

Guinea Pig Care Information

Small Angels Rescue • 301-668-0404 • www.smallangelsrescue.org

Guinea pigs are gentle and lovable animals. They live an average of five to seven years. They can make at least nine sounds. They are instinctively most active at dawn and dusk but easily adjust to a household routine. Guinea pigs are social herd animals and need the companionship of their own species. It is unnatural for them to live alone. Guinea pigs should always be kept in at least pairs, either the same gender or spayed and neutered. Male guinea pigs must be kept separate from female pigs for six weeks after being neutered, as they can still successfully mate up to six weeks after neuter surgery. Introductions between single guinea pigs can be very successful. Never pair your guinea pig with another species of animal, such as a rabbit.

HOUSING

There is no such thing as a habitat that is too big. Your guinea pigs 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. For a single guinea pig, the cage should be a minimum of 6 square feet (2' x 3'). For a pair of guinea pigs, the cage should be a minimum of 8 square feet (2' x 4'). The floor of 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. We recommend Cubes & Coroplast habitats. Examples of these wonderful habitats can be seen at www.guineapigcages.com. They are easy and inexpensive to construct. If you choose to purchase a cage from the store, we recommend the Marchioro Tommy 120. Guinea pigs should never be kept in aquariums. Aquariums are not large enough for guinea pigs. They do not provide proper ventilation, do not allow for adequate enrichment items, and isolate your guinea pigs from their environment. Clean your guinea pigs' habitat at least twice a week.

BEDDING

Use Carefresh Bedding. It is the safest and healthiest bedding choice for your guinea pigs. It is made from recycled wood pulp and is available at most pet stores. Hunt Club and/or aspen bedding are acceptable second choices. Never use pine, cedar, sawdust, corn cob bedding, chlorophyll bedding, straw, or cat litter. Pine and cedar shavings are poisonous to all animals! Provide a generous layer of timothy hay or orchard grass on top of the bedding.

HIDEAWAY

Guinea pigs enjoy a cozy space for sleeping and relaxation. Provide a wooden hideaway or a cardboard box with a doorway cut out of it. Plastic igloos are not recommended for habitats with more than one guinea pig. Super-sized igloos are acceptable. They are extra large and oval in shape. If your guinea pigs chew excessively on their plastic igloo, remove it and provide a different type of hideaway.

WATER

Use a 32-ounce 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. Give your guinea pigs fresh water everyday. Filtered water is best.

FOOD

Provide a heavy, shallow ceramic food dish, about an inch high and four inches wide. Ceramic cat saucers work very well. Do not use plastic. Guinea pig pellets should be plain. There should not be any seeds, nuts, corn, dried fruit, or other bits mixed in with the pellets. These are unhealthy and a choking hazard. Except for baby guinea pigs up to six months of age, guinea pig pellets should be timothy based, not alfalfa based. Check the ingredient label. We recommend Oxbow Cavy Performance pellets for baby guinea pigs up to six months of age and Oxbow Cavy Cuisine pellets for adult guinea pigs. Oxbow is available from www.oxbowhay.com, www.ferretstore.com, and a variety of other online retailers. Oxbow is also available at some independent pet 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 that is linked to cancer, organ damage, birth defects, and other serious health problems. Do not give your guinea pigs 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 guinea pigs natural wood chews that have not been artificially colored and/or dried apple branches from apple trees that have not been sprayed with pesticides.

VEGETABLES

Guinea pigs need fresh, raw vegetables every day. Vegetables should be given in small amounts, two or three times a day, for a total of one cup of vegetables a day per guinea pig. Leafy greens should make up a majority of your guinea pigs' vegetable intake. Guinea pigs enjoy basil, cilantro, dandelion leaves, endive, green leaf lettuce, parsley, red leaf lettuce, romaine lettuce, red romaine lettuce, and watercress. Kale and spinach can be given in limited quantities. Guinea pigs also enjoy broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, celery, corn on the cob, cucumber, green pepper, red pepper, and tomatoes. Fruits can be given as an occasional treat. Guinea pigs enjoy apples, banana, blueberries, grapes (seedless), oranges, pears, and strawberries. Do not give your guinea pigs processed, cooked, or canned fruits or vegetables. Avoid iceberg lettuce, rhubarb, dried corn, dairy products, nuts, seeds, and commercial treats from the store. Whole oats and canned pumpkin, in small quantities, can be a nice treat. Use common sense when feeding your guinea pigs, and introduce new foods slowly.

HAY

It is vital that guinea pigs have unlimited access to timothy hay or orchard grass at all times. Hay promotes a healthy digestive system and keeps their teeth worn down. Alfalfa hay should only be given to baby guinea pigs up to six months of age, as it is high in calcium and may contribute to urinary problems and the formation of bladder stones in adult guinea pigs.

VITAMIN C

Guinea pigs do not manufacture their own Vitamin C. They require 10 to 30mg/kg of Vitamin C daily. Guinea pigs may receive adequate Vitamin C from quality pellets and fresh vegetables. (Green pepper, red pepper, and parsley are excellent sources of Vitamin C.) However, you may want to ensure your guinea pigs get enough Vitamin C by giving them a chewable tablet. Oxbow makes a Vitamin C tablet for guinea pigs. It is available from www.oxbowhay.com, other online retailers, and through Small Angels. Do not give your guinea pigs Tang! Tang contains artificial colors, refined sugar, and very little Vitamin C. Also, vitamins added to the water bottle are useless, as they are quickly destroyed by light. Sick or injured guinea pigs may require extra Vitamin C.

EXERCISE and PLAY

Guinea pigs need and enjoy time out of their habitat everyday to run around and stretch their legs. It's very easy to make or buy an exercise pen so your guinea pigs can play. Guinea pigs enjoy towel tents, fleece cuddle cups, tunnels, large oatmeal canisters with the bottom cut off, toilet paper tubes stuffed with hay, paper bags laid on their side, tennis balls, ping pong balls, some hanging bird toys, some hard cat toys with bells, large mounds of hay, mirrors, and/or old socks stuffed with bedding. **NEVER** put your guinea pigs in an exercise ball. Exercise balls are dangerous and stressful for all animals. Never give your guinea pig an exercise wheel. They are not safe or suitable for guinea pigs.

HANDLING

Before you pick your guinea pigs up, make sure you have clean hands that do not smell like food. Make sure your guinea pigs are fully awake and aware of your presence. Pick your guinea pigs up gently using both hands. Place one hand under the chest and the other hand under the rear. Hold your guinea pig securely against your body or in your lap.

Interested in guinea pigs?

Please email guineapigs@smallangelsrescue.org or call 301-668-0404. You can see our adoptable animals online at www.smallangels.petfinder.com.