



Guinea Pig Care

Background

Also Known As: Cavy

Weight: Up to 2-3 Pounds

Lifespan: 5-7 Years

Approximate Cost Per Year: \$800 for initial year, then \$600-\$800 yearly

As A Children's Pet: Guinea pigs are excellent starter pets for older children who have mastered proper handling techniques and can handle the responsibility of caring for a pet.

Fun Fact: There are several different theories about how guinea pigs got their name. Some say that the "guinea" part resulted from traders selling them for one guinea (an old coin once used in Europe), and the "pig" part came from their signature squeal sounding so similar to the sound a pig makes!

Background: Larger than hamsters, but smaller than rabbits, guinea pigs can weigh a couple of pounds and generally live for five to seven years. The three most common breeds of guinea pig are the Smooth-Coated, with short, glossy fur; the Abyssinian, whose hair grows in fluffy tufts all over the body, and the Peruvian, with long, silky hair that flows to the ground.

Guinea pigs make wonderful companions. These docile members of the rodent family rarely bite and are known for squeaking with delight when their favorite humans enter the room.



Guinea Pig Supply Checklist

- ✓ Solid-bottom/plastic bottom cage with wire cover- as large a cage as possible
- ✓ Cage bedding – paper based is preferred to shavings or hay. Do not use cedar or pine chips, as these contain oils that can be dangerous to your pet.
- ✓ Small, heavy food dish – ceramic crocks work well
- ✓ A guinea pig igloo to serve as a ‘hiding spot’
- ✓ Brush and comb
- ✓ Attachable water bottle with drinking tube
- ✓ Unpainted, untreated pieces of wood or other safe chew toys
- ✓ Cardboard boxes, plastic pipes, or any other safe toys to keep your pet entertained.
- ✓ Guinea Pig timothy hay based pellets
- ✓ Timothy hay – this is the bulk of their diet
- ✓ Fresh guinea pig vegetables – see the diet guide.
- ✓ A source of vitamin C

Guinea Pig Diet

- Timothy hay is the bulk of a guinea pig's diet and makes up about 80%-90%. **Hay and fresh, clean water should be available to your pet at ALL times.**
- Timothy hay based guinea pig pellets are only part of your pet's diet. An average guinea pig will eat approximately 1/8 cup daily. Avoid mixes made with nuts, seeds, dried fruits and corn products. These do not provide proper nutrition and many guinea pigs will pick them out and leave the pellets behind!
- Offer small amounts of fresh vegetables and fruits daily. Half a handful of veggies and a slice of fruit should be plenty!
Avoid: iceberg lettuce, potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, and anything that is old or spoiled
- **Guinea pigs cannot manufacture vitamin C.** Make sure your guinea pig gets enough. A quarter of orange a day will suffice. Other options include high-C foods such as strawberries or kale, vitamin C chews designed for guinea pigs, or a vitamin C additive for their water. Make sure to change their water daily if you use an additive!



Cage and environment



Guinea pigs are social animals who prefer to live in small groups. If you keep two or more females together, they will become great friends. If you want two males, it is recommended to choose two babies who are either from the same litter, or have already been living together peacefully. Neutering is always recommended to help control behavioral aggression. Since guinea

pigs multiply rapidly it is not recommended to keep males and females together unless the males are neutered.

Guinea pigs need a lot of space to be healthy and happy. A minimum of four square feet per guinea pig is needed, but bigger is always better! Your cage needs to have a solid bottom. No wire floors, as they can irritate your pet's feet and cause sores. Never use a glass aquarium due to the poor ventilation. Use a paper based bedding to line the cage. Never use cedar or pine shavings as the oils they contain are dangerous to your pets. Shavings in general are not recommended – they can have sharp edges that may cause eye injuries.

Always keep the cage indoors and away from drafts such as vents and windows. Guinea pigs are susceptible to heatstroke and respiratory infections. Once you are comfortable with your pets, you should let them run around in a small room or enclosed area to get some additional exercise every day. You will need to carefully check the room for any openings from which the guinea pigs can escape, get lost and possibly end up hurt. These animals must be supervised when they are loose because they will chew on anything in their paths—including electrical wires.

If you are providing playtime outside, keep your guinea pig off the grass. Wild animals such as rabbits and squirrels that graze in your yard often carry parasites that may be transmitted to your pet. Set up a play area on a patio or deck. Never leave a guinea pig to play outside unsupervised – birds of prey present an oftentimes unexpected danger.

Provide your pet with plenty of toys for entertainment. Guinea pigs love to hide when they play, so offer cardboard or grass tubes in their cage. Some form of a sleeping box, such as the plastic igloos offered at many pet stores should be made available.

Basic Guinea Pig Care

General Care

Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale food from the cage daily. Clean the cage completely weekly. Remove dirty bedding and scrub the bottom of the cage with warm water. Be sure everything's dry before adding fresh bedding.

Did you know that guinea pigs' teeth grow continuously, just like those of other rodents? That's why it is important that you provide yours with something to gnaw on at all times. Branches and twigs from untreated trees will work, as will any small piece of wood that hasn't been treated with chemicals. Chewing timothy hay all is the most important way to keep teeth under control, as well as providing roughage. Make sure your pet has plenty at all times!

It's crucial that you get your pets used to you—and used to being handled. Start by feeding them small treats. When they're comfortable with that, you can carefully pick up one pig at a time, one hand supporting the bottom, the other over the back.

Guinea pigs rarely bite, but they can nip if frightened or mishandled, so make sure to be gentle when playing with your pet. Daily interaction is crucial for a happy and well adjusted guinea pig. They have a wide range of vocalizations and will often whistle, grunt or squeak when excited, and petting will often have your pet purring in contentment.



Guinea pigs are very conscientious about grooming themselves, but brushing them on a regular basis will help keep their coat clean and remove any loose hairs. Long-haired guinea pigs should be brushed daily in order to prevent tangles and knots from forming.

Veterinary Care

A healthy guinea pig should visit your veterinarian twice yearly for check-ups. Don't wait for your six month appointment if you think your pet is sick—seek medical attention immediately. Guinea pigs can hide signs of pain or discomfort successfully from you until they are seriously ill, so even if signs and symptoms are mild, they can become life-threatening very quickly.

Guinea pigs are also susceptible to external parasites such as mites and lice. If you think your pet is infested, head to the vet for treatment.

Common signs that something isn't right include:

Sneezing

Crusty eyes

Dirty ears

Diarrhea

Hair Loss

Weight Loss

Bloody or gritty urine

Loss of appetite

Lethargy

Labored breathing

If your guinea pig is experiencing any of these symptoms or any others please visit your veterinarian immediately.

