



This is a basic guide to caring for guinea pigs. Always consult a veterinarian if you have any specific concerns. Guinea pigs are smaller pets, but they require plenty of space, time, effort, and human interaction. If you are willing to give your guinea pig a good home with proper food, attention, living space, grooming, and veterinary care, you will be well rewarded with a happy, healthy, and very fun guinea pig.

Guinea Pig Habitat

Make or buy a large enough cage. You should allow at least 7.5 square feet of cage space as a minimum for one guinea pig, or 10.5 for two. However, a bigger cage would be even better. Research “C&C” cages, as these are very inexpensive to make, provide ample room and are expandable. The cage must have a **solid bottom** (not a wire bottom) to protect guinea pigs’ fragile feet. A lid is unnecessary if the walls of the cage are at least 12”-14” high.

Use caution with multi-level cages. A fall from higher than 6” can injure guinea pigs’ feet or legs, and elderly guinea pigs should only be kept in flat cages.

Provide the guinea pig with **several inches of bedding** made of **paper fluff** bedding or **fleece**, and be sure to change it at least once every week or more often if you live in a humid area. Make sure to **never use wood shavings**, such as cedar or pine bedding, as it can cause respiratory problems. We also do not recommend using Aspen shavings.

Find a **good location** for the cage. A place where the family frequents several times a day for extended periods of time is the best location. A living room, bedroom, or hallway is the best choice because there is **frequent traffic**. Ensure that no one will trip, push, or knock the cage over.

Guinea pigs are very sensitive to temperature, so must be kept in a **temperature controlled environment**.

Do not place the cage in a garage with cars because the fumes can harm or even kill guinea pigs and the temperature is usually not regulated in a garage.

Cage Mates

Adopt two or more guinea pigs so they are not lonely. Guinea pigs need company because they are herd animals. Spend some time with your pets every day. Keeping a sociable animal alone can lead it to become depressed.

You can put together two females, two neutered males or two males who have never been separated.

Water

Give your guinea pigs plenty of water. One of the most important elements of caring for any pet is providing it with fresh, clean water at all times.

Keep your guinea pigs’ water bottle clean and change the water daily. The best water dispenser is a **guinea pig/rabbit bottle with the little ball in the spout**. It’s advised to use hanging elevated food and water dispensers.

Be sure to clean the water bottle nozzle frequently with a Q-tip to keep it free of obstructions and food residue that can breed harmful bacteria and clog the water flow. The water bottle itself can be cleaned by placing uncooked rice and a little water in the bottle, and then shaking it vigorously. The rice will dislodge any greenish (algae) build-up. If the cage is in the sun for part of the day, this can contribute to algae build-ups. In this case, cover the bottles with an opaque cloth to avoid algae.



Avoid adding anything to the water such as vitamin tablets. They do not provide effective nutrients and can make your guinea pigs refuse to drink.

Diet

Use pellets sparingly in your guinea pigs' diet. Follow the label on the bag and feed no more than what is recommended. Less is also ok. The more hay the better.

Oxbow's Cavy Cuisine is best for pigs **over 6 months**, and their **Cavy Performance** is best for pigs **under 6 months**. **Oxbow Young Guinea Pig** alfalfa based pellets are only for pigs **under 6 months**.

Do not feed a guinea pig other small animal pellets such as for rabbits – the vitamin content is not the same, and can be harmful to your guinea pig.

Be sure to feed guinea pig pellets that are **seed-free** to prevent choking. Be sure to select pellets that are **plain**. They should not contain any colored pieces, dried fruit, corn, etc. It should contain nothing but pellets.

Do not feed your guinea pigs other foods. Pellets, hay, untreated fresh organic grass (wheat or standard lawn grass) and fresh veggies are all the foods that guinea pigs need. Feeding them other types of food can be very harmful to the pigs' health.

Hay

Make grass hay available to your guinea pigs constantly. Guinea pigs are grazing animals, so they need something to graze on (such as timothy or orchard grass) at all times or their digestive tracts can shut down. But, they can also poke their eyes out on it, so make sure to pat down the hay so no pointed or sharp pieces stick out!

Alfalfa hay should only be fed to **babies 6 months old and younger**, and **pregnant or nursing sows**, because they have a lot of extra nutrients that healthy adult guinea pigs do not require.

Timothy, orchard grass, or bluegrass hay should be fed for guinea pigs **older than 6 months**. It should be 'free fed' which means they have some in the cage all the time.

Lack of hay can lead to malocclusion, a misalignment of the teeth that may require surgical correction, and GI Stasis, shutting down of the digestive tract often leading to death.

Vegetables

Feed your guinea pigs **fresh vegetables daily**. Green leafy vegetables should make up about 15% of your guinea pigs' diet. Be careful about leafy vegetables as too many of these can cause stomach upsets and diarrhea. It is useful to get a list of safe fruits and vegetables from a trustworthy guinea pig website or your local vet.

Guinea Pig servings should include plenty of vegetables high in vitamin C (as guinea pigs are unable to produce their own vitamin C, and too little of the vitamin can lead to illnesses).

