

GUINEA PIGS

Guinea pigs (Cavies) originate from Peru where they roam about the countryside in family groups usually comprised of one male and a group of females and their young.

They can be kept indoors or in an outdoor hutch. Although naturally nervous they soon become used to gentle handling and rarely bite.

It is advisable to keep guinea pigs in pairs or small groups of the same sex.

The average life of a guinea pig is 4-8 years.

Choosing and buying your guinea pig

There are three basic types of guinea pig Smooth-haired, Abyssinian and Peruvian. The hair of the Abyssinian guinea pigs falls in rosette patterns, while the Peruvian is long-haired.

Whichever type you choose, your guinea pig should be 4-5 weeks old when you buy it.

A healthy guinea pig should be:

- Bright and alert Have no signs of discharge from eye, ears, mouth and nose

- Have a clean anal area

- Have a glossy coat with no bald patches and not have sores on the skin

- Should move around the cage easily

- Should feel well covered and not bony

Housing

Guinea pigs should be provided with as large a cage as possible. A hutch for outdoors should be sturdy and water proof. It should be raised off the floor by about 25 cm and placed in a sheltered position or inside a shed. Guinea pigs must be protected from inclement weather as well as strong sunlight. (A hutch cover, blanket or piece of old carpet will often offer added protection on cold nights.)

If you decide to keep your guinea pigs indoors then a cage similar but much larger than those used for hamsters would be suitable. These should be placed in a cool room out of direct sunlight and drafts.

All guinea pigs benefit from access to a covered pen or run in the garden.

Avoid using pesticides nearby and ensure that the enclosure is secure enough to keep the guinea pig in as well as other animals out. A hutch or cage should have a layer of shavings on the floor with hay for bedding.

Hygiene is extremely important especially in the summer. If not kept clean the hutch or cage will attract flies. As a general rule, cages should be cleaned thoroughly at least once a week. A good quality, pet-friendly disinfectant should be used and all the bedding and shavings replaced with a fresh supply.

Guinea pigs often use the same area as their toilet every day. This can make cleaning easier and allows them to be trained to use a litter tray. Outdoor runs should be moved regularly. Toys should be provided to break boredom. Try and buy a selection of toys and rotate them to avoid boredom.

Gnaw Blocks should be provided to help wear down teeth.

Feeding and Water

Guinea pigs are herbivores. A range of specially prepared diets are available from Pets Pad. Fresh foods can be given in small quantities. Cabbage, sprouts, dandelions, chicory, carrots, apple and some soft fruits are suitable.

A supply of good quality hay is essential for the health of the digestive system and for wearing teeth down. Guinea pigs require vitamin C daily.

This can be provided by feeding a commercially prepared diet, by providing a few small pieces of fresh fruit and vegetables daily or in the drinking water by using a liquid vitamin supplement.

Remember you can give your pet the occasional treat. Fresh water should be available at all times. This is best provided in a water bottle attached to the side of the cage, it should be emptied, rinsed and refilled daily.

Handling

It is advisable to let your new pet settle in for a few days before you start handling. Using smooth and gentle movements, gripping firmly but not tightly place one hand across the shoulders with the thumb over and around the neck. The other hand should support the hind quarters. This prevents injury to the back from kicking.

General care

Check regularly that the hay has not gone mouldy, as this can cause respiratory problems. Be careful to check regularly for overgrown teeth and nails.

Should your guinea pig show signs of ill health contact your veterinarian as soon as possible.

Grooming not only helps to keep your guinea pig healthy, but helps you to bond with your pet. How you groom your pet will depend on whether your guinea pig is short or long-haired. A long-haired guinea pig will need grooming with suitable coat care equipment. Our staff will give you advice.

Short-haired guinea pigs will also benefit from regular brushing.

Shopping List - all available from Pets Pad

Hutch

Cage

Run

Food

Treats

Brush and comb

Water bottle and brush

Hay

Woodshavings

Food bowls

Salt lick

Vitamin C

Book on guinea pig care

