



# Guinea Pig Care

Guinea pigs make gentle and loveable pets; however, like any pet, they will be totally dependant on you for everything they need to be happy and healthy. We ask you to talk about this as a family and discuss the shared responsibility for their care over their lifetime of 5-8 years. Over time, children may lose interest in these animals or leave home; if this happens are you as parents, willing to continue to care for them? If not, you should reconsider your decision to adopt guinea pigs.

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED

### Housing:

The larger the cage the less frequently it will need cleaning and the more space will be available for your guinea pigs to exercise and have fun!

We require a minimum of 8 square feet for a pair of guinea pigs. Our first choice is a **Cubes and Coroplast cage** of at least 2 cubes by 4 cubes (28" by 56" approximately) to which you can add boxes with doors/wooden houses and tunnels or ramps and platforms to create an interesting habitat that can be varied over time. If you own any predatory animals, these cages can be fitted with a **Closet-Maid lid** for protection (please ask for details) and you might also wish to place the C & C cage up off the floor on a table or storage unit. C & C cages with or without lids can be built by you or purchased from the Rescue (go to [www.guineapigcages.com](http://www.guineapigcages.com) for further information regarding size requirements and more details about these cages and their possibilities).

If we agree with you that a traditional cage is necessary to keep your guinea pigs safe from larger pets, the Marchioro Tomy 120 cage is the only traditional cage that is a suitable size. However, you will need to give the guinea pigs regular supervised exercise time out of this cage in a playpen (with hay/food/boxes/water bottle and tunnels for their amusement), perhaps one made from extra cubes and cable ties, in a room away from other animals.

*No aquariums or plastic tubs as they have poor ventilation.*

*No wire-floored cages as they are excruciating for a guinea pig's sensitive feet*

### Location:

Guinea pigs should live in a well-ventilated room that is away from drafts, free from sudden loud noises and provides natural light. The temperature of the room should range between 65°F and 75°F and if there is direct sunlight, shade must also be provided.

***The guinea pigs should be in a part of the house that is frequently inhabited by the whole family and not isolated to, for example, a child's bedroom.***

### Setting up your cage:

Add the following to the base of the cage:

1. A layer of newspaper
- 2a. One to two inches of one of the following:
  - ❖ Paper-based bedding such as CareFresh or Yesterday's News

- ❖ Cardboard based bedding such as Hunt Club Bedding. (Go to <http://www.southernstates.com/> for store locator; then call and ask if they stock the cardboard bedding)
- ❖ Kiln dried pine shavings/Aspen shavings (*but only if nothing else available*)

or

2b. Fleece (Go to [www.guinealynx.info](http://www.guinealynx.info) for more details) or piggie bedspreads.

*Do not use:*

- Cedar shavings because they contain toxic oils. (All wood-based bedding contains aromatic toxins)
  - Sawdust because it is too dusty
  - Corncob bedding because of mold growth
  - Straw because it can injure the guinea pigs' eyes
  - Cat litter because it can kill your guinea pigs if ingested
3. Add a layer of high quality **Timothy hay** or **Orchard grass hay** to the bedding, or if you are using fleece you can add some hay racks.

### **Cleaning your cage:**

At least weekly, remove all newspaper/bedding/hay etc. Clean base with water and a little vinegar. Rinse and dry. Replace bedding/hay etc. Top up with more hay as necessary. Cleaning a C & C cage will take approximately 30 minutes.

### **Food:**

Most pet stores sell guinea pig food that contains unsuitable ingredients; the only pellets we recommend are the Oxbow Guinea Pig Pellets (give approximately 1/8 cup of pellets per guinea pig per day) as they contain essential ingredients and are low in fat and salt. They also provide stabilized Vitamin C

- **Cavy Cuisine**, which is Timothy hay-based, is for adult guinea pigs (guinea pigs that are over 6 months old)
- **Cavy Performance**, which is Alfalfa-based, is for baby guinea pigs (guinea pigs that are 6 months of age or younger), pregnant/nursing guinea pigs and elderly/malnourished guinea pigs

For more information visit <http://www.oxbowhay.com/index.sp> and use their store locator to find your local supplier. Alternately, you can purchase pellets on-line from the Ferret Store (<http://www.ferretstore.com/>).