Veggies that are good for guinea pigs include romaine lettuce, green/red leaf lettuce, various herbs, a small amount of carrots, off-the-vine tomatoes, cucumber, corn, kale, , small amounts of spinach and pod-peas. Be sure to limit servings of some vegetables to avoid serious harm to the guinea pigs' digestive tracts. Some fruits are ok for guinea pig treats such as strawberries and apple pieces but these can only be given occasionally as some of the acids can be harmful to guinea pigs.

If a guinea pig seems unwilling to eat any vegetables, try cutting them up into slices or small chunks. Also be aware that guinea pigs may have individual tastes or preferences and may like or dislike different vegetables.



Vegetables to avoid feeding your guinea pigs include iceberg lettuce, rocket salads, red leaves, cauliflower, beet greens, potatoes, and radishes.

Each guinea pig will require about one cup of vegetables per day. Dividing the veggie meal into two servings is a good idea since guinea pigs are grazing animals which prefer to eat throughout the day instead of eating one big meal.

Entertainment

Give your guinea pigs **some floor time each day**. Let them loose in an enclosed space but be sure that no one steps on them. You can do so by setting up a pen in a room (an area with easily-cleaned floors) or outside if it isn't too hot or cold.

Make sure to have plenty of space in their exercise area so that they can run and play. This **exercise time is crucial** to your guinea pigs' happiness.

Make sure to put a few **toys and tunnels** in the play area.

Use extra care if allowing your guinea pigs to exercise outside. Guinea pigs should be supervised at all times when outdoors: they can slip through small openings and leave your yard, and predators such as foxes and hawks can get into even the most secure outdoor areas.

Supply your guinea pigs with plenty of toys and cage accessories. You can make your own toys out of boxes, paper bags, oatmeal containers, folders, and more. Be creative and use materials you find around the house.

Interact and bond with your guinea pigs several times daily. Guinea pigs are an inherently social species and live in herds or groups in the wild. Frequent handling each day is essential to your guinea pigs' happiness. Talk to your guinea pigs, cuddle them, carry them, and pet them as often as you can. Set aside plenty of time to play with your guinea pig.

In some countries, it is illegal to buy single guinea pigs: you have to buy them in pairs. Guinea pigs do very well having the companionship of another guinea pig.

Guinea pigs can express depression-like symptoms (loss of appetite, inactivity, etc.) if they aren't bonded with appropriately.

Guinea Pigs are very smart. You can teach them to stand on their hind legs, spin, jump, and much more!

Cleaning

Clean the guinea pigs' cage thoroughly at least once a week. The frequency of thorough cleaning depends on the type of bedding used and the number of guinea pigs you have.

Remove all debris, liners, bedding, food and toys and dispose of them or clean with a guinea pig friendly antibacterial spray, but be sure to remove any excess cleaners before returning parts to the cage. Don't use cleaning products designed for humans.

You may want to wipe down the inside of the cage/hutch with guinea pig friendly antibacterial spray, but you can also just use water and sunshine, which can kill bacteria naturally. You may want to place the cage outside to air out for a short while.

Now replace the bedding. It is often useful to put a layer of newspaper under your other bedding to prevent urine stains. Newspaper should not be used for bedding on its own and should not be easily accessed by guinea pigs as they may ingest the ink, which could be harmful.

Appropriate bedding for guinea pigs is CareFresh, moisture wicking fleece over towels or a combination of both.

Do not use wood chips or sawdust as bedding. Also do not use cedar or pine bedding or pine shavings, as these have harmful phenols.

Towels underneath fleece cut to fit your cage can also be used as cage liners – just shake off the debris, wash and reuse. Be careful that there are no loose threads in the material, as guinea pigs' feet can easily become caught in them.

Make sure you provide an area for your guinea pig to sleep in – you can buy igloos from most pet stores or alternatively, you can provide loose hay for them to burrow in.

Health

Trim your guinea pigs' toenails every few weeks. If they have dark toenails, shine a flashlight behind the nail so you can see where the "quicks" are. If you clip too close to the blood vessel, the toenail may start to bleed. Use styptic powder or flour to stop bleeding.

If you are unsure about clipping the nails, then it is a good idea to go to a veterinarian to have them clipped for the first time. A vet or vet tech can clip them for you and show you what to do in person.

Avoid bathing your guinea pigs frequently. You may wish to give your guinea pigs a bath, but bathing them upsets their natural body processes, so baths should be limited to a few times a year.

Watch for signs of illness. Know what to look for in an ill pig. Take your guinea pigs to a savvy exotics vet for proper treatment. Always be on the lookout for even the slightest change in habits or appetite as guinea pigs are extremely good at hiding any illness.

Make sure all guinea pigs are treated at the same time as some illnesses will spread from one guinea pig to its cage mates.

Check male guinea pigs' genital areas. The genital areas on male guinea pigs can become impacted. You can simply massage the area a little and if soft poop-like stuff is present, gently clean out the pocket with a cotton swab. You also need to make sure that no poop clogs the hind quarters as well.

Keep your guinea pigs away from rabbits. Rabbits naturally carry a bacteria that can make guinea pigs very ill, and rabbits are bigger, stronger animals. Even a playful kick from a rabbit could kill a guinea pig.

Useful Websites

The following websites are some of for taking care of your guinea pig!

Guinea Pig Zone guineapigzone.com

Guinea Pig Manual guineapigmanual.com

Oxbow Animal Health oxbowanimalhealth.com

Pet MD petmd.com

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us!

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