

Guinea Pig Care

General

Although naturally quiet, nervous animals, Guinea pigs make wonderful affectionate pets if given careful handling and lots of time and attention. They have lots of special noises that they make which can give you an indication of their mood, for instance, they make lots of squeaks and whistles, showing distress or contentment according to the volume. They will also “purr” or vibrate the whole body when they like something, such as a potential mate.

Their teeth are constantly growing and they will spend lots of time gnawing on things. If they cannot keep their teeth worn down, they will become overgrown and may need veterinary attention. Guinea pigs almost never bite unless mishandled, irritated or taste what they think is food.

Housing

If kept outside the hutch should have a waterproof roof and be placed in a position that gives some shelter from rain and sun. Guinea pigs are particularly susceptible to chills so make the entrance is also sheltered from the wind. The hutch should be at least four times the size of your guinea pig and attach a wire run so that it can enjoy the grass and fresh air.

If kept indoors the cage should be placed away from direct sunlight, away from draughts and in a room of constant temperature. Avoid putting the cage near a heater where the guinea pig may become hot and be sure to put the cage out of the way of any other pets which may harm your guinea pig.

Diet

You should use only good quality guinea pig food from a pet shop. They need approximately 1/4 - 1/2 cup containing 18-20% protein and 10-16% fiber. Fresh, sweet smelling hay should be fed freely as they will eat constantly.

Dry food can be supplemented with fresh foods, particularly those that contain vitamin C. orange, kale, celery, alfalfa sprouts, turnip, cauliflower, parsnip, Brussels sprouts, cucumber, carrot, apple, chicory, spinach, tomato, melon, grapes, corn, bell pepper, peas and pear are all good. Be sure these foods are clean and free from any pesticides.

They will also eat pesticide-free grass and wild plants such as sorrel, dandelion, clover, and plantain, but be very sure that you recognise these plants before feeding them to your pets. Untreated fruit tree branches such as plum or apple are good for guinea pigs to gnaw on.

Cleaning

Remove soiled bedding daily. You should wash food dishes, water bottles and the bottom of the cage at least once a week. Always make sure the cage is dry before returning your pet.

Guinea pigs are capable of having babies from about a month old so unless you want to breed from your pets then you should keep single sex animals together or separate males and females.

Health

Guinea pigs can easily suffer from lack of vitamin C in their diet and will quickly fall ill leading to swollen and painful joints. To avoid this make sure that you feed them fruit and vegetables which are rich in vitamin C every day, see the notes on diet above.

If you notice any hair loss, bare or flaky patches on the skin this could be due to mites. This needs to be treated immediately by a vet or it will get much worse and your guinea pig will be in a great deal of discomfort from itching and soreness.

Diahorrea is also common and often caused by a change in food or overfeeding one type of food. Introduce new foods gradually and always feed fruit and vegetables in medium amounts. If you notice any change in your little pigs behaviour it is wise to get him checked out by a vet immediately as little animals can deteriorate very quickly and must be treated sooner than later if they are to recover.