GUINEA PIG CARE GUIDE

Housing

CAGE

SIZE: 7.5 sq feet for 1-2 pigs; 10.5 sq feet for 3 pigs; 13 sq feet for 4 pigs. Guinea pigs cannot climb or jump vertically so rely on floor space.

MATERIAL: Most guinea pig cages you find in the stores are much too small on their own. It is recommended to either build your own cage (see right) or expand your cage with fencing or an exercise pen.

Example
One of the best cage options is a homemade cage called a C&C (cubes and coroplast) cage. It is fairly easy to make and inexpensive compared to cages sold at pet stores. It is also very easy to clean and provides appropriate space. The bigger the better!

BEDDING

GOOD
CareFresh
shredded paper
paper towels
Yesterday’s News (paper pellets)
fleece

BAD
cedar
pine
corn cob
saw dust
clay cat litter

DID YOU KNOW?
Guinea pigs can be trained to use a litter box! Teaching them to do this will make cage cleaning much easier. Check out our litter training page for tips.

MN Pocket Pet Rescue recommends avoiding all wood bedding to avoid respiratory illness.

FURNISHINGS

Decking out your guinea pig cage with not only the essentials but also an assortment of fun stuff to do is incredibly important for the happiness and well-being of your pigs. It is ideal to change out the toys and furnishings for them in addition to providing a variety and number of items to keep them from getting bored.

Why chew toys? Guinea pigs are rodents which means their teeth constantly grow. They require chew toys to gnaw on in order to keep their teeth trim.

ESSENTIALS
water bottle
food dish
shelter (box, igloo, etc)
chew toy (wood, lava)

FUN STUFF
tunnels
toilet paper tubes
fiddlesticks
fleece blankets
cat jingle balls

pet beds
cardboard
wooden toys
treat balls
hay huts
**DIET**

**HAY**: Timothy hay, orchard grass or meadow hay should be available to your pigs 24/7. A guinea pig’s digestive system needs hay in order to function properly.

**VEGGIES**: Offer about 1 cup of veggies per day per pig. The bulk of this should be leafy greens.*

**PELLETS**: Feed 1/8 cup of timothy pellets per day per pig. Pellets are not a substitute for hay!

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**GOOD**
- kale*
- parsley*
- sweet peppers*
- broccoli*
- guava*
- green peppers
- kiwi
- strawberry
- mustard greens
- cauliflower
- red cabbage
- peas
- cantaloupe
- oranges
- snap peas
- turnip greens
- papaya
- collard greens
- asparagus
- carrots
- green leaf lettuce
- romaine lettuce
- spinach
- squash
- tomatoes
- sweet potatoes
- dandelion greens
- radishes
- turnips and greens

*Good source of vitamin C

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**BAD**
- iceberg lettuce
- avocado
- apple seeds
- chilies
- coconut
- hot peppers
- garlic
- onions
- peanut butter
- rhubarb
- baked goods
- nuts
- meat
- beans (except green)
- seeds
- potatoes

*Guinea pigs cannot manufacture their own vitamin C and require 10 to 30 mg/kg daily to prevent scurvy. While many guinea pigs receive adequate vitamin C from fresh vegetables and pellets, you may wish to ensure your guinea pig gets adequate vitamin C by giving a quarter of a 100 mg chewable or plain vitamin C tablet.

Do not add vitamin C to the water. Water is vital to good health but because vitamin C changes the flavor, they may drink less. Ascorbic acid degrades rapidly once added to water. Some guinea pigs drink a lot and some very little, so it is impossible to know how much vitamin C your pet is getting.

“The Guinea Lynx”
www.guinealynx.info

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**Example**
MN Pocket Pet Rescue recommends Oxbow brand pellets.

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**MINNESOTA POCKET PET RESCUE**

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**GUINEA PIG CARE GUIDE**

**Feeding**
**EXERCISE**

**FLOOR TIME**: Floor time and exercise is very important for a guinea pig. Time outside the cage for a guinea pig should be spent running around and exploring. It is strongly recommended that there be at least one hour of free range play time in a guinea pig safe environment every day.

**PIGGY PROOFING**: When having outside playtime be sure to secure the area so your guinea pigs can’t escape the room. Always hide or cover all cords and outlets, put away anything that you do not want chewed on including house plants. Make sure your pets cannot get into small spaces that you cannot reach into such as under the fridge or in couch cushions. Use an exercise pen whenever possible. If you have other pets, secure them in another room or a crate.

