

# Guinea Pig Care

Congratulations on adopting a new member of your household! To help your new furry friend adapt to your home, we recommend following these guidelines:

**PLEASE KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON YOUR GUINEA PIGS IF YOU CHOSE TO LET THEM EXPLORE LARGER SPACES. THEY ARE SMALL AND CAN GET LOST EASILY!**

1. **GIVE YOUR PIGS A DAY TO TRANSITION INTO THEIR NEW HOME!** They will be confused and need time to adjust to their new surroundings. Try to limit handling the first day, and keep the noise level in their new room to a minimum!
2. **TO PICK UP YOUR PIG:** Slowly place one hand under his chest just behind the front legs, and gently cup your other hand under his hindquarters. Once you have a firm but gentle grip on the animal, lift him and immediately pull him close to your chest or lap so he feels safe. Guinea pigs are both top and bottom heavy, and should be supported from both ends. Gaining trust can be a slow process; your time and patience will be rewarded
3. **BE OBERVANT ABOUT YOUR NEW PIGS' HEALTH.** Small animals are fragile and should not wait for vet care. Weigh your pigs often. Weight loss is often the first sign that something is wrong. For a list of common guinea pig illnesses visit: <http://www.guinealynx.info/emergency.html>



## GUINEA PIG FACTS

- **They aren't pigs, and they aren't from New Guinea!** They are native to South America and are strict herbivores.
- Well cared for guinea pigs can live 5-8 years.
- The average pig weighs 1.6-2.5 pounds.
- They are highly social animals that do best when housed in pairs!

## HOUSING YOUR GUINEA PIGS

In terms of size, guinea pigs are one of the biggest companion rodents, and yet **most guinea pig cages sold in pet stores are way too small.** At a minimum, a single pig needs 7.5 square feet of cage space (30 x 36 inches), and two pigs need a minimum of 10.5 square feet (30 x 50 inches). Consider how much space your new friends will have once you add accessories: food dish, hay bale, hide, litter pan, and toys. Room to move promotes happier, healthier pigs.

Benefits of space include:

- **Easier to clean** – Larger cages are easier to clean! The more space your pigs have the less of an impact waste will make; this also allows your guinea pigs to separate their bathroom area from other activities like eating and play.
- **Exercise** – Overweight pigs can develop heart disease, diabetes, bladder infections, respiratory problems, bumblefoot, impaction and more. Many pigs are crepuscular, meaning active during dawn and dusk, which may not be the most convenient time for you to play. With a large enough cage, they can exercise whenever they choose.

- **Stimulation** – Like people, guinea pigs get bored living in the same space day after day. The more space you have, the more elaborate you can make your pigs' cage. Tunnels to explore and hanging items to nibble are great entertainment!

Many guinea pig parents have found Cubes and Coroplast (C&C) cages are an easy and inexpensive alternative to traditional cage options. Intended for home storage, the cubes are usually 14 inch, coated wire grids that can be connected to build a custom enclosure. Coroplast is a corrugated plastic that will serve as the base of the cage. There are several brands and sources for these materials. A complete overview can be found at: <http://www.guineapigcages.com/cubes.htm>

A clean cage is the first step to a healthy guinea pig! Droppings, uneaten food, and soiled bedding should be removed every day. **Once a week the cage and accessories should be cleaned with warm soapy water and the bedding completely replaced.** This also helps to significantly reduce any unpleasant odors! Provide a 2-3" layer of recycled paper bedding on the bottom of the cage to collect waste and provide insulation. Pine or cedar bedding can be harmful to small animals and should be avoided.

Guinea pigs enjoy a room kept at 65 to 75 degrees (Fahrenheit) and can be sensitive to temperature changes. Avoid drafty spaces and to prevent heatstroke do not place your pigs' house in direct sunlight. Choose a nice, bright location where people frequently gather so your guinea pigs feel like part of the family. Keep in mind, guinea pigs have sensitive hearing and should not be placed next to stereos, televisions or other loud noises.

### DIET

Your guinea pigs' main diet should consist of a **high-quality pellet food, unlimited timothy hay and fresh salads.**

Choose pellets that have been fortified with vitamin C (ascorbic acid), as guineas cannot naturally produce vitamin C and need to get it from their food. Avoid pellet mixes that include seeds or nuts (choking hazard) or dried fruit (unnecessary calories).

Hay is a nutritional necessity, providing fiber for digestion and keeping teeth healthy. Good quality timothy hay is green, feels dry, and smells fresh and sweet. Orchard grass can be provided to add a bit of variety to their diet. Alfalfa hay is very high in calories and calcium, and is typically used for underweight or nursing pigs. More than likely your guinea is already eating an alfalfa based pellet, and would not benefit from additional alfalfa.

Fresh fruit and vegetables add diversity to your pigs' meal plan and provide essential nutrients. It's best to check with your vet as to which foods would be best for your guinea pigs' dietary needs, as some fruits and vegetables may upset their delicate digestive system. For a nutritional chart visit: <http://www.guinealynx.info/charts.html>

**Never give your guinea pigs processed people food**, especially candy, caffeinated and carbonated beverages, or sticky foods (such as taffy and peanut butter) as they cannot digest them properly and could become very ill. Fresh, clean water should be available at all times; a water bottle with a drinking tube that attaches to the side of the cage is the best way to go.

**Guinea pigs have open rooted teeth that continue to grow throughout their life;** wooden blocks, hay, and crunchy treats will keep their teeth in top shape. Make sure you always have a selection of these items for them to chew on. Moved this to a place that made more sense.

## GUINEA PIG COMMUNICATION

### Body Language:

- **Popcorning:** hopping straight up in the air, when happy, excited or playful – very cute to watch and the sign of a pleased piggy!
- **Freezing:** startled or uncertain
- **Sniffing:** checking things out
- **Fidgeting** (while being held): your guinea pig needs to go to the bathroom, or is tired of being held
- **Licking:** a sign of guinea pig affection or how tasty you are!
- **Touching Noses:** a friendly greeting between guinea pigs
- **Scent Marking:** guinea pigs will rub their chins, cheeks, and hind ends on items they wish to mark as theirs
- **Tossing Head Up in the Air:** a pig annoyed with being petted will toss their head back as way of asking you to stop

### Vocalization:

- **Wheeking:** sounds like a long, loud squeal or whistle; your pig is excited probably about you or food
- **Cooing:** reassurance, often seen between pigs
- **Purring:** If a pig is comfortable they will make a deep calming sounding purr, however if the purr is high pitched your pig may be annoyed
- **Whining:** annoyance or dislike for something
- **Teeth Chattering:** this is a sign of an agitated or angry guinea pig and means "back off" or "stay away"
- **Hissing:** like teeth chattering, these can occur together
- **Shrieking:** a piercing, high-pitched squeak is a sign of alarm, fear, or pain. If you hear this type of sound, check on your guinea pigs to make sure everything is okay

### For further advice, please read our handouts on:

- **Guinea Pig Pairs**
- **Guinea Pig Caging**