\* Note: pellets can be frozen successfully and then thawed out for future use

*No seeds (choking hazard)*

*No dried bits of fruit or corn syrup (can cause obesity)*

*No colored bits (dyes can be harmful)*

*No salt licks*

*No mineral wheels.*

*No rabbit pellets (have no vitamin C & may contain antibiotics dangerous to guinea pigs)*

*No dairy or meats products (guinea pigs are strictly herbivores)*

## Hay:

Timothy hay or orchard grass hay is **essential** for a guinea pig's good digestion, condition of their continuously growing teeth and amusement! Alfalfa hay should not be given as it is too high in protein & calcium causing health problems such as bladder stones **Guinea pigs must have access to unlimited hay at all times.**

We recommend where possible that you use a bale of fresh hay from a reputable farm, or farm store. When buying hay by the bale remember to check that it is in good condition.

### What to look for when buying a bale of hay:

- Hay that has a good green color, rather than yellow or brown. (But do not worry about any slight discoloration on the outside, especially in stacked hay)
- Fine stemmed, leafy and soft to the touch.
- Smells good, not moldy or dusty.
- It should be relatively free from weeds/thistles/pests/dirt/trash.
- Reject bales that seem excessively heavy for their size or warm to the touch as they may contain excessive moisture that could cause mold, or even spontaneous combustion (!)
- On opening the bale there should not be any moldy or wet/rotten parts. Sometimes clouds of mold spores can be released when a bale is opened and the hay itself can seem to be gray and stuck together in clumps. This moldy hay can make animals very sick and may even be fatal. If you find this, return the bale to the farm/store and **do not use it.**
- If possible hay should be fed within a year of harvest to preserve the nutritional value.

Remember too, that baled hay should be stored in a dry sheltered area out of the rain and sun. It is important to have a good circulation of air around it, so preferably have it up on blocks of wood or on a wooden pallet; under no circumstances should it be stored in plastic trash bags.

You can also purchase specialty hays in various sizes of bags and boxes as a daily treat for your guinea pigs. Consider either purchasing this from the Oxbow Hay Company <http://www.oxbowhay.com/index.sp>

or Kleenmama's Hayloft <http://www.kmshayloft.com/catalog/>  
or from your pet store

## Accessories:

- Heavy ceramic untippable dish for pellets.
- (No gravity feeders as the pellets do not remain fresh)**
- 2 gravity fed water bottles 16 oz each with a spout to be mounted on the side of the cage. We do *not* recommend the "sipper-style" water bottles.
  - Wooden house with large "window" and door or plain brown cardboard box with more than one entrance/exit to prevent squabbling.
  - Cat carrier for transportation (use with towel in bottom)
  - Nail clippers
  - Styptic powder (to stop bleeding if the nail is accidentally cut too short)
  - Soft brush for grooming.

## DAILY CARE

### Vegetables & Fruits:

**Vegetables:** give your guinea pigs small amounts of fresh vegetables (up to 1 cup daily) to provide additional Vitamin C and other nutrients. Popular choices include: Romaine lettuce, small pieces of carrot, tomato, green or red pepper, celery, cucumber.

**Fruits:** you can give the occasional piece of apple, seedless grape, slice of orange, piece of cantaloupe.

For more details and a complete listing go to [http://www.guinealynx.info/diet\\_order-c.html](http://www.guinealynx.info/diet_order-c.html)  
We recommend having a routine for giving veggies rather than free-feeding and introduce new vegetables/fruits gradually. Give plenty of variety.

**Other treats:** your guinea pigs will appreciate having some clean grass, clover and dandelion as long as it is free from pesticides.

**No processed, cooked or canned foods. No Iceberg lettuce, rhubarb, potato, raw beans, dried beans, nuts or seeds.**

### Water:

Change water daily so it is always clean and fresh. Weekly, clean spout with Q-tip and use bottle brush to clean inside bottle.

### Vitamin C:

Guinea pigs are unable to make their own Vitamin C. However, if you are feeding them fresh Oxbow pellets and they are eating a variety of fresh vegetables & fruits daily you needn't supplement with Vitamin C. If however, they are sick or off their food, you can give them an Oxbow Vitamin C tablet daily or a quarter of a 100mg chewable Vitamin C. (Adult guinea pigs require 10-30mg Vitamin C daily)

### Treats:

There are many commercial treats available; most are bad for guinea pigs as they are high in fat and/or sugar and are best avoided. Why not buy them some specialty hay as a treat instead? There are also a range of Oxbow treats to choose from.

### Handling:

Guinea pigs can be tricky to pick up; this is the result of being prey animals over thousands of years living in the wild. Always pick them up carefully. Use a quiet voice and slow movements to keep them calm. Use one hand to support the chest and the other hand to support the hindquarters. Hold the guinea pig against your body so it will feel secure. When returning them to the cage, use the "rear-end first" method to discourage jumping.

**Never leave the guinea pig on a couch, chair, bed or table; she will fall off and could be seriously hurt.**

Guinea pigs will enjoy daily lap time. If your guinea pig is squirmy at lap time consider swaddling her in a small towel or blanket.

