

OVERVIEW

The guinea pig or cavy is a South American rodent. They were originally domesticated in their native Andean region for their meat and are still used as a food source today especially in Peru. But pet lovers adore these 1.5-2.5 pound animals that may live 5-7 years. Guinea pigs are available in a wide range of colors and many breeds with different coats including Short-hair, American Crested, Silkie (Sheltie), Abyssinian, Peruvian and Texel.

HOUSING

Guinea pigs should be housed in wire-sided cages designed for their care and the largest cage possible should be used. Many pet trade cages are far too small. Wire bottoms can cause foot problems and poorly ventilated enclosures like aquariums should never be used. Elevated humidity can cause problems such as ringworm, and temperatures above 80°F can cause heatstroke. Guinea pigs are naturally timid animals and should have retreats such as a length of 6" diameter PVC or the log tunnels available in the pet trade or even a simple cardboard box or tube. Plastic hides are best avoided as many cavy will chew on them and may ingest. Appropriate bedding includes CareFresh or other processed paper beddings, hay, pine or aspen shavings, and pine or wood pellets. **DO NOT USE** cedar shavings, corn cob litter or straw. Guinea pigs produce a lot of urine and waste. Keep cage clean!

Guinea pigs are social animals that do best in pairs or small groups. Females will often cohabitate easily, but males will do best if they are siblings raised together from birth. Lone guinea pigs often do not fare well unless given constant attention.

FOOD & WATER

Commercial pelleted guinea pig diets are the primary food for the grass-eating guinea pig. Unlike other animals, guinea pigs cannot produce their own Vitamin C, so their species-specific diets are fortified with this essential nutrient. Pellets for rabbits or other grass-eating animals are inappropriate. Even with a quality guinea pig-specific diet, care should be taken to ensure a cavy gets enough Vitamin C. You can include some produce that is high in C to their daily food, such as a quarter of an orange or some kale, broccoli, dandelion greens or strawberries. Guinea pigs feed continuously and it is best to keep clean, dry food available at all times by using a gravity feeder. Hay and alfalfa cubes are also recommended, and the latter is helpful in keeping their teeth from overgrowing.

Guinea pigs drink often and fresh water must be available at all times via a large water bottle with ball tip. Thoroughly clean the water bottle each week. When transporting guinea pigs a carrot or a slice of apple can be used as a water source.

GROOMING

Untreated (chemical-free) wood chews or branches can be used to accommodate a guinea pig's need for gnawing. Long-haired breeds of guinea pig require daily brushing. If the hair becomes matted it may need gentle trimming. Some keepers do bathe their cavy every few months, but this should be an infrequent practice to prevent dry skin. Bathing should also take place only when temperatures are warm enough to prevent a chill. Boars (males) may require special cleaning around the grease gland located where a tail would be.

HEALTH

Guinea pigs have few health problems when fed a proper diet and housed properly at cool temperature with excellent airflow and low humidity. Scurvy is possible if there is inadequate dietary Vitamin C. Potential parasites include ear mites, fur mites, lice and mange mites. Fur mites & lice are effectively treated with correct doses of canine flea preventers like Revolution and Advantage. For mange mites Ivermectin is the drug of choice. **Any parasite infestation (or any other medical treatment) should be treated by an experienced exotic animal veterinarian who calculates proper dosage.**

MORE INFO

See <http://www.guinealynx.info/> for a good guinea pig resource.