

## Basic Information on Guinea Pigs

At B&B Pet Stop, we think guinea pigs make excellent pets for several reasons. They are loveable and cute, easy to care for, and easy to feed. With proper care - a guinea pig could live up to 8 years.

Guinea Pigs don't generally bite (although to be safe, we always say "anything with a mouth CAN bite"). As with any pet, young children should always be supervised. Guinea pigs like the firm support of two hands, so make sure they are held properly and securely. If they don't feel secure, they will squirm and buck which can cause a nasty scratch for whomever is doing the holding. Never leave a guinea pig unattended on a table top - they have no depth perception and will walk right off!

### The three types generally found in pet stores:

- **English short-haired:** very easy to maintain
- **Peruvian long-haired:** they look like a dust-mop! Daily brushing is necessary.
- **Abyssinian rough-haired:** lots of cowlicks called "rosettes". *They look like they are having a "bad hair day" everyday!*

### Selecting your Pet

Males are slightly larger and more active than females. Females are smaller and more docile. Look for an animal that is alert with bright eyes. Make sure there is no discharge from the eyes or nose. Make sure there are no signs of diarrhea. Hold the animal close to your ear and listen to it breathe - make sure his lungs sound clear.

Two females usually get along, but two males may cause trouble. Usually males will fight for dominance. There is no place in a cage for the "loser" to go. If not removed, he may die from starvation and exhaustion as the winner will drive him from food, water, and sleeping areas. Females may also engage in a dominance battle but theirs will not be as aggressive as males. Keep an eye on your pets until you are sure they are getting along, eating, drinking, and sleeping well.

### Breeding

If you plan to breed, you will need a larger cage. Get one male with two females. The female will be pregnant for 60 to 67 days and have about 3 to 6 young. They are born with fur and their eyes open. Normally, they are eating on their own after 3 or 4 weeks.

**IMPORTANT!:** *Females **must** breed before 9 months of age or their hip bones will fuse. After these bones fuse, the female will not be able to give birth and will have to have a c-section if she becomes pregnant.*

### Proper Feeding and Nutrition

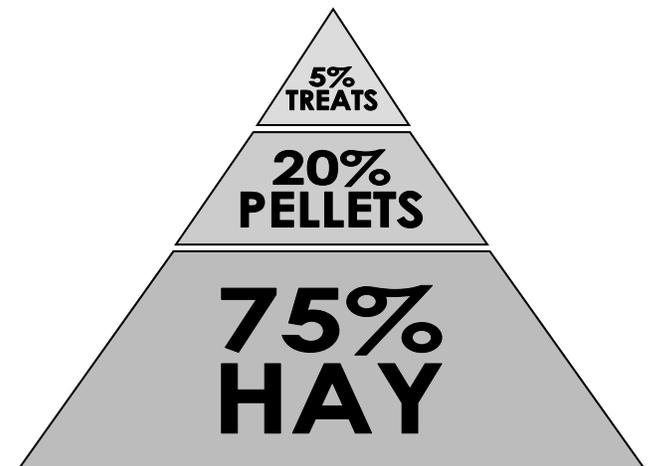
Guinea Pigs are herbivores. They eat only plant material and need to have food moving constantly through their digestive systems. A diet of mostly grass hay provides the fiber necessary to accomplish this. Add fortified pellets daily to round out your pig's healthy diet.

Grass hay is absolutely **essential** to the guinea pig's diet. It helps prevent obesity, dental disease, diarrhea, and boredom. Your guinea pig should eat a pile of hay twice the size of his body everyday. Without enough hay, your pet will have a hard time digesting its food.

Rabbit food is *not* guinea pig food - even though it may look similar. Since guinea pigs cannot manufacture or store vitamin C, they must be fed a diet with added vitamin C. Guinea pig food contains essential vitamins and the vitamin C that rabbit food does not have. Just to be safe, since vitamin C in food may break down during storage, we recommend adding a vitamin supplement to the water daily as well as a offering your pig a piece of citrus fruit. Guinea pigs need at least 10 mg of Vitamin C daily to maintain good health. **Tip** - *Chlorine in tap water can inactivate Vitamin C. Let your guinea pig's water sit for 24 hours before adding vitamins.*

Your guinea pig will also enjoy treats like honey seed sticks, yogurt drops, or fresh fruits and vegetables. Most guinea pigs enjoy pieces of apple, squash, broccoli, carrot, sweet potato, grapes, melons, sweet corn, sweet peppers, watermelon, cantaloupe, strawberries, pears, and pineapple. Never feed too much of one fruit. Avoid lettuce - too much lettuce could result in loose stool.

Make a salt lick available to your pet. Just wire it to the side of the cage - within reach. He knows when he needs it, and it encourages him drink water.



## Habitat

Guinea pigs like a cage with lots of room. They need room to run around and have a food dish, water bottle, chew toy, and nest box or hiding place. They need a minimum of 2' x 2' per animal. The floor of the cage must have flat bottom since guinea pigs have skinny little feet and legs, which can fall through wire and potentially break.

Use pine shavings, aspen shavings, corn cob, or a recycled paper product like Eco-Bedding for their bedding. **NEVER use cedar** - most small animals are irritated by the aromatic oils in the cedar which can cause respiratory infections.

Guinea pigs can become bored. So, liven-up their cage area with hide-outs, ferret tubes, and ramps to shelves for climbing. Some pets even like bird toys with mirrors and bells.

As a general rule guinea pigs like their environment to stay consistently at a temperature of 68° - 72°F. They do not tolerate rapid changes in temperature. No matter what the temperature is, **guinea pigs do not tolerate drafts**. Make sure your pet's cage is away from vents, drafty windows, ceiling fans, or doors. If your pets are housed outside, make sure their sleeping box is well sealed and stuffed with timothy hay for insulation.

On the other end of the temperature spectrum - make sure guinea pigs are not exposed to extreme heat. They are less tolerant of heat than cold. If housed outside, make sure they are in a shady area. Although pigs like to bask - too much sun can cause heat stroke.

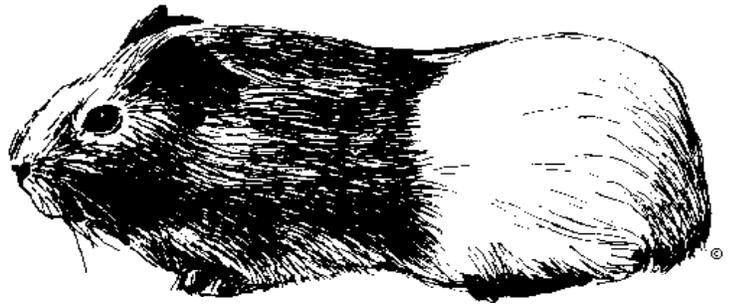
## Hygiene

Clean the cage once a week by removing all litter, wiping the cage clean with a product like Clean Cage by SuperPet, then replacing the litter once the cage is dry.

Guinea pigs, especially the long-haired variety, need to be combed or brushed on a weekly basis to prevent mats. Dry or waterless shampoos are a great way to keep your pet smelling good. The no-rinse shampoo is especially good because the animal does not have to be submerged in water. Just rub the shampoo all over the pet which causes a lather to form, towel it off, then brush the coat thoroughly. Shampooing or grooming your guinea pig provides you with a chance to bond to your pet as well as care for the animal's needs. As a rule - wet baths should be limited. If you must bathe your pet take care that it does not become chilled. It is **NOT** a good idea to blow-dry a guinea pig. Their skin is sensitive and burns easily. In order to prevent chills allow them to air dry in an area with no drafts. Never use a medicated/chemical shampoo on a mother with nursing babies.

If your guinea pig has fleas or mites, use something suitable for small animals such as 8-in-1 Ultra-Care Flea & Tick Spray.

Toenails need to be trimmed on a regular basis, too. See our nail trimming handout or bring your pet back into the store. We'll show you how to trim them or do it for you. (*Rewards Club Members get nail trimming for half-price!*)



Guinea pig teeth constantly grow. If they don't wear them down, the teeth will curl up into their mouth which makes eating difficult - if not impossible. Provide your pet with plenty of chew toys. This will help them keep their teeth the appropriate length. If the teeth become too long - consult a veterinarian for help.

## If you're happy and you know it...

Guinea pigs communicate with both sound and body language. Often they will squeak and grunt as they move about their cage. This is a sign of contentment. Sometimes a baby will get lonely and squeal - asking for reassurance. Guinea pigs will squeal loudly when they suspect food is on its way or when they want human companionship.

If there is enough room in their cage you may see "popcorns". This is several short leaps in rapid succession while curving their backs. This little exhibition means your guinea pigs are happy, well-cared for, and in high spirits.

## Senses

Guinea pigs hear very well - much better than humans. They can distinguish their owner's foot steps from a stranger's. They will also become conditioned to different sounds. Refrigerator doors or the rustle of plastic bags may cause squeals from your pigs who think that dinner or a snack is coming their way.

Although their sense of smell is not as keen as a dog's, they do recognize each other by scent.

Like most prey, they have side-mounted eyes. This gives them a great range of vision - but provides them with almost no depth perception. This can lead to nasty falls if you are not careful. Guinea pigs can distinguish color well, especially red, yellow and blue.

## Potty Training

Most guinea pigs learn quickly that their cage is a safe place. As a rule, they "go" only in safe areas. This makes potty training easier.

**Step 1** - *take your pig from the cage and allow him to play on the carpet. After a few minutes return him to the cage.*

**Step 2** - *Wait for him to "go". Once he's gone to the bathroom...*

**Step 3** - *take him back out to play again.*

With enough repetition your pet will get the idea that carpet is for playing. Poops are harder to control, but not as messy to clean up.

**Please Note:** The information in this handout is meant to provide basic information only. Please see a salesperson for more information.

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