**Adults *only* should take a guinea pig from her cage and return her afterwards. Children should be supervised at all times and get into the habit of sitting on the floor with their legs crossed and a towel on their lap which will soak up any “accidents”. Children need to be reminded to be gentle and avoid poking eyes and not tug on ears.**

**Practice good hygiene:**

- ~wash hands with soap and water before and after handling pets
- ~supervise hand-washing for young children
- ~keep cages and pets away from food preparation areas
- ~discourage children, especially young children, from kissing their pets

**Playtime:**

If your guinea pigs already live in Cubes and Coroplast cage they have plenty of space in which to run around and have fun. You might want to make them an additional playpen using some extra creative cubes linked with cable ties; you can then give them a change of scene and a variety of boxes and tunnels to chase about in. You can use an old sheet or some towels for the floor that can then be shaken off and laundered after use. Bear in mind that guinea pigs will chew on almost anything including electrical cords!

**Outside time-please note that this is not without risks and is not an essential activity.**

- Guinea pigs can enjoy **supervised** playtimes outside in an exercise pen as long as:
- ~ a responsible adult stays with them the whole time and does not leave them unattended
  - ~ air temperature is around 70 degrees (guinea pigs cannot sweat and are susceptible to heat stroke) and humidity is low
  - ~ grass is dry and clean (unpolluted by fecal matter and chemical treatments)

**Never put your guinea pig in an exercise ball or on an exercise wheel as these are extremely dangerous for guinea pigs!**

## **HEALTH**

We recommend a wellness check with a cavy-knowledgeable veterinarian within a short time of adopting your guinea pigs. This will enable your vet to become familiar with your guinea pigs and give you a chance to get to know your vet and ask questions regarding their hours and after hours care. After the initial check-up, take your guinea pigs for an annual physical examination.

**Do not wait until you have a sick guinea pig to find an experienced guinea pig vet!**

**Use the following article to assist you in finding a competent vet in your area:**

<http://www.cavyinfo.com/html/vet.htm>

We also recommend using the following veterinarians:

- Dr Valerie Campbell, Blue Ridge Veterinary Associates.  
120 E.Cornwell St., Purcellville VA (540 338-7387)
- Dr Keith Gold, Chadwell Animal Hospital.  
3004 Edmorton Rd, Abingdon MD (443 512-8338)

**Be observant and if you see any of the following signs, see your vet immediately:**

Refusal to eat or drink and /or weight loss (hence we recommend you weigh your guinea pigs at least monthly and keep a record)

Lethargy/reluctance to move

Wheezing/displaying effort to breathe

Hair loss/excessive scratching/bare patches/scabs

Limping

Loss of coordination

Labored or noisy breathing

Eye or nose discharge

Rough or puffed up coat

Diarrhea

Head tilt suddenly develops

Blood in urine (or crying/hunching when peeing)

## **GROOMING**

### **Brushing:**

Guinea pigs especially long haired ones, benefit from regular brushing with a soft brush. It will keep their coat healthy and reduce shedding.

### **Nail trimming:**

This is essential and should be done monthly. We can show you how to do this using dog nail trimmers and we recommend having Styptic powder available to stop any bleeding, should you accidentally cut the “quick.” Alternately ask your vet or local pet store.

### **Bathing:**

Long haired guinea pigs are more likely to need an occasional bath. Use a rabbit or kitten shampoo and use a shallow bowl of warm water. Take care to keep the water and soap out of the eyes and ears. Rinse thoroughly and towel dry; finish off with a hair drier on a warm setting.

## **For More Information**

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

E-mail: [guineapigs@smallangelsrescue.org](mailto:guineapigs@smallangelsrescue.org) or call 301-668-0404 and leave a message; we will get back to you as soon as we can.

### **Books :**

A Grown-Up's Guide to Guinea Pigs by Dale Sigler

The Proper Care of Guinea Pigs by Peter Gurney

The Really Useful Guinea Pig Guide by Myra Mahoney

### **Websites:**

General information

[www.cavyspirit.com](http://www.cavyspirit.com)

Cages, information, ideas

[www.cavycages.com](http://www.cavycages.com)

Oxbow products & supplies

[www.ferretstore.com](http://www.ferretstore.com)

Gifts for guinea pig lovers

[www.winking-cavy.co.uk](http://www.winking-cavy.co.uk)

Medical & care guide for guinea pigs

[www.guinealynx.info/healthycavy](http://www.guinealynx.info/healthycavy)

For Pete's Sake, Middletown

[www.for-petes-sake.com](http://www.for-petes-sake.com)