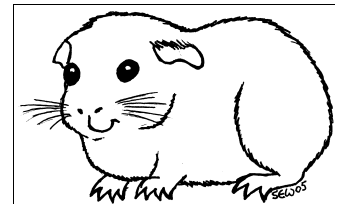




# Guinea Pig Care



Guinea pigs are gentle and lovable creatures. They make wonderful pets for a responsible guardian. Part of the responsibility of being a guinea pig guardian is to learn all you can about these wonderful animals. Your guinea pig is 100% dependent on you for everything; healthy food, fresh water, a clean home, a stress-free environment, exercise, play time, medical attention and LOTS OF LOVE!

The following information is meant to be a starting block for a responsible pet guardian new to guinea pigs. Please take the time to learn more about these animals through books and websites. Also, keep in mind that there is misinformation out there too. Just because you read or hear something does not mean it's true. Please use your common sense, and if you're not sure: just ask.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Your guinea pig should be **at least** 6 weeks old before you bring him home. Guinea pigs can already breed at this age, so be sure to keep a male and a female in separate cages unless one of them is spayed or neutered (yes, guinea pigs **CAN** be spayed and neutered).

Guinea pigs typically live up to eight years.

Their vocabulary includes about 9 different sounds; including whistling, purring, chattering, squeaking and squealing.

They are most active at dawn and dusk but will easily adjust to the routine of your household.

They rarely bite or scratch.

They are fun to watch, and they like to explore new settings.

## COMPANIONSHIP

Life is better with a buddy! We believe that guinea pigs should live in groups of **at least two**; as they are very social animals and need another animal of their own species for companionship. Taking care of two pigs is just as easy as taking care of one.

Some publications recommend pairing a guinea pig with a rabbit. **We do not encourage inter-species pairings.** Guinea pigs and rabbits have different needs, behaviors and language. Rabbits are very strong animals, and even the nicest bunny can unintentionally hurt a guinea pig.

Guinea pigs can happily live in a home with other animals; however, they should only be housed with other pigs.

Unless you are willing to have one guinea pig spayed or neutered, pairs of piggies should be the same gender.

**Male guinea pigs must be kept separate from female pigs for six weeks after being neutered**, as they can still be potent for up to six weeks after the surgery.

If you already have a guinea pig and are looking for a friend for your piggy, please ask for assistance. There are various techniques that can be used to help make the introduction a success and avoid possible injury through conflict. As a general rule, an adult pig will usually get along with a baby of the same gender or an altered pig of the opposite gender. However, please keep in mind that they are all unique individuals with distinct personalities.

## CAGE

### Types of Cages:

You can purchase a ready-made cage or you can easily build your own.

The cage for a pair of guinea pigs should be **a minimum of 8 square feet** in size, but the bigger the better, so please buy or build the largest cage possible for your guinea pigs' quality of life.

If you plan to purchase a cage, it should have a solid plastic bottom, with raised sides to keep the bedding in the cage. The top should be durable coated wire, with easy access and good ventilation. Make sure you look at how easy or hard the cage will be to clean. You should expect to spend \$80 to \$150 on an appropriate store-bought cage. Please note that **no animal should be kept in a cage with a wire floor**. Wire is excruciating painful to stand on; it will deform their feet and cause wounds and sores. They can also get their toes and feet caught; which could result in broken bones.

When it comes to store-bought cages, we recommend the **Marchioro Tommy 120** cage.

If you are interested in exploring the option of building your own cage, please look at:

**[www.guineapigcages.com](http://www.guineapigcages.com)**

This site gives directions on how to build your own cage, and it shows examples of wonderful, easy to build, inexpensive cages. They use Creative Cubes (sometimes called Neat Idea Cubes) and Coroplast to create lovely Guinea pig homes. The site tells you where you can find the necessary materials. You can build a great cage that is **bigger, better and much less expensive** than a store bought cage. Check it out! It's easy!

You can also purchase a 4 cubes by 2 cubes Cubes and Coroplast cage from Small Angels Rescue that is ready to assemble at home for \$60. There is an optional lid for \$20.

**NEVER use an aquarium! They are VERY dangerous for guinea pigs. They are not large enough. They do not provide proper ventilation, and they isolate your piggy from her environment.**

## **Location:**

Your guinea pigs' cage should be placed in the area where you spend most of your time at home; as your piggies want and need to be an interactive part of their human family.

It should be in an area that receives natural sunlight but never in direct sunlight unless there is shade available.

