



## **Guinea Pig Husbandry Sheet**

Guinea pigs are friendly, social pets that live on average between 5-6 years when cared for properly. Guinea pigs are found in herds naturally and do best in pairs. Two females housed together is usually ideal, because some boars (especially if not neutered and from different litters) can fight when allowed together. It should also be noted that some guinea pigs just prefer to be solo and never get along with others – these require even more human interaction. Guinea pigs are active 20 hours per day and only sleep for short periods so they will need exercise and exploration opportunities outside of the cage, petting, grooming, and generally be near their human for attention.

### **Housing**

Most commercially available guinea pig cages are designed for 1 guinea pig. Each guinea pig requires a minimum 2.5 x 3 ft cage space, but bigger is always better. This should also include daily opportunities outside of the cage for exploration and exercise. They need a flat bottom cage to avoid injuring their feet on wire. Bedding should be provided 2-3 inches deep to reduce strain on feet, allow burrowing, and soak up urine. Carefresh bedding (recycled newspaper bedding) is recommended. Cedar, other aromatic wood shavings, and corn cob should never be used. Fleece can also be used to cover ramps and flooring to provide cushioning. Fleece should be removed and washed as it becomes soiled. Guinea pigs do not do well with heights so multi story cages need ramps with sides, and floors with sides to prevent falling and injuries. Most guinea pig owners construct cages with flat bottoms and wire tops or convert rooms into guinea pig safe zones. Aquariums are not a good choice because the ammonia from their urine becomes trapped and can be damaging to their respiratory tract. Look into C&C cages for some great, inexpensive customizable caging options.

If offering an outdoor pen, it should be predator proof including wiring on top to prevent birds and other animals from entering the pen and prevent predators from digging underneath. Opportunities for shade and fresh water should always be available. Guinea pigs preferred temperature zone is 65 to 68 degrees. Above 80 degrees they are susceptible to heat stroke.

### **Diet**

Guinea pigs are predisposed to obesity and are strict herbivores (plant eaters). They should never be fed seeds, high protein items, or sugary treats. Young guinea pigs (under 4 months old) should be fed a diet mostly of alfalfa hay. Alfalfa based pellets should be offered at 1/8 of a cup per day. A vegetable (1/2 cup) and a small piece of fruit (size of a quarter) can be offered

daily. Hay should be available 24 hours a day and often stays fresher if kept in a hay rack. No other food item is high enough in fiber or provides proper grinding for teeth other than hay. Guinea pigs over 4 months of age should be fed a diet of mostly Timothy hay. Other hays such as Brome, Orchard grass, and Botanicals can be offered as well. Pellets should be transitioned to Timothy based pellets (Brands: Oxbow or Mazuri) and purchased in small bags. Guinea pig pellets are fortified in Vitamin C which breaks down very easily, the fresher the food, the better the Vitamin C content.

Guinea pigs love their greens. Romaine, parsley, