

# DEGU CARE INFORMATION

Degus (pronounced day-goos) are quick, curious and entertaining animals. They are originally from Chile. Degus live an average of five to eight years, so they are a long term commitment. They can be quite vocal and make a variety of sounds to communicate. Degus love to dig, and they are avid chewers. They are extremely active and require daily exercise in a large, safe area. Degus are highly social animals and need the companionship of their own species. It is unnatural for them to live alone. They should always be kept in at least (same gender) pairs. Introductions between single degus can be successful if handled properly and patiently.

## CAGE

There is no such thing as a habitat that is too big. Your degus will be spending a majority of their time in their cage, so it should be as big as possible. It should be safe, roomy, comfortable and interesting. The cage should be a minimum of 30" x 24" x 18". Bigger is always better. Several solid wooden platform perches should be provided, about six to eight inches apart. Any levels in the cage should be solid, not wire. Animals should never be made to stand on wire. Standing on wire is extremely painful and will cause wounds, sores, foot deformities and arthritis. Wire levels can be made safe by covering them with ceramic tiles, cardboard, sea grass mats or other similar items. We recommend using ceramic tiles. Since degus are such avid chewers, levels can not be plastic.

We recommend the Rat Lodge (R-680) from [www.martinscages.com](http://www.martinscages.com) and/or the Chinchilla Condo from [www.qualitycage.com](http://www.qualitycage.com). Do not keep degus in aquariums. Most aquariums are not large enough. They do not provide proper ventilation, do not allow for adequate enrichment items and they isolate your degus from their environment. Clean your degus' habitat at least twice a week.

## BEDDING

Use Carefresh Bedding. It is the safest and healthiest bedding choice for your degus and is available at most pet stores. Aspen bedding is an acceptable second choice. Never use pine, cedar, sawdust, corn cob bedding, chlorophyll bedding or cat litter. Pine and cedar are poisonous to all animals! We usually have 50 Liter bags of Carefresh bedding available for purchase at our adoption events.

## HIDE-AWAY

Degus enjoy a cozy space for sleeping and relaxation. Provide a wooden nesting box. Do not use plastic. Do not use the edible hide-aways made from compressed alfalfa and honey; they are extremely unhealthy.

## WATER BOTTLE

Use a 16 ounce (minimum) hanging water bottle that has an angled stainless steel sipper tube with a ball bearing in the spout. A glass water bottle is preferable, but a plastic water bottle is acceptable. If your degus chew through their water bottle, which they are apt to do, you will need a water bottle guard. Give your degus fresh water everyday. Filtered water is best. DO NOT put bleach in your degus' water as some websites and publications recommend.

## FOOD

Provide two heavy ceramic crock-type (first choice) food dishes or two metal dishes that clip securely onto the cage. Do not use plastic. We recommend two bowls to prevent squabbles. Degu pellets should be plain. There should not be any seeds, nuts, corn, dried fruit or other bits mixed in with the pellets. We recommend ½ Oxbow Chinchilla Deluxe and ½ Oxbow Cavy Cuisine (guinea pig) pellets mixed together. Oxbow is available from [www.oxbowhay.com](http://www.oxbowhay.com) and a variety of other on-line retailers. Oxbow is also available at some independent pet and feed stores, veterinary practices and through Small Angels Rescue.

**Do not** use Kaytee, Hartz, L&M or Nutriphase products. They contain a controversial antioxidant preservative called Ethoxyquin which is linked to cancer, organ damage, birth defects and other serious health problems.

Small amounts of fresh vegetables should be given two or three times a week. You can provide broccoli, carrot, celery leaves, dandelion leaves, leafy greens, red pepper, yellow pepper, sweet potato. Treats should be given very sparingly. Degus can not process sugar. All sugary foods and treats should be avoided. We recommend Itty Bitty Buddy Biscuits made by Cloud Star as healthy degu treats – either Sweet Potato Madness or Veggie Madness. Do not give your degus a mineral or salt wheel. They are not necessary or healthy. Mineral and salt wheels are made with glue, and salt wheels are bleached. You can give your degus natural wood chews that have not been artificially colored and/or dried apple branches from apple trees that have not been sprayed with pesticides and have been aged at least three months.

### **HAY**

It is vital that degus have unlimited access to timothy hay or orchard grass (and once in a while alfalfa hay) at all times. Among other things, hay promotes a healthy digestive system and keeps their teeth worn down.

### **EXERCISE and PLAY**

Degus need and enjoy an exercise wheel. The exercise wheel should be metal, should provide a solid running surface and be at least 11 inches in diameter. If you give them a plastic wheel, they will chew it up and could possibly ingest some plastic. Never use an exercise wheel with metal or plastic bars/rungs. Their feet, legs and/or tail can slip between the rungs, get caught and break. We recommend a Flying Saucer or 11" Chinchilla Wheel from Quality Cages. The website is [www.qualitycage.com](http://www.qualitycage.com).

Degus love to chew. Provide your degus with safe items to chew on everyday. It gives them something to do, and it keeps their teeth worn down. You can give them hay, cardboard toilet and paper towel tubes, natural wood chews like Cholla Chews, dried apple branches from trees that have not been sprayed with pesticides, and other similar items. The websites [www.busybunny.com](http://www.busybunny.com) and [www.leithpetwerks.com](http://www.leithpetwerks.com) have a wonderful variety of safe and edible toys.

Degus need time out of their habitat everyday to run around in a large degu proofed area. A good playpen is the "Grrreat Wall" which can be ordered on-line. Degus can easily get out of the fence-type playpens.

**NEVER** put your degus in an exercise ball. Exercise balls are dangerous and stressful for all animals. Rodents have poor eyesight. In a ball their vision is even more limited. They always run into furniture and walls, which they don't see coming. It's like a car crash for them. They back up to try and get away and end up crashing into something else. It's very stressful. In addition, paws can get pinched/broken in the air slits. Animals can become over-heated. If they go to the bathroom in the ball, they have to run in their own waste. Furthermore, their great joy in life is exploring and checking things out with their paws and noses. They can't do that in a plastic bubble. Provide a large, safe play area for your degus and trash the ball!

### **DUST BATH**

Degus need and enjoy a dust bath to keep their fur clean and properly groomed. The bathing dust/sand can be purchased on-line and at most pet stores. Offer access to the dust bath two to three times a week. You can reuse the sand as long as it is clean and not soiled by urine, hay, food, etc.

### **HANDLING**

Before you pick your degus up, make sure you have clean hands that do not smell like food. Make sure your degus are fully awake and aware of your presence. Scoop your degus up gently using both hands. **NEVER** pick your degus up by the tail, not even the base of the tail. The tail can break off or the skin can rip, leaving exposed bone.

### **Interested in degus?**

Please email [info@smallangelsrescue.org](mailto:info@smallangelsrescue.org) or call 301-668-0404. You can see our adoptable animals online at [www.smallangels.petfinder.com](http://www.smallangels.petfinder.com).