The area should also be **well-ventilated** and **free from drafts** as drafts can contribute to respiratory problems. Make sure the cage is also located away from heating vents and air conditioning ducts and in an area **free from sudden and/or extreme changes in temperature**.

Guinea pigs are sensitive to loud and sudden noises; therefore your cage should **not be placed by a television or stereo**.

Guinea pigs are curious creatures, and they like to chew on things, so you should make sure their cage is **not near any electrical cords**.

It should also be placed somewhere where your piggies will be safe from other household pets.

## **BEDDING**

You have several bedding options. We recommend **Carefresh®** bedding. It looks like gray shredded paper and it is available at almost all pet stores. It is the **safest, healthiest** choice for your pig. It also happens to be the most expensive choice. However, Carefresh® is more absorbent than wood based beddings and will last longer.

If you are not willing or able to use Carefresh®, use **aspen bedding** or **Hunt Club Bedding®**. Hunt Club Bedding® is a new alternative to wood-based beddings is made from recycled corrugated cardboard. It is made by Triple Crown, Inc. and is stocked by most Southern States farm supply stores. If you are unable to find it in your area, you can call **1-800-622-1862** (Triple Crown Customer Service) and they will assist you.

You should be aware that **all wood based beddings release aromatic toxins**, which can be harmful to your guinea pigs.

**Do not use sawdust.** It is too fine and will irritate your guinea pigs' eyes, ears and mucous membranes. **Do not use corncob bedding, chlorophyll bedding, cat litter or straw.** If ingested, cat litter can kill your guinea pig. Straw does not absorb urine, and its hard stalks can cause serious injury to your guinea pig.

**NEVER use cedar bedding!** Cedar is poisonous and very harmful to all animals. It will damage your guinea pig's respiratory system and liver.

Whichever option you decide on, place a layer of newspapers underneath and the top layer of bedding should be a **generous amount of Timothy hay or orchard grass hay**. Guinea pigs need unlimited access to Timothy hay or orchard grass hay **at all times**. They love to eat hay, sleep in hay, and play around in hay! **Do not use Alfalfa Hay!**

# CLEANING

Ideally, your guinea pigs' cage should be cleaned daily. However, this depends on the number of pigs you have and the size of their cage. Realistically, most people don't have time to clean the cage everyday. We recommend you clean your guinea pig's cage **at least twice a week**. If you are using a Cubes and Coroplast cage, you can spot clean soiled areas and replace bedding and hay in those areas daily; then change to whole cage weekly.

Once a week, you should **thoroughly clean the entire cage**. Wash out the bottom with hot water and vinegar or baking soda. Make sure it is completely rinsed out. Do not use harsh or abrasive cleaners. Dry it the cage thoroughly before replacing the bedding.

# FEEDING

## Dishes:

The food dish should be **heavy ceramic**; ceramic cat saucers work very well. It should be shallow and wide; as guinea pigs often place their feet on the edge of their dish and if the dish is too light or too tall, they will tip it over. The dish should be washed frequently. We do not recommend gravity feeders, as the pellets do not remain fresh.

## Water:

Use a water bottle that will hold a **minimum** of 32 ounces of water. It should be gravity fed with a spout and mounted on the side of the cage. It should be thoroughly washed and cleaned once a week with a bottlebrush. Use a Q-tip to clean inside the spout. Your Guinea pig should be given **fresh water everyday**.

## Food:

Guinea pigs are herbivores. There are three elements to their diet: pellets, hay and fresh food.

## Pellets:

Guinea pigs should be fed fresh, quality guinea pig pellets. Be aware that **most of the pellets available in pet stores are not good for guinea pigs**. Most commercial pellets are alfalfa based. You should feed a **Timothy based** pellet that is low in sodium and fat. **Do not feed pellets that contain seeds, dried bits of fruit, or colored bits and pieces**. Seeds and dried fruit cause obesity. Seed husks are a choking hazard, and colored pieces contain harmful dyes and artificial colors.

Choose pellets that have stabilized Vitamin C and have been recently milled.

It is best to provide a small amount of pellets, about a quarter cup, and change them daily, so they remain fresh.

Pellets should be stored in your freezer and thawed for use as needed.

We recommend **Oxbow Cavy Cuisine®**. For young and elderly guinea pigs we recommend **Oxbow Cavy Performance®**.

