



AGAVE VETERINARY CARE
AND EXOTIC ANIMAL HOSPITAL

Your Complete Guinea Pig Care Guide

What should you feed your guinea pig?

Feeding your guinea pig the correct diet is the most important part of giving them the proper care. Guinea pigs are herbivores and should be given guinea pig pellet food, unlimited hay, and daily fresh greens. Oxbow Animal Health has great options for pellets, hay, treats and supplements.

Young guinea pigs can be given unlimited pellets until six months of age. Adult guinea pigs should be fed 1/8 cup of pellets daily unless directed otherwise by their veterinarians. Guinea pigs tend to favor pellets over hay which can lead to obesity, diarrhea, and overgrown teeth. The pellets should be plain and should NOT have colorful cereal pieces, oats, seeds, nuts, or dried fruit mixed in. If there are treats or seeds mixed in it then it's likely your guinea pig will pick out those snacks and leave behind all the healthy pellets they should have!

Guinea pigs have many choices when it comes to hay. Young guinea pigs under six months of age are often given alfalfa due to its higher calorie and calcium content. After six months of age, they should be slowly switched over to timothy, orchard grass, or oat hay. Approximately, 80-90% of your guinea pig's diet should be hay. They need an unlimited supply to eat whenever they please. Guinea pig's teeth are constantly growing and need hay to maintain the proper tooth length and shape.

Guinea pigs should also get a good variety of fresh greens such as romaine lettuce, red leaf lettuce, green leaf lettuce, cilantro, parsley, etc.. They can also have vegetables such as bell peppers or cucumbers. Fruit should be given exclusively as a treat. Fruits have a high sugar and fiber count that can lead to gastrointestinal upset, diarrhea, and even diabetes.

Guinea pigs do not naturally produce their own Vitamin C, therefore need to be supplemented through their diet with veggies and a daily supplement. The easiest way to ensure your guinea pig gets enough Vitamin C is to give a compressed hay tablet Vitamin C “cookie” every day. Water additives are available but not recommended as the dosing can be highly variable and the vitamin is light sensitive.

When introducing new fruits and veggies to your guinea pig, do so in small amounts and slowly to avoid tummy upset and diarrhea. The following are great veggies to offer your guinea pig:

- Sweet Bell Peppers
- Romaine Lettuce
- Red leaf lettuce
- Green leaf lettuce
- Parsley
- Cilantro
- Cucumber
- Celery leaves
- Zucchini

Foods to avoid completely are foods high in starch such as peas, beans, corn, or grains. While they may be tolerated in small amounts, your guinea pig may start to prefer these over healthier foods and should be avoided completely. Despite being marketed towards guinea pigs, you should avoid most treats at pet stores, such as yogurt drops or “cookies”. If you want to offer your guinea pig treats, fresh fruit is best.

Clean and fresh water should be accessible to your guinea pig at all times. A sipper bottle or heavy crock is best to offer water, you can find these both at most pet stores. Guinea pigs are messy and can easily spill their water bowls. If using a heavy crock, make sure to check for cleanliness regularly as your guinea pig might soil it with droppings or urine.

Can you house multiple guinea pigs together?

Guinea pigs are social animals and do best in groups of at least two. When introducing new pigs, watch them carefully to ensure they are not showing signs of aggression or fighting. If you intend on housing a male and female together, the male must be castrated. Female guinea pigs can reproduce as young as 4 months old; it is recommended to get your male castrated as soon as possible to prevent pregnancy.

Guinea pigs should only be housed with other guinea pigs, never with another species such as rabbits or hamsters. It is important to never leave your pig unattended with your cats or dogs. While they may seem to get along with supervision, they could seriously injure your guinea pig if left alone.

How should you house your guinea pig(s)?

Bigger is better when it comes to cage size for your guinea pig! Most store-bought cages are too small for guinea pigs, especially if you have more than one pig. Your enclosure should provide enough room that your pigs can freely move around, with areas for eating, pooping, and activity. Ensure the cage is free from sharp edges and hazards that could allow your guinea pig to hurt themselves. Place the cage in an area that is quiet and out of direct sunlight. Many owners use ex-pens to hold their guinea pigs to give them more room to safely move around.

Bedding should be soft and absorbent; washable fleece or paper bedding are good options. It is best to avoid cedar and pine shavings, as the volatile hydrocarbons they produce can contribute to respiratory inflammation and secondary infections. Care fresh bedding is a good option, as are fleece blankets changed and washed frequently. Guinea pigs are messy animals, so you should be spot-cleaning their cage daily and a full bedding change every week to keep the area as clean as possible.

Guinea pigs spend a lot of time in their cage, therefore need enrichment to prevent boredom such as toys, chews, and hides. As prey animals, having places to hide is important to make them feel secure and safe. It is recommended to have at least one hiding area per guinea pig. Unlike hamsters, guinea pigs do not do well with exercise wheels or balls as they can cause injury and is best to avoid use.

When can you get your guinea pig neutered?

Male guinea pigs paired with a female should be neutered as young as four months of age. Unlike cats and dogs, fasting is not required prior to surgery. It is important to remember that even after castration, male guinea pigs can still impregnate a female for up to four weeks so it's important to keep them separated during that time.

What health concerns should you look out for?

Guinea pigs are prey animals, meaning they tend to hide symptoms when they are sick. When guinea pigs start showing symptoms of illness, the disease may already be advanced.

Symptoms to look out for in your guinea pig are changes in stool production, loose/soft stool or small/dry stool, blood in urine, sneezing or trouble breathing, lethargy, overgrown front teeth, sores on feet, missing hair, or any change in eating or drinking. If you notice any of these symptoms or any changes in your guinea pig's normal habits, call your veterinarian.

Should you groom your guinea pig?

Depending on the breed of your guinea pig, you may need to occasionally give them a bath. As previously mentioned, guinea pigs are very messy and breeds such as the Silky or Peruvians can get fecal matter or urine stuck in their fur. You should use a shampoo formulated for small animals or kittens as they are much more gentle than human or dog shampoos. You should only bathe your guinea pig if necessary and keep them warm as they dry. You should also be trimming your guinea pig's nails about once a month. Small cat nail trimmers work well or even your own fingernail clippers. Guinea pigs do have a blood supply in their nails called a "quick." Avoid trimming too much of the nail as you can cause your guinea pig to bleed. If this does happen, don't panic! You can use a styptic powder (purchased from a pet store) or cornstarch to stop the bleeding.

Works Cited

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