spots and a space to crawl, scratch, and chew.
- Hide treats, greens, or hay in newspaper or paper towel tubes.

Your guinea pig should be provided time outside of its cage with supervision for exercise daily. Make sure to supervise your guinea pig at all times while outside the cage because they can easily hide and will rapidly chew furniture, cords, and other hazards.



## Veterinary Care

- Common diseases in guinea pigs include dental disease (molar elongation and tooth root abscesses), bladder stones, GI stasis and bloat, external parasites, and cancer in older patients.
- We recommend spaying and neutering pet guinea pigs. Female guinea pigs have a very high incidence of uterine disease/cancer and spaying will prevent these problems. Intact male guinea pigs can exhibit unwelcome reproductive behaviors, such as mounting and urine spraying.
- We recommend yearly physical exams for all guinea pigs. Although guinea pigs do not require any vaccinations, we recommend routine veterinary care since physical exams may reveal disease in the early stages.
- If your pig ever stops eating suddenly, stops producing feces suddenly, or is having trouble breathing, these can be signs of life-threatening diseases and should be seen by a veterinarian immediately.



## Behavior and Handling

Guinea pigs are very social animals and are usually content around other guinea pigs, although this may mean they will be less bonded to their human family. Pigs of the same sex usually get along best, if given appropriate cage space. Males and females may be housed together, but it is recommended to have one of them neutered to prevent pregnancy.

The guinea pig's natural curiosity and friendly disposition make it fairly easy to handle. Most guinea pigs will approach a hand introduced into their cage and can be easily scooped into the palm of your hand. We recommend holding your guinea pig with both hands, always. Guinea pigs that are not accustomed to being handled may attempt to jump and run, but very rarely show aggression. The best way to interact and play with your guinea pig is on the floor.

## Diet

Guinea pigs are herbivores and their diet should be unlimited hay, fresh greens, and good quality pellets. We recommend Oxbow® hay and pellets. Grass hay should be available at all times.

**Hay:** Adult guinea pigs should be fed unlimited timothy hay or other grass/oat hays. Alfalfa hay should be fed sparingly. Guinea pigs should eat a pile of hay twice the size of their body daily. Hay is essential for a guinea pig's gastrointestinal health, as well as, to keep their molars trim.

**Greens:** You may offer romaine, mustard greens, dandelion greens, carrot tops, red leaf lettuce, parsley, cilantro, bok choy, radish tops, watercress, and/or escarole. Green vegetables such as broccoli, brussel sprouts, and/or peppers may be offered. Add one vegetable to the diet at a time to eliminate any item that causes soft stools or diarrhea.

**Pellets:** Offer only plain guinea pig specific pellets (about 1/4 cup per pig). Avoid the "deluxe" pellet mixes with seeds and dried fruits. These types of foods can lead to gastrointestinal and dental abnormalities. Young guinea pigs should be fed alfalfa pellets until they are seven to eight months old.

**Treats:** Treats should be offered sparingly. Treats include, herbs such as basil, dill, and/or mint, fruit and vegetables such as carrots, tomatoes, citrus fruits (oranges), apples, and/or berries, and dandelion and clover flowers (and leaves).

**Vitamin C:** Guinea pigs are unable to synthesize vitamin C, so they need vitamin C supplementation to avoid serious health problems. Commercial guinea pig pellets include vitamin C, but the vitamin breaks down quickly once manufactured and may become ineffective. It is best to give the vitamin C supplement to your pig directly rather than putting it in the water source where it is rapidly degraded.



Hay



Greens



Pellets



Treats



Vitamin C