**WHEEL**: Never use a wheel or exercise ball with your guinea pig. These items can cause injury to your pig’s back, feet or toes.

**SOCIAL NEEDS**

**BONDED BUDDIES**: Guinea pigs are very social and will be happiest when living with other pigs. It is strongly recommended to keep a minimum of two guinea pigs at a time. Guinea pigs should be kept only with other pigs of the same sex.

**KEY COMPONENTS OF TRAINING**

- trust
- positive reinforcement
- consistency
- repetition
- patience

**LEARN HOW TO TRAIN YOUR PIG**
http://guineapigagility.com/?id=369

**TEACHING YOUR GUINEA PIG TO TRUST YOU**

Every time you approach your piggy’s cage, bring a small treat for your pet. They will learn to associate you with pleasant things and look forward to your visits. Never feed treats through cage bars or your pig may start to nip fingers.

Always call your guinea pig by name, they will soon learn it and respond to it. Talking to your piggy will get them used to your voice and they may even start to talk back!

If possible, keep your guinea pig somewhere where you spend a lot of time. Just seeing and being near you helps them get used to you and your voice, scent and movements.

When approaching your pig, announce yourself by placing your hand at least 5 inches from it’s eyes so they can see you. Because of their eye placement, guinea pigs cannot see directly in front of nose.
GENERAL INFO

ANNUAL EXAM: It is important to take your guinea pig to the vet for an annual exam, to ensure your pig is in good health. Guinea pigs do not require vaccines.

GENERAL SIGNS OF ILLNESS

any behavioral change  
lethargy  
defensive aggression  
disinterested in treats  
changes in eating or drinking  
disinterested in interacting with you  
poor coat quality

LIFESPAN: 5 - 7 years

REPRODUCTION: Guinea pigs become sexually mature and are able to reproduce at 3-4 weeks of age. It is possible to spay and neuter guinea pigs but most people choose to keep them intact and house them with the same gender instead, as surgery on small animals is always risky, particularly a complex surgery such as a spay. Talk to your vet to see what option is right for you and your guinea pigs.

COMMON ISSUES

VITAMIN C DEFICIENCY

Just like humans, guinea pigs do not produce their own vitamin C. Therefore, they rely on fruits and veggies to get it. Symptoms of vitamin C deficiency are rough coat, lethargy, diarrhea, loss of appetite and swollen feet/joints. If you notice any of these symptoms in your pet, take him to the vet immediately. To avoid vitamin D deficiency in your guinea pig, be sure to feed him plenty of vegetables containing vitamin C (see our page on feeding for tips) and/or provide him with a daily Oxbow Vitamin C tablet.

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

If you notice that your guinea pig has blood in his urine, difficulty urinating or is having accidents (if potty trained) he may have a urinary tract infection. Guinea pigs are prone to bladder stones that if left untreated can cause a blockage in your pet’s urinary tract which is life threatening. If your pet has these symptoms, he will need antibiotics from a vet.

GASTROINTESTINAL PROBLEMS

Guinea pigs can sometimes have sensitive stomachs, especially when trying new foods. Be sure to introduce new foods slowly so as not to upset your pig’s digestive system. Symptoms of digestive upset include diarrhea, constipation, lack of appetite and lethargy. If your pet has any of these symptoms you must get him to the vet as soon as you can. Diarrhea can lead to dehydration and death, constipation can lead to blockage and death, and lack of appetite and energy is always an emergency.

RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS

Guinea pigs can be sensitive creatures and can easily develop respiratory infections which can quickly turn into pneumonia. If you notice that your guinea pig is sneezing, has eye or nose discharge, has a lack of appetite or is lethargic, get him to a vet as soon as possible. Guinea pigs, like most pocket pets, are prey animals and thus tend to hide any weakness or illness for as long as possible. This means that by the time you notice symptoms, your pet is usually very sick. To help avoid respiratory illness, keep your pig’s cage away from drafts, clean the cage often, use fleece for bedding, keep stress to a minimum and provide your pet with as large of habitat as possible.
SAFE HANDLING

THROUGH THE BARS: Never feed your guinea pig or stick your fingers through the cage bars. Doing so encourages pets to bite at fingers both in and out of the cage. Always offer treats with an open palm when possible.

