



GUINEA PIGS AS PETS:

Guinea Pigs make great pets for kids. They are friendly, gentle little animals and are relatively easy to keep. They don't make a lot of noise, need to be taken for walks or need obedience training. Guinea pigs are a wonderful pet alternative to a cat or dog if you do not have a lot of time or space for a pet.

How long do they live?

Guinea pigs usually live for 4 to 6 years, but they need extra TLC in the hotter months and must be kept safe from wandering dogs and cats.

Housing

Mesh cages with solid floors are the most suitable as the guinea pig will not be able to chew through it. Walls & fittings should not be coated with toxic paint that your pet may ingest. You will need to clean the cage at least once a week. Cleaning the cage involves removing old litter and washing & drying the cage using a commercial spray cage cleaner with anti bacterial agent. A mite & lice spray should also be used if your guinea pigs or cage are outdoors for prolonged periods of time.

Bedding

Shredded paper & paper-based or lucerne-based cat litter are suitable. Wood shavings are frowned upon these days as the little dust particles are known to block and damage the respiratory system.

Feeding

Guinea pigs are classified as herbivores. That means they are only equipped to eat fruit and vegetables. While a guinea pig mix can usually be purchased from the pet shop or supermarket, it is very important to also feed fresh fruit and vegetables every day. Guinea pigs are unable to produce their own vitamin c so if they don't get this in their diet the vitamin c deficiency will cause a disease known as rickets. Food is best kept in a solid ceramic bowl or a bowl mounted to the cage as guinea pigs are very good at tipping bowls over and spreading food everywhere. By the same token, water is best kept in a drip bottle or mountable bowl and must be checked on a regular basis. Mixing hard & soft foods will benefit their digestive system, however too many soft foods may cause diarrhoea.

Dangerous foods – Potato, rhubarb, avocado, onion, shallots, spicy foods, meat, dairy products & junk foods. Please ask for a list of safe foods to feed your guinea pig.

Worming

They require worming every three months from 12 weeks of age. The wormer comes in the form of a sweet syrup which most guinea pigs love. Administer in food, in a treat, on a spoon or in a syringe.

Teeth

Guinea pigs' teeth are always growing. To prevent dental problems provide lots of hard things to chew. Include hard fruit and vegetables, such as pumpkin, apples & carrots, as well as different flavoured, non-toxic wood chews bought from your local pet shop.

Handling

The correct way to handle a guinea pig is to scoop it up from under the belly. Support their weight with both hands & place them either up against your chest, in your hands or in your lap. The more your pet is handled the quieter & more affectionate it will become. However, guinea pigs have a low tolerance to stress so it is important that your pet has some down time too. They will show you they are not happy by wriggling or biting. Supervision for children under seven or who are not used to guinea pigs is essential.

Introducing a pet into the home

When you first bring your new pet home only handle it for fifteen minutes at a time in the first week (you can do this several times a day). Try sitting with them in your lap or cuddling like a baby, this will allow them to get used to and recognise your scent, helping to establish a bond.

Housemates

Guinea pigs are social creatures so they are much better off in groups of 2 or more. **Remember to get two guinea pigs of the same sex so you don't end up with unplanned and unwanted pregnancies because they will breed all the time and you need to be able to find homes for all the babies!** If you prefer boys, make sure you get 2 young ones (preferably from the same litter) as boys are not very accepting of each once they are adults. Alternatively, you can desex the males and this can make it easier to mix with males or females.

Extra tips

Provide toys, tunnels, toilet rolls, cubbies etc to keep your pet entertained. Visit your local pet shop to see what toys & accessories are available.

Be careful of extreme temperatures (guinea pigs do not cope well with heat) & other animals (the stress of a dog or cat hassling them can kill them).

This information is given in good faith to assist you with the care & maintenance of your pet guinea pig.