**Oxbow® food is available at:**

SuperPetz (in the veterinarian area at the back of the store)  
www.ferretstore.com (free shipping on orders over \$35)  
Kingsbrook Animal Hospital  
Blue Ridge Vet

### Hay:

Timothy hay or orchard grass hay is essential for a healthy digestive system. It also wears down guinea pigs' continually growing teeth and gives them something to do to pass the time. Your guinea pigs should have **unlimited access to Timothy hay at all times**. Alfalfa hay should not be given, as it is too high in protein and calcium and may cause health problems.

You can purchase small bags of hay at the pet store; however, it is much more practical and economical, if you have the room, to buy a bale of sweet smelling, fresh hay from a reputable farm, or farm store. Keep it in a clean, dry place that allows air to circulate around it. Amos Keller, in Middletown, sells quality hay by the bale. His phone number is **301-371-6585**. Ask for **second cutting Timothy hay or orchard grass hay**.

### Fresh Food:

Guinea pigs need **fresh, raw vegetables everyday**. They should be **thoroughly washed** and in **perfect condition**. Veggies should be given in small amounts two or three times a day, served at room temperature, for a total of one cup of vegetables a day.

Fruits should be given once or twice a week. **Never give your guinea pigs processed, cooked or canned fruits or vegetables**. Try a variety of vegetables and fruits, and see what your piggy likes!

Any of the following can be given (this list not exhaustive).

Apples	Oranges	Dandelion leaves
Escarole	Carrots	Celery
Blueberries	Carrot greens	Romaine lettuce
Grapes (seedless)	Parsley	Cilantro
Broccoli	Pears	Snow peas
Green pepper	Cauliflower	Corn on the cob
Brussels sprouts	Red pepper	(with leaves & silk)
Strawberries	Cucumber	Tomatoes

Spinach, kale, clover and collard greens can be given occasionally in small amounts.

### DO NOT FEED:

Iceberg lettuce	Raw beans	Nuts
Rhubarb	Dried beans	Seeds
Potato		

\* Introduce new foods one at a time, in case your guinea pig gets an upset stomach from one in particular.

## Vitamin C:

Guinea pigs do not make their own Vitamin C, but as long as you are feeding an appropriate high quality pellet and vegetables, it is not usually necessary to you're your guinea pigs additional Vitamin C. However, if your guinea pigs are ill or off their food, it may be necessary to supplement Vitamin C. An adult guinea pig requires 10 to 20mg of Vitamin C per day. You can give them a small piece of a Vitamin C chewable tablet or an Oxbow Hay Company's Vitamin C tablet. Alternately, give them vegetables with a high Vitamin C content, such as green pepper. **Do not give your Guinea pigs Tang!** It is not healthy or nutritious source of Vitamin C.

## Treats:

There are many commercial guinea pig treats available. However, just because a pet store sells it does not mean it's good for your guinea pig! **Avoid commercial treats;** they are high in fat and sugar. You could use your pig's favorite fruit as a treat. Or, when you purchase your guinea pig pellets, you could buy a bag of specialty Oxbow hay.

**DO NOT give your guinea pig a salt lick or mineral wheel!**

# HANDLING

Guinea pigs are prey animals; through thousands of years of evolution, they have learned to avoid predators. Therefore, as some of their main enemies were birds of prey, they will instinctively avoid something coming down at them from above. This usually includes your hand. As a result, guinea pigs can sometimes be a bit tricky to pick up.

Always pick up your guinea pigs carefully. When picking one of them up, use one hand to support her under her chest and the other hand to support her under her hindquarters. Hold her with her feet against your body, so she feels safe and secure. **Never leave your guinea pigs on a chair, couch, bed or table.** They could fall off the edge and be seriously hurt. Guinea pigs can also be badly injured if dropped.

Daily lap time is very important. Hold your guinea pig securely; talk to her and stroke her gently. Most guinea pigs enjoy cuddles and will sit nicely with you, however if she is nervous, you can wrap her in a small blanket to help her feel safer.

**An adult should always be the one to take the guinea pigs out of their cage and put them back in. Children should always be supervised when they are handling the guinea pigs.** With young children, it is best to have them sit on the floor with their legs crossed and a towel placed across their lap to prevent any "accidents".

Children should be reminded not to poke eyes or tug on ears. Hugs should not be too tight or the piggy could get hurt. Have a discussion with your children and establish rules; it will help avoid future accidents and injuries.

# PLAYTIME

Along with lap time, your guinea pigs need floor time everyday to run around and get some exercise. We recommend **an hour a day** out of their cage if your guinea pigs live in a traditional cage. If they live in a Cubes and Coroplast cage, daily floor time is less essential as they already have plenty of space.

Make sure you let them out in a safe, pig-proofed area. Remove any hazardous items and place chewable objects such as electrical cords out of reach. You can easily construct an

exercise pen out of Creative Cubes/Neat Idea Cubes and cable ties. Cable ties can be found at most hardware stores. Exercise pens can be easily folded away when not in use. If floor time is not on a carpeted surface, it is a good idea to put down an old sheet that can be shaken out and laundered as needed.

Interesting toys will make playtime more enjoyable. Guinea pigs like plain cardboard boxes with doors cut out of them, paper grocery bags lined with newspaper, ramps and bridges, toilet paper rolls stuffed with hay, tunnels, bricks for climbing on, platforms, large PVC pipes, and empty oatmeal canisters with the bottom cut off. Be creative! Toys like these should be provided in your guinea pig's cage and in her exercise area.

Guinea pigs can enjoy **supervised** time outside. Always have your guinea pigs in an enclosed area when outdoors - such as an exercise pen. A loose pig will be a lost pig! Make sure your guinea pigs are in an area that has not been treated with pesticides or fertilizers. **Only put your guinea pigs outside if the temperature is around 70°F and the grass is dry.** Guinea pigs cannot sweat, so it is important to make sure they do not get too hot. Do not have your pig outside longer than twenty to thirty minutes.

**NEVER put your guinea pig in an exercise ball, and NEVER give them an exercise wheel! They are totally unsuitable for guinea pigs and very dangerous!**

## HEALTH

Your guinea pig should have a physical examination done by an experienced exotics veterinarian once a year. You should know a qualified vet **before** you need one. **Please keep in mind that not all vets are equally knowledgeable about small animals, even if they see them at their practice.** It is your responsibility to find a skilled veterinarian.

Health problems can arise from drafts, dampness, temperature fluctuations, lack of exercise, stress and inappropriate diet. Guinea pigs are typically hardy animals; however they can become seriously ill very quickly.

If you notice any signs of illness, have your guinea pig examined by your veterinarian as soon as possible.

Signs of illness include but are not limited to:

Change in behavior	Loss of appetite
Change in activity level	Diarrhea
Change in drinking habits	Loss of coordination
Hair loss	Labored or noisy breathing
Limping	Eye or nose discharge
Weight loss	

Usually the first sign of something being wrong is weight loss, so you should weigh your guinea pigs monthly on a kitchen scale and keep a record of their weights. A great time to do this is when you do the monthly nail trim and teeth check.

# GROOMING

## Coat:

Guinea pigs, especially longhaired ones, benefit from regular brushing. It will keep their coat healthy and in good condition. Use a soft brush and be very careful with wire bristle brushes.

## Nails:

You will need to trim your guinea pigs' nails once a month as overgrown nails will be very painful for your them. We will be happy to show you how to do it, but if you are not comfortable trimming nails, most vets perform the service for a small fee. It is best to use cat or dog nail trimmers, which are available at most pet stores.

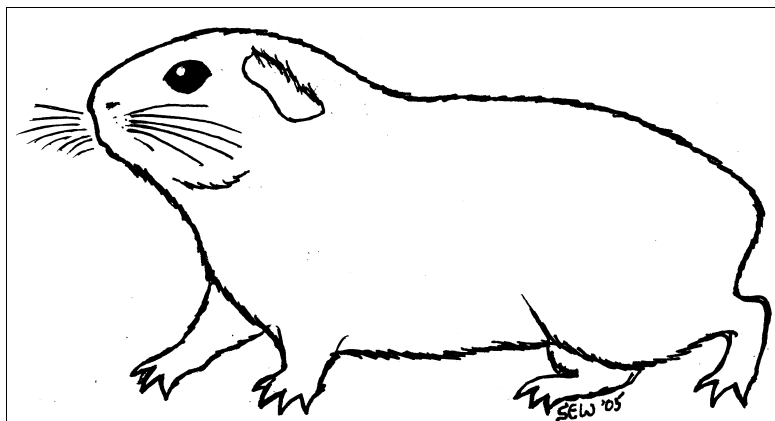
## Teeth:

Unlike humans, guinea pigs' teeth grow continually throughout their lives. It is therefore important to check that they are an appropriate length and properly aligned. Your vet should check this when you take your guinea pigs in for their annual examination, but it is a good idea to ask your vet to show you how their teeth should be so you can keep an eye out for problems.

You must provide suitable items for your piggies to chew on to keep their teeth a good length. You can give your guinea pigs small branches from fruit trees that have not been treated with pesticides, toilet paper tubes, plain cardboard boxes and other similar items. Unlimited access to Timothy hay is also vital for fit teeth.

## Bathing:

Occasionally you may want to give your guinea pig a bath. Make sure you use a gentle shampoo and thoroughly rinse her with warm water. Make sure she is thoroughly dried before putting her back in her cage. Do not let your piggy air-dry. Use a hair dryer on a low setting.



# MORE INFORMATION

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or concerns or would like further information.

Sue Wilmot                      301-829-5759                      cavymum@adelphia.net  
Michelle Clowe                301-523-1238                      clowegirl9@yahoo.com

## **Books:**

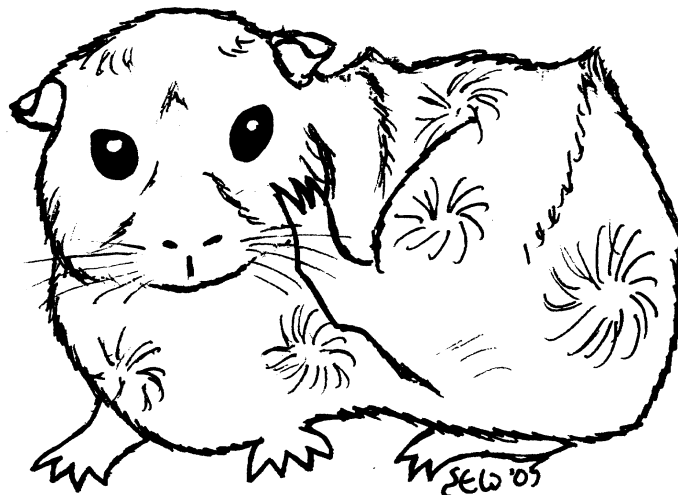
A Grown-Up's Guide to Guinea Pigs by Dale Sigler  
Piggy Potions: Natural Remedies For Guinea Pigs by Peter Gurney  
The Proper Care of Guinea Pigs by Peter Gurney  
The Really Useful Guinea Pig Guide by Myra Mahoney

## **Books For Children:**

I Love Guinea Pigs by Dick King-Smith.  
The "Olga Da Polga" Series by Michael Bond.

## **WEBSITES:**

<a href="http://www.petfinder.com">www.petfinder.com</a>	National rescue resource for all animals
<a href="http://www.mgpr.org">www.mgpr.org</a>	Maryland Guinea Pig Rescue
<a href="http://www.ferretstore.com">www.ferretstore.com</a>	Oxbow Pellets and small animal supplies
<a href="http://www.cavycages.com">www.cavycages.com</a>	Cages, information and ideas
<a href="http://www.guineapigcages.com">www.guineapigcages.com</a>	Cages, information and ideas
<a href="http://www.winking-cavy.co.uk">www.winking-cavy.co.uk</a>	Gifts for guinea pig lovers
<a href="http://www.cavyspirit.com">www.cavyspirit.com</a>	General information
<a href="http://www.cavymadness.com">www.cavymadness.com</a>	Online forum
<a href="http://www.gpdd.org">www.gpdd.org</a>	Guinea Pig Daily Digest
<a href="http://www.oxbowhay.com">www.oxbowhay.com</a>	Oxbow Hay Company ~ supplies
<a href="http://www.arachnet.com/~seagull/Guineas">www.arachnet.com/~seagull/Guineas</a>	Comprehensive guinea pig information



## CHECKLIST: Are you ready for your new guinea pigs?

- 1. Cage- A Marchioro® 120 or a Cubes & Coroplast
- 2. Gravity-fed 32oz water bottle
- 3. Heavy ceramic dish
- 4. Pellets- Cavy Performance® or Cavy Cuisine®
- 5. Bedding- Carefresh® or Hunt Club Bedding®
- 6. Old newspapers for lining cage
- 7. Cardboard boxes with doors cut in them for houses or wooden house\*
- 8. Fresh vegetables
- 9. Timothy or orchard grass hay
- 10. Soft brush for grooming
- 11. Dog or cat nail clippers

**\*We do not recommend the use of igloos as houses for guinea pigs**