

----- Feeding

Grass is the guinea pig's natural diet. Their molars are suited for grinding plant matter, & grow continuously throughout the animal's life. Guinea pigs benefit from feeding on fresh grass hay, such as timothy hay, in addition to food pellets which are often based from timothy. Alfalfa is also a popular food choice. They must also supplement their diet by coprophagy, the eating of their own feces. They do not consume all their feces, but produce special soft pellets which recycle B vitamins, fiber, & bacteria required for proper digestion. Like humans, guinea pigs cannot synthesize their own vitamin C & must obtain this vital nutrient from food. Guinea pigs require about 10 mg of vitamin C daily, which can be obtained through fresh, raw fruits & vegetables (such as broccoli, apple, cabbage, carrot, celery, & spinach) or through dietary supplements. They do not respond well to sudden changes in diet; they may stop eating & starve rather than accepting new food types. A constant supply of hay or other food is generally recommended, as guinea pigs feed continuously & may develop habits such as chewing on their own hair if food is not present. Guinea Pigs will enjoy most fruits or veg', but many common garden plants are toxic to them, including anything from a bulb - like a tulip. Kitchen vegetable trimmings (pre-cooked) may be used as food treats, never use garden trimmings.

Seek veterinary attention if your pet changes behavior or becomes inactive; this may indicate the pet has an illness.

As a pet owner, you are responsible for proper pet practices. Be prepared to take an ill pet to a Veterinarian & know which Veterinarian in your area can treat your pet.



check-list ✓

Your pet Guinea Pig requires...

- Aquarium or Cage of appropriate size & wire gauge
- Water bottle(best), dish or bowl
- Substrate or bedding material
- Cave/Den/Hiding spot
- Rock or branch (for climbing & scratching)
- Food dish for Guinea Pig appropriate pellets
- Food dish for fresh fruits & veg'



Guinea Pigs

- weighing between .7kg and 1.2kg (1.5-2.5 pounds), & measuring between 20 & 25 cm (8-10 inches) in length.
- Life Span: 4 - 6 years on average.



----- Temperament

The guinea pig (*Cavia porcellus*), also called the cavy, is a species of rodent. Despite their common name, these animals are not in the pig family & are not from Guinea. They are domesticated descendants of a closely related species (from the Andes) & do not exist naturally in the wild. The guinea pig has enjoyed widespread popularity as a household pet since its introduction by European traders in the 16th century. Their docile nature, responsiveness to handling & feeding, & the relative ease of caring for them, continue to make the guinea pig a popular pet. Organizations devoted to competitive breeding of guinea pigs have been formed worldwide, & many specialized breeds of guinea pig, with varying coat colors & fur, are cultivated by breeders. They are still used in research, primarily as models for human medical conditions such as juvenile diabetes, tuberculosis, scurvy, & pregnancy complications. The epithet "guinea pig" for a "test subject" is outdated, as they have been mostly replaced by other rodents such as mice & rats.

They are social, living well in small groups. They do not burrow or build nests, & frequently seek shelter in the burrows of other animals, as well as in crevices & tunnels. Domestic guinea pigs have developed a different biological rhythm from their wild counterparts, & have longer periods of activity followed by short periods of sleep. Activity is scattered randomly over the 24 hours of the day; aside from avoidance of intense light, no regular circadian patterns are apparent. Like most rodents, they have a good memory. Guinea pigs can accurately remember a learned food path for months. Guinea pigs can jump small obstacles but they are poor climbers & are not particularly agile. They startle extremely easily & will either freeze in place for long periods or run for cover with rapid, darting motions when they sense danger. Larger groups of startled guinea pigs will "stampede", running in haphazard directions as a means of confusing predators. When excited, guinea pigs may repeatedly perform little hops in the air (known as "popcorning"). Handled correctly early in life, they will become amenable to being picked up or carried & seldom bite or scratch. They are also very good swimmers.

----- Housing



Guinea Pigs are safe, hardy & a good pet choice. They are smart & active all day.

Cavies do not require a huge cage, but the larger the cage, the less cleaning, & more exercise & entertainment for the guinea pig. One pig will need about 2-3 sqft with an added 1 sqft for any additional pig (they are very social & live in groups). Keep in mind that the cage should provide enough space for a hiding area, feeding area (pellet dish & water bottle), & an area for voiding. Any cage should have a solid, washable bottom. Wire bottoms cause foot & leg injuries. The sides can be made of wire, & a cover to prevent other animals from entering the cage.

- **Substrate:** Pine kiln-dried shavings are the best bedding material. A 1-2 inch lining over the bottom of the entire cage should be provided. Do not use Cedar shavings, because they contain toxic oils, which can lead to respiratory difficulties & disease. In addition, sawdust bedding should never be used, because the dust causes eye irritation & respiratory problems. Corn cob bedding can be used, but is not ideal, as some guinea pigs will eat the bedding, & the corn cob pellets mold very quickly. Yesterday's Newspaper, cat litter, hay or Cell-Sorb Plus bedding can be used.
- **Decoration:** Hardwood branches, rocks, etc are good things to have in your enclosure to give your pig something to climb on. Hiding boxes are needed for guinea pigs, it prevents stress by giving them time away from prying eyes & a safe secure sleeping den.
- **Water:** The water bottle is best as a constant water source. Guinea Pigs tend to tread in every thing & water bowls often become a labour.

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----- Health



Guinea pigs have toenails that grow continuously. They may require regular clipping to prevent overgrowth. A veterinarian can demonstrate the proper way to clip guinea pig nails. Some cavies have tooth problems, & may have to have their teeth clipped on occasion. Always keep track of the length of the incisors, & be sure to provide plenty of chewable foods to help wear down the teeth. Some guinea pig may require bathing due to skin problems or soiling of long fur. A shallow bowl with lukewarm water is ideal. During the bath, support the guinea pig gently with one hand to prevent the cavy from jumping out of the bowl or slipping & injuring itself. Avoid getting water into the guinea pig's eyes or ears. A face cloth may be used on the head to wash the fur. If possible, always try to wash in the direction of the fur. Monitor what your guinea pig is eating. Any indications of respiratory problems, diarrhea, balding, excessive scratching or weight loss are emergency situations. Sometimes weight loss is the only indication of illness. A yearly veterinary visit is always recommended to ensure the health of all pets. Cavies are notorious for hiding signs of disease until it is too late.

----- Behavior & Interaction

Guinea pigs are very trainable. They pick up some behaviours on their own, such as squealing when they like something, or they purr when they are happy & cuddled. They can even be taught to play with objects, run through tunnels & follow a leader. They can also be trained to use a litter box inside the cage (never use clumping cat litter) by placing it in the guinea pig's selected waste area. Guinea pigs are herd animals & do like to have a friend or two. This is not necessary if the cavy has enough attention from people in the house. If more than one guinea pig is desired, having all the same gender is best to avoid the issues of pregnancy & offspring. Younger guinea pigs are easy to train & take a little less time to acclimatize, while older ones may take a little longer to get used to a new home, but may already be socialized. On a warm day, you can bring your guinea pig outside. Be sure to have an enclosure that will protect the guinea pig from running away. The grass in the area should be free of chemicals, & animal waste. Hiding spots & a cover should be provided. Guinea Pigs are quiet, smart, friendly & have good memories. They are ideal for periodic visits, play or petting sessions.

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