

a care guide for your

Guinea Pig (Cavia porcellus)



Congratulations on adopting a new guinea pig! Here is what you need to know and expect from your new furry family member.

Behavior

Guinea pigs, also known as cavies, are very social and curious animals. They thrive on interaction with other guinea pig companions and people. When properly socialized, they seek attention and affection from their human friends. Guinea pigs generally have a lot to talk about — they vocalize with squeals, chirps, squeaks, purrs and whistles.

Socialization

Guinea pigs are social rodents, living in familial (or unrelated) herds. However, it can take time for them to warm up to new guinea pigs, humans or environments. Make sure to give your guinea pig a full 24 hours to adjust prior to any socialization. After this period, you can begin your socialization efforts.

Set up a playpen for you and your guinea pig. The play area should be on a surface that's easy to clean. You can also lay down an old sheet or blanket under the playpen to protect flooring. Make sure there is a place for your guinea pig to hide in the play area, so it has a place to retreat if it is scared. You can use this play area to provide your guinea pig with daily exercise and socialization. Join your guinea pig in the playpen and hand-feed vegetables to gain your guinea pig's trust. As he or she gets more comfortable with you, you will be able to hold your guinea pig more frequently.

Diet

A guinea pig's daily diet should consist of unlimited grass hay, 1 cup of fresh vegetables and one-eighth cup of timothy-based pellets.

Guinea pigs may also receive a small amount of fruit — infrequently — as a treat. Grass hay



The Basics



LIFESPAN
6 to 9 years



DIET
grass hay, vegetables
and pellets



HABITAT
well-ventilated cage
with bedding



EXERCISE
floor space in its
enclosure, playpen



CLIMATE
65°F-75°F



GROOMING
nail trimming, brushing
(long-hair breeds)

(timothy or orchard grass) is crucial to the wellbeing of your guinea pig and must be available at all times. Hay is an important source of fiber, aids in their digestion and provides wear on their ever-growing teeth. Alfalfa hay should not be fed to guinea pigs, as it is calorie-dense and can cause diarrhea and kidney stones.

Guinea pigs don't produce their own vitamin C and there's not enough of it in commercially produced pellets. You must supplement vitamin C in your guinea pig's daily diet to prevent scurvy, a debilitating condition that results in limb paralysis and death.

Excellent sources of vitamin C that your guinea pig will love include bell peppers, zucchini, watercress and parsley.

Pellets

Feed your guinea pig pellets that are based solely on timothy hay. Museli-based mixes (or 'fiesta' mixes) contain dehydrated fruits, vegetables and sugary grains with little to no nutritional value and allow guinea pigs to pick out and eat only the tasty, unhealthy bits.

Daily vegetables

Guinea pigs need 1 cup of fresh veggies daily, with a focus on greens such as romaine, green leaf or red leaf lettuces, parsley, cilantro, kale, escarole, dandelion greens or wheatgrass. Supplement greens with other veggies for variety. Guinea pig favorites include bell peppers, tomato wedges, small baby carrots, snow peas, snap peas and zucchini.

Fruits

Fruits should be fed as an occasional treat. Appropriate fruits include apples, apricots, bananas, blueberries, kiwi, melon, oranges, papaya, pears and strawberries.

Water

Guinea pigs need access to fresh water at all times. Hanging water bottles with a ball-bearing drip tube are ideal and can be cleaned weekly. Guinea pigs love to drink from and play with a water dish, but they are active creatures that dirty them quickly. Thus, it should only be offered as a supplement to a water bottle.

🚫 Foods to avoid

The following foods can be detrimental to your guinea pig's health. Do not feed it: beans, bok choy, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, chocolate, collard greens, dairy products, garlic, iceberg lettuce, lentils, nuts, onion, peanut butter, potatoes, rhubarb, green tomato tops and seeds.

Lifespan

Guinea pigs typically live six to nine years.

Habitat

Guinea pigs rely on floor space to get their exercise. While their enclosure doesn't need to be very tall, it should be long and wide, a minimum of 7 ½ square feet (30 inches by 36 inches). An enclosure for two guinea pigs should be at least 10 square feet (30 inches by 50 inches). Ramps and platforms that are provided at low heights offer variety and can increase the space they can use.

Provide 2-3 inches of paper-made bedding on the bottom of the habitat. Alternatively, you can lay a fleece blanket on top of towels for reusable, soft bedding that is easier to spot clean. Giving your guinea pig an appropriately sized litter box filled with a thin layer of paper-made bedding or pine pellets and hay can make cleaning easier. Spot clean daily, and fully clean the enclosure one to two times a week.

Guinea pigs are prey animals and need a space to get away and feel safe, so give them a hide, such as a cardboard box with a hole cut into one or two sides. They are also sensitive to noise and bright lights, so keep them in a calm part of your home.

Temperature and humidity

Guinea pigs thrive in temperatures ranging from 65-75 degrees F. Never house your guinea pig outdoors or in an area directly impacted by a heater, fan, air-conditioner or direct sunlight.

Grooming

Your guinea pig will need its nails trimmed twice a month. Guinea pig breeds with long hair need to be brushed as frequently as twice per week.

Toys

Because their incisors grow continuously throughout their lives, guinea pigs need hard, dense, healthy things to chew. Wooden chew sticks, compressed green hay cubes and even wooden kitchen utensils are great solutions for guinea pig dental maintenance. Cardboard boxes make great disposable, chewable hides. You can also stuff toilet paper tubes with hay for a fun scavenging toy! Have fun with your guinea pig!

Veterinary care

Guinea pigs should receive an annual checkup with a vet who specializes in exotic animals. Contact a veterinarian immediately if you see any signs of illness.

Supplies needed

- Exercise pen or play area
- Habitat
- Bedding: paper-made or towels and fleece
- Hide
- Litter box
- Litter: paper-made or pine pellet
- Hanging drip water bottle
- Food dish: ceramic
- Guinea pig timothy-hay-based pellets
- Grass hay (timothy or orchard)
- Fresh vegetables for salads
- Treats: commercial or fresh fruits
- Guinea pig chew toys
- Nail trimmer
- Brush

References

- Guinea Lynx (www.guinealynx.info)
- The Humane Society of the United States (www.humanesociety.org)
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (www.rspca.org.uk)
- VCA Animal Hospital (www.vcahospitals.com)



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