

## Guinea Pig Pairs



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### **Two is better than one**

Guinea pigs are social animals and crave the company of other pigs. Communicating through vocalizations and touch, they will coo and cuddle each other just like people chat about their day and hug each other. A pair of pigs will play, chase, and eat together providing round the clock companionship when they are not with you. A single pig can become very lonely, and this stress could impact their health.

### **Adding a second guinea pig**

Now that you've learned adding a guinea pig will enrich your current pig's life, there are a few things to consider:

- **Adequate cage space:** The minimum cage requirements for a pair of pigs is 10.5 square feet or 30 x 50 ". For more than 2, add 12" of length, for example: three pigs would need a 30 x 62" space. In the beginning of a pig relationship the cage can be divided in two for a slow introduction.
- **Additional cost:** In general a non-breeding pair of guinea pigs will not cost much more in time or money than a single pig, but the benefits of their companionship are priceless. You may end up spending about 25% more on food and bedding, not much for twice the piggy love!
- **Bonding with you vs. the other Pig:** A common concern over adding a pig is that the guinea pigs won't "bond with me". Generally, this is not an issue as guinea pigs are not "dog-like" in their bonding behavior with humans. Guinea pigs all have their own personalities, some are shyer than others and need time learning to trust you and recognize your scents and sounds. Bonding with you is a different process than pig companionship, and having a friend may help them feel more secure and more likely to be social with you.
- **Selecting a new friend:** To avoid pregnancies, unaltered guinea pigs should be housed in same sex groups. When pairing up young pigs, it is possible for their behavior to change through adolescent (3-5 months), and you should keep this in mind when considering housing options. While most groups of guinea pigs can figure out their social hierarchy, it can lead to fighting and result in permanent separation. This can happen with any pairing of male/male or female/female. It's best to quarantine a new pig, or keep pigs from different sources separate for the first two weeks to avoid any disease transmission.

## **Cavy Courtship**

Guinea pigs are individuals; they may take quickly to new pigs or may need time to adjust. Be patient with your pigs and let them figure each other out on their own terms; it could be love at first sight or it may take months.

The following steps should be in a neutral territory, and not in either of the pig's cages.

1. Set up an exercise pen or small room. Clear the room of distractions: other pets, unfamiliar noises, ect.
2. Place the pigs on opposite sides of your set up; it's best to have one person per pig for easy handling.
3. Let the pigs find each other on their own time.
4. Wait and Watch. Sometimes normal pig behaviors can look a little rough. Unless they are fighting, it's best to just watch your pigs get to know each other. Try to keep your interruptions and involvement to a minimum unless you need to separate them. Keep towels handy, as you do not want to use your hands to break up fighting.
5. If the pigs have been getting along for an hour or more, cuddling, popcorning, playing chase, or sharing hay. They can be moved into a freshly cleaned cage to begin their lives together!
6. If your pigs do not bond upon first meeting, you can try again later. Moving their cages gradually closer together can build familiarity while maintaining comfortable boundaries.

## **Standard Courtship Behaviors**

Safe, non-combative behaviors: Do not interfere

- Rump sniffing and nudging
- Wheeeking, squealing
- Rocking back and forth
- Chasing
- Mounting (any which way: rear mount, head mount, side mount, flying leap mount!)
- Nose to nose, the pig with the higher nose wins

Escalating behaviors: Keep close watch, but do not separate yet

- Teeth chattering, (continuous) a sign of anger, aggression, or warning
- Nips, or light bites
- Wide yawn, they are showing their teeth
- Snorting, like a strong puff or hiss

Fighting with intent to harm: Separate immediately!

- Bite attacks, lunges with intent to harm.
- High pitched squealing or screaming

- Combination of raised hackles, loud and angry teeth chattering, rocking in place with the head staying in one position while facing the other guinea pig.
- Both pigs rear up on their haunches, face to face.
- Locked together in full attack. Separate immediately, and carefully. Throw a towel over them or use a small board (dust pans work well) to separate them: DO NOT USE YOUR HANDS! Unintended bites from their very sharp incisors can cause serious damage.

The best indicator of stopping the session is when the pigs are positioning themselves to nip or bite. If blood is drawn, it's definitely time to end the session! Fighting amongst guinea pigs is very rare and typically only seen during mating struggles between males. Since you don't have to worry about breeding competition in your home, hierarchy struggles should be easily managed.

*For additional guidance, please call us at 408-370-2732.*

Helpful Links:

<http://www.hssv.org/behavior.html>

<http://www.guinealynx.info/companionship.html>

<http://www.cavyspirit.com/sociallife.htm>