

How to Give the Best Care to Your Guinea Pig

Your New Guinea-Pig

If you are about to offer a home to a rescue guinea pig - congratulations! Given a little effort to provide these creatures with the right environment, you should have the pleasure of their company for between 5 & 9 years. Guinea pigs are shy and sensitive creatures so they may try to scurry away initially but with patience and kindness they will learn to trust you.

Guinea pigs make an ideal first pet as they don't bite in the same way as hamsters and they are much more content to be picked up and cuddled. Having said this it is vital to remember that they are family pets and small children must always be supervised whilst handling them - they have very delicate bones which can be easily crushed and to be dropped would result in certain death.

Take pleasure in the nurture and care that you give your companion; he relies on you. He may not be able to tell you how much he appreciates your care but he does.

Guinea Pigs Need Company

Guinea pigs are social creatures and must be kept in same sex groups, pairs or male and female pairs where the male has been castrated. Pairs of males may need to be castrated if aggression develops.

It is a popular misconception that guinea pigs and rabbits can live together. There have been many cases of rabbits killing (either accidentally or through aggression) the much more delicate piggy. If you have this pairing and all seems well, you have been lucky, SEPARATE them now and pair them with their own kind. It is a real joy to see piggies 'chatting' and interacting with each other.

If you already have a guinea pig and are looking for a companion, we strongly recommend that your own guinea pig is professionally sexed before it is paired with another, as many innocent mistakes have been made. A rescue piggy will have been sexed before re-homing.

Guinea pigs are born fully furred with their eyes open and can start breeding from a very early age. We recommend that the males and females are separated at one month and that males (boars) who are 6 months and over be castrated if they are going to be paired with a female (sow).

NB - a period of at least 4 weeks must elapse before mixing a newly castrated male with a female.

Housing

Guinea pigs can be kept either indoors or outdoors. They are especially suited to indoor homes as they don't suffer from an 'unpleasant odour'. Specialised housing is widely available from pet shops. If kept outside they need to be housed in a solid, wind and rain proof hutch. Please buy the biggest hutch/home you can accommodate because if it is cold they can't graze on the grass and if they are not being cuddled they will be spending their time in their home. Guinea pigs suffer from the cold, so hutches should be covered with blankets and thick plastic or bubble wrap in the winter. Proper locks must be fitted and strong rigid wire used - chicken wire offers little or no protection from predators. Whether kept inside or out piggies love to graze on grass in warm weather. Their run needs to be constructed of rigid wire and a roof is essential for keeping out foxes and cats. Their run must also incorporate shelter from the sun and rain.

Use newspaper to line the home/hutch and hay should be used as bedding. Avoid straw as this can be twig like and could cause damage to your piggies eyes. Sawdust and wood shavings are not suitable as there is always a very fine amount of dust which can cause respiratory problems, it is also unhygienic as the urine does not get a chance to evaporate and leaves patches of wet pulp which is a great breeding ground for bacteria.

When cleaning the hutch/home spray with an animal friendly antiseptic before putting newspaper and hay back down.

If your guinea pig lives outside, please make sure that 'out of sight' is not 'out of mind'. Tending to their needs has to be done in **ALL** weathers and is a daily responsibility.

Diseases of the Guinea-Pig.

There are three major problems...

Vitamin C deficiency as previously discussed.

Taxacarus Caviae, Skin infestation by small mite. Many piggies carry this mite and show no symptoms but if the piggy is less than fully fit the symptoms appear.

Ring Worm, fungal infection which can be caused by living in damp conditions, it is therefore imperative that the hutch/home is cleaned out regularly. Treatment for ring worm is obtainable from your vet.

Symptoms are

Intense itching and scratching

Raw skin from self inflicted rubbing

Serious loss of weight due to little rest owing to his itch

Treatment is easily obtained from your vet. All guinea pigs in the group should be treated even if only one is infected.

ARC – Animal Rescue & Care
<http://www.animalrescueandcare.org.uk>