TRUST: It is ideal to let your guinea pigs come to you before reaching in to pick them up as this develops trust. Talk to your pig and let it sniff your hand before you pick it up to announce that you are coming. Guinea pigs do not have strong eyesight and this will help prevent startling them.

GROOMING

DENTAL CARE: You do not need to brush your guinea pig's teeth but you must provide plenty of chew toys so your pig can wear down its teeth naturally. Check your pig's teeth regularly to be sure they are not overgrown or misaligned. If they are, take him to the vet as they will need to be trimmed by a professional.

BATHING: Guinea pigs are quite clean animals and take good care in grooming themselves. Therefore, you should rarely, if ever, need to bathe your guinea pig. If circumstances arise that you must, be sure to use kitten shampoo and never human shampoo, as the latter can irritate a guinea pig's skin.

BRUSHING: Use a soft bristled brush to work through any tangles. Long haired guinea pigs will need to be brushed daily.

EARS: Check your guinea pig's ears for debris every couple and clean as needed by placing a drop of mineral oil in the ear and wiping clean.

PICKING UP YOUR GUINEA PIG: Most guinea pigs tolerate but to not enjoy being picked up as they feel more safe and secure on the ground, so try to only pick up your pig when necessary. Always use two hands when picking up your pig. One hand should support the rump while the other supports the chest. It sometimes helps to talk to him softly to comfort your pig.

Guinea pigs need their nails trimmed regularly, usually every 4-5 weeks. You can do this at home or have your vet do it for you. Guinea pigs have four toes on their front feet and three toes on their back feet.

When trimming your guinea pig's nails, be sure to only clip the clear part of the nail, avoiding the pink vein (quick.) Use small animal or cat nail clippers and try to cover up the toe with your fingers so that only the nail is exposed. If you accidentally cut the quick, dip your pet's foot in cornflour or styptic powder. It is often easier to trim nails if you have second person to hold the pig. Nail trims can be scary for a guinea pig so be sure to give breaks and lots of treats! Sometimes it is easier on you and your pig if you only do one or two feet per session.
**Behavior**

Every guinea pig looks, acts and sounds different; just like people. This is a general guide to guinea pig sounds and body language but you will learn by interacting with your pigs what they are trying to communicate with you.

**VOCALIZATION**

**WHEEKING** : When a guinea pig is excited, happy or wants attention, they will let out several long, loud squeal or whistle. Most guinea pigs will learn what the sound of the refrigerator opening or food being prepared means and wheek with excitement!

**TEETH CHATTERING/GRINDING** : This is a sign that your pig is angry or annoyed.

**SHRIEKING** : A piercing, high pitched squeal that means your pig is frightened or worried.

**RUMBLING** : A deep rumbling sound often accompanied by a little dance is emitted by a male pig romancing a female.

**PURRING** : There are several different types of purring and each pig is a bit different. A deeper purr (not as deep and rumbling) means your pig is content but a short or higher pitched purr can mean annoyance or uncertainty. You can usually tell based on body language the difference.

**WHINING** : Whining or moaning means your pig is annoyed or dislikes something.

**CHIRPING** : This sound is not often heard and is referred to as “singing.” Not all pigs do it and it’s meaning is not understood.

**BODY LANGUAGE**

**HOPPING** : Guinea pigs hop, bounce, leap and run around when they are happy and having fun. This is also called popcorning.

**LICKING** : Guinea pigs lick themselves and each other to groom. If your pig licks you, it means you are loved!

**HEAD TOSSING** : When you are petting your guinea pig and he tosses your hand away with his head it means he is annoyed and wants you to stop.

**FIDGETING** : If your pig fidgets while you are holding him he may need to go to the bathroom or is just tired of being held. Either way, it’s time to give him a break.

**SCENT MARKING** : Like cats, guinea pigs rub their faces on items to mark them with their scent.

**MOUNTING** : This is either a sexual behavior or a dominant behavior.

**FREEZING** : A guinea pig will stop suddenly and freeze if startled or frightened.

**SIGNS OF AGGRESSION** : Rising on hind legs, shuffling from side to side with stiff legs, hair puffed up, hissing, teeth chattering, showing teeth.

**SOUNDS OF RESPIRATORY ILLNESS** :

- **CLICKING**
- **SNEEZING**
- **GURGLING**

If your guinea pig is making any of these sounds, take it to the vet as soon as possible.