

# Guinea Pig Care Sheet

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Whether you spent some time planning the purchase of your guinea pig or you acquired it on the spur of the moment, you've probably got lots of questions about how to take care of your furry new friend!

Your guinea pigs formal scientific name is the *Cavia porcellus*, so many people call them cavies.

## Where Do They Come From?

Yes, we know you got your pet at the local pet store, preferably from an adoption house or from a friend—but just what are guinea pigs, and where do they come from?

If you're among the many people who think they come from one of the Guineas, in Africa or in the southwest Pacific, you're wrong!

Guinea pigs actually originated in the Andes section of South America, and European traders introduced them to various locations as long ago as the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## Keeping Guinea Pigs Together



Now you've brought your little fellow (or little gal) to your home; what kind of home must you provide? For starters, it's not a good idea to keep guinea pigs of the opposite sex together.

The females might become pregnant as young as four weeks, and males as young as three weeks can sire little cavies. But guinea pig breeding is a risky proposition, and it's best to leave it up to the experts.

While they are social animals who will enjoy a pal or two to keep them company, make certain you house your guinea pigs with same-sex roommates.

If this is not an option, your local small animal vet can have one of them "fixed up" – Getting the male sterilised is a better option, due to less complications.

## Creating the Complete Cavy Cage

There are many ways to make your cavy's home into a comfortable, safe place for him, but no matter what way you go about it remember that he needs at least about eight square feet (about .75 square meters) of floor space. If you have two guinea pigs, you don't have to double the space, but add about four extra square feet per additional cavy. The more floor space the happier your pig will be.

It's important to avoid wire flooring or shelving because your pet can catch and injure his feet in the wiring. We do, instead, have great guinea pig cage ideas from other guinea pig owners:

- Buy some C&C, which stands for cubes and Coroplast. Coroplast is a plastic coating on square-foot grids, like corrugated plastic; the grids can be assembled into cages. Choose a thickness between 4mm and 6mm for ease in assembly; more thickness makes it difficult to work with.

- Try using a toddler's wading pool for your guinea pig. The only disadvantage to this is the lack of a lid or roofing to keep your pet contained and safe from exploration by small children or other pets like dogs or cats in your household.
- You can make a cage from wood if you choose kiln-dried pine (available at your local do-it-yourself store), but other woods such as cedar might even be harmful for your pet. You cannot paint the interior of a wood cage, and you also must protect the floor from absorbing your cavy's droppings or urine.
- Don't choose a container with high sides so he cannot see the outside world. Your cavy is curious and social, and he wants to know what's going on!
- Cavies are intelligent and playful, and your pet will love it if you provide an extra story to his habitat. Just be certain to cover all surfaces, including ramps, so that his feet are protected.
- Remember that your cavy can squeeze a body part through anything bigger than about 1.5 cm.

## Your Pet's Interior Décor



Having **access to hay 24/7** is vital for your pet! A shelf or shallow box for hay is a vital component of your pet's hutch. What your guinea pig really needs, all day and every day, is access to Timothy hay (in the US) or Oaten hay in Australia.

Timothy hay is actually a grass, and it's full of the fiber that your pet needs. The full end will also allow your pet to give his teeth a workout.

Next, consider how you will cover the floor of your guinea pig's cage. Some people like to use fleece as guinea pig bedding, because it's soft and warm for your guinea pig. You'll have to wash it regularly and keep extra pieces on hand. Use towelling underneath the fleece to soak up the urine.

Many people prefer to buy shavings from the local pet store. Aspen or pine packaged shavings are a good choice, and layer the shavings to a depth of 3.5 to 4 cm.

Don't forget to provide some type of Pigloo your pigs can hide in. There are fleece, plastic and wooden versions available in most pet stores.

## Essential Care Inventory

Having the right supplies, equipment and tools handy is a must for complete and ongoing guinea pig care. Here is what you need for general care and medical emergencies...

- Nail Cutters & Scissors – Your guinea pig's nails will need to be trimmed monthly, Your vet can show you how to perform this correctly.
- Paraffin – This is great for Dry Skin areas, however mites may be the cause & different treatment required.
- A Hidey House (Pigloo) – Every guinea pig needs a hidey house
- Water Bottle & Ceramic Food Bowl
- 3-4 Old Towels + Dust Pan & Broom
- Electric shaver – Long haired guinea pigs may need to be groomed
- Grooming Brush
- Baby Shampoo / Rabbit & Guinea Pig Shampoo – Every 3 months is a good time for a bath
- Critical Care Formula & Feeding syringe – This is fine grain fiber & nutrient mixture, essential for sick piggies whilst waiting your vet appointment.

You should also research the nearest location of a reputable small animal vet. Not all vet's specialise in guinea pigs, so having this information handy before any problems arise is essential. For online medical information, the go to place is... <http://guinealynx.info>

## What's For Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner?

No guinea pig care sheet would be complete without some discussion of how to feed your little fellow! Just remember that he is like a little kid in the way he approaches any new food—with curiosity and a little bit of suspicion. And just like a child, there will be some foods he likes and others that he rejects.

### 24/7 Food Supply

Fresh Timothy or Oaten Hay - Fresh Daily  
High Quality Guinea Pig Pellets - Fresh Batch Daily  
Fresh Water (Sipper Bottle) - Fresh Water Daily

### Twice Daily

Vegetables & Leafy Greens

- Fresh Sweet Capsicum (Ball Peppers) – Red, Green & Yellow are fine.
- Celery & Leaves (Chopped into 1cm pieces to avoid choking on stringy sections)
- Cucumber (Low in Calcium)
- Lettuce & Leafy Greens (Avoid Iceberg Lettuce)
- Lettuces that are good – Romaine (Cos), Red Leaf & Green Leaf
- Safe Grasses & Weeds
- Tomato (High in Vitamin C)
- Remember to mix it up

### Occasional Treats & Do Not Eat



For a comprehensive occasional treats and **Do Not Eat** foods list, visit the food section on our website here...

<http://guineapigcare.com.au>

The pellet bowl should be heavy on the bottom so that he can't knock it over.

Also don't forget the water—use a feeding tube apparatus, because water bowls are easily spilled and **have two water bottles available 24/7**

### When Your Piggy Isn't Well

By now you've probably realized that your little guinea pig is a smart, social creature who enjoys your company and likes to look out on the world. He whistles or squeaks to show his happiness.

You'll be able to tell if he's feeling a little off. He'll stay back away from you, possibly inside his little cubbyhole.

If you notice that his eyes or nose are running, or if the fluid around his eyes dries to a crust, it's time to call the vet. When you see him losing excessive amounts of fur, or whenever you notice that one of his feet has been injured, he needs professional care.

Droppings that are small and shaped like tear drops or are soft/runny also signify a problem. It is normal, however, to see the green colour of the pellets in his droppings.

**\* IMPORTANT CARE TIP - Weigh Your Guinea Pigs Weekly! \***

Keep a folder or excel spreadsheet and write each of your piggies weight down (to the gram) weekly.

Kitchen scales with a square guinea pig sized container glued to the surface works well for scales.

If you notice a guinea pig lose more than 5-10% of his bodyweight - something is wrong. Also if you notice a weight drop, start weighing daily and keep a close eye on your pig.

Don't wait until your cavy is sick to search out a vet. Locate one in your community as soon as you decide to buy a guinea pig. That way, when trouble strikes, you won't waste time.

## Keeping Your Pet Happy



In the meantime, sit down on the floor with your pet and play with him on a regular basis. You can use a cardboard roll from toilet tissue and hide a piece of fruit inside it.

While guinea pigs really don't have toys, your pet will love chewing on the cardboard roll when he's done with the fruit. It's a good idea to cut open the cardboard before you leave it with him.

Guinea pigs are loving creatures, very smart and very social, so another guinea pig friend is essential.

His happiness depends not only on the proper food and housing but also on the affectionate treatment you give him. With luck and consistent care, you will have your pet for seven years or so!

Wishing you a happy pet guinea pig.

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