Feeding

It is important to know what can & cannot be fed to hedgehogs. Hedgehogs can be picky, but usually they eat most foods. Many pet shops sell dried food mixes suited for hedgehogs. These usually consist of crushed oats, barley, rodent pellets, peanuts, sunflower seeds, maize, dog biscuit & some of the better hedgehog mixes provide a wider variety with the addition of ingredients such as dried fruit & vegetables. Dry cat & kitten formulas are equally good choices. Whatever commercial food you choose, it should be also be supplemented by a variety of other foods such as vegetables, mealworms or crickets, cooked meats or fruit & vegetables. Foods that can be given as treats: Apple, Blueberries, Corn-on-the-Cob, Strawberries, Squash, Peas, Cauliflower & Broccoli, Grapes, Green beans, Banana, Watermelon, Cucumber, Dry Bread, Corn Chips, Watercress, Kitten Treats. Vegetables & herbs that should not be fed are: Kidney Beans (raw), Onion, Potato, Rhubarb, Tomato leaves, any type of Bulb. Don't leave the treats in the cage for more than a half hour, hedgehogs tend to obesity & their diet needs to be monitored.

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 Hedgehog requires...

- ☐ Aquarium or Cage of appropiate size & wire guage
- ☐ Water bottle(best), dish or bowl
- ☐ Substrate or bedding material (Aspen shavings)
- ☐ Litter Box (optional)
- ☐ Cave/Den/Hiding spot
- ☐ Toys/tunnels/swings (for climbing & exercise)
- ☐ Excersise Wheel (their exercise & your entertainment)
- ☐ Food dish for Hedgehog pellets or dry food
- ☐ Food dish for fresh fruits & veg'

Hedgehogs

- weighing between .7kg up to 3kg, length of 6.5cm up to 25 cm (large is near guinea pig size)
- Life Span: 4 - 7 years on average.

Temperament

The most common pet species of hedgehog are hybrids of the White-bellied Hedgehog or Four-toed Hedgehog & the North African Hedgehog. It is smaller than the European Hedgehog, thus is sometimes called the African Pygmy Hedgehog. Other species kept as pets are the Long-eared Hedgehog & the Indian Long-eared Hedgehog. A hedgehog is any of the spiny mammals ib the subfamily Erinaceinae & order Erinaceomorpha. There are 17 species of hedgehog, found through parts of Europe, Asia, Africa, & New Zealand. There are no hedgehogs native to Australia & North America. The name 'hedgehog' came into use around the year 1450, derived from the Middle English, because of it's propensity for hedge rows & It's pig-like snout (just like you thought). Other names include 'urchin', 'hedgepig' & 'furze-pig'.

Hedgehogs are easily recognized by their spines, which are not poisonous or barbed. Unlike the quills of a porcupine, the spines cannot easily be removed from the hedgehog. A defense that all species of hedgehogs possess is the ability to roll into a tight ball, causing all of the spines to point outwards. Since some of the desert hedgehogs evolved to carry less weight, they are much more likely to try to run away or even attack. Hedgehogs are primarily nocturnal. The hedgehog sleeps for a large portion of the daytime either under cover of grass, rock or in a hole in the ground. Hedgehogs are vocal & communicate through a combination of grunts, snuffles or squeals. Hedgehogs occasionally perform a ritual called anointing. When the animal encounters a new scent, it will lick & bite the source, then form a scented froth in its mouth & paste it on its spines. It's unknown what the specific purpose is, some believe anointing camouflages the hedgehog with the new scent of the area. Hedgehogs are considered a low-maintenance pet. Their curiosity makes for quick adjustment to their owners. Their eating & waste habits make for a relatively clean housing environment for the pet. They exhibit few vulnerabilities to disease & are easy to care for. They are social animals & owning more than one requires little extra effort or space. They should be of the same sex however. Consider the consequences of breeding.

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Housing

Hedgehogs are friendly, smart, comical, entertaining & a good pet choice.

The ideal cage would be multi-level with many toys to keep them occupied & you entertained. Tunnels, ladders, hammocks, or moving toys keep hedgehogs busy & act as sleep spots. The cage size will depend on the type or species of Hedgehog. Paper tubes are fun for them, but cut them length-wise as they tend to get stuck in places they can't get out of. They don't need much room. A 10 gallon fish tank is plenty of room for some dwarfs & many people use aquariums rather than wire cages. More common breeds will require around a 20-25 gallon tank. Make sure you have a lid or that the walls are high enough that escape is impossible. They will climb or scale everything in their environment to find an escape route! It is their nature to be curious & go exploring, don't aid it.

Hedgehogs like to sleep in a place that is dark, warm & dry. A good rule of thumb for almost any pet is; if you are comfortable without a sweater, they will do just fine (reptiles being the major exception). It must have good circulation & be well lit but not in direct sunlight during the daytime. You will need to provide a box or den for them, use soft fabric materials in the sleeping area. You could also include a litter box in the cage as they tend to designate a waste area naturally & do take to it.

- *Water:* The water bottle is best as a constant water source. Hedgehogs tend to tread in water bowls or tip them, they often become a labour. Make sure you replace the water in the same spot each time for them to find it. Remember to change the water & clean the water bottle often!
- *Substrate:* For substrate (bedding) aspen is a good way to go because it doesn't give off any oil.It also allows Hedgehogs to burrow if the mood strikes them. Green carpet, paper towel, paper mulch, or bark may also be substituted. Cedar is not recommended & avoid sawdust as it causes breathing problems. You may want to provide some rags, fur scraps or soft fabric material for the sleeping den.

Health

The hedgehog may be stricken by colds, colds that otherwise hit humans. For that reason you should be aware about your own hygiene. If you have case of cold, watch how you manage the hedgehog. If the hedgehog sneezes & its nose or eyes runs, the cage should be cleaned immediately & the pet kept warm. Young hedgehogs should not be subject to an excess of sudden managing. Hedgehogs will eagerly eat most foods. They adapted for low-fat, protein-rich insects, too much fat & sugar leads to the common problem of obesity. The most common cause for quill loss is mites. If you suspect mites, take your hedgehog to a vet. Hedgehogs who are 8 weeks to 6 months of age will begin to shed their baby quills & replace them with their adult quills. Quilling normally lasts for about 4 weeks. Quill loss also, or soft & green stool, can result from abrupt diet changes.

Behavior & Interaction

When bringing a new hedgehog home, do not expect that it will come into your hands immediately as the hedgehog will still be afraid or shy. In order to have your hedgehog to trust you, you should occasionally give it treats. Avoid handling too much until it gains trust in you & will come on his own. Let it climb around on you to check you out & don't hold it too tight. This usually takes a couple weeks! Patience is an important factor. Petting your hedgehog is much like petting a hair brush. Their spines aren't really that sharp & are like bristles. They do like their soft bellies rubbed though!

Bathing should only be done in exceptional circumstances. Bathing removes natural & essential oils from the hedgehog's coat, which can cause the hedgehog to catch a chill & die. Hedgehogs are naturally very clean & will self groom. A hedgehog will need things to climb, tunnel through & chew. Your hedgehog's natural habitat would have it evading predators, hunting for food, burrowing underground, so they are very active. That energy needs to be released. Ideally with hedgehogs, you want to deck out the cage with things for them to investigate, places to go or items to play with. They will climb everything, even their water bottle, to find a food route, so make sure their home is seccure. Give them plenty of bedding to dig through & nest in. Often they will store their food in a little den & eat privately. Hedgehogs are highly entertaining, & are becoming very popular pets for that reason!

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