



Care of Pet Guinea Pigs

The guinea pig (*Cavia porcellus*) is a docile rodent native to South America. Guinea pigs are lively, lovable pets that require easy care. The most common types of guinea pigs are the English or American Shorthair, the Peruvian (long-haired), and the Abyssinian (swirled hair). The average weight of a guinea pig ranges from 500 to 900 grams (1 to 2 pounds). The average lifespan of a guinea pig is 4 to 7 years.

Housing

The cage you choose should be large enough for your guinea pig to move around comfortably and still accommodate a hide box. The sides of the cage do not need to be especially tall since guinea pigs do not jump very high. Any cage should provide adequate ventilation, therefore aquarium tanks are not recommended for guinea pigs. Avoid wood flooring which allows urine to soak in and is difficult to clean. A commercially available cage with a plastic bottom and a removable wire top is a good choice. Avoid cedar or pine wood chips for bedding because they can contain harmful oils. Safer alternatives include recycled paper or aspen. Any bedding should be changed frequently. Your guinea pig should be exercised outside the cage with supervision on a daily basis for exercise. If not, he may need to be housed in a substantially larger cage. Make sure any wires or other chewable items are out of your pig's reach.

Guinea pig are very social animals and are usually content around other guinea pigs, although this may mean they will be less bonded to their human family. Pigs of the same sex usually get along best given appropriate cage space. Males and females may be housed together if at least one of them has been neutered to prevent pregnancy.

Diet

Your guinea pig's diet should consist of grass hay (timothy, orchard grass, botanical blends) available at all times, small amounts of pellets (about ¼ cup per adult pig) and fresh vegetables. Alfalfa hay should be avoided in adult guinea pigs due to its higher protein and calcium content. High dietary calcium may predispose your guinea pig to the formation of urinary bladder stones. Offer only plain pellets, avoid the kinds with nuts, seeds or dried fruit, which are too high in fat.

Guinea pigs are unable to make Vitamin C, so they need to be given Vitamin C to avoid serious health problems. Pellets made for guinea pigs include Vitamin C, but the vitamin breaks down quickly on the shelf and becomes ineffective. The best option is to feed Vitamin C-rich foods (see table below). A less ideal way to provide it through supplementation: give 60mg of Vitamin C daily. Liquid Vitamin C supplements are available at pharmacies and health food stores. Be sure it ONLY contains Vitamin C. Oversupplementation of other vitamins can cause serious health problems. It is better to give it directly by mouth rather than putting it in the water where it rapidly degrades.

Vitamin C Food Chart

This chart shows the Vitamin C content in 1 cup portions of selected foods:

Turnip greens	260mg
---------------	-------

Mustard greens	252mg
Dandelion greens	200mg
Kale	192mg
Brussel sprouts	173mg
Collard greens	140mg
Parsley	140mg
Guavas	125mg
Broccoli leaf*	120mg
Beet greens	100mg
Cauliflower	100mg
Kohlrabi	100mg
Strawberries	100mg
Honeydew melon	90mg
Broccoli florets*	87mg
Spinach	60mg
Raspberries	60mg
Rutabaga	52mg
Cabbage	50mg
Orange	50mg

*Broccoli stem has 0mg of Vitamin C

Introduce food items one at a time and initially offer only a small amount to ensure there are no ill effects on appetite or eliminations.

Handling

The guinea pig's natural curiosity and friendly disposition makes it fairly easy to handle. Most guinea pigs will approach a hand introduced into their cage and can be easily scooped into the palm of the hand. Cup one hand under the rump while cradling the midsection with the other hand. A two-handed hold is always recommended. Guinea pigs unaccustomed to being handled may jump and run, but rarely turn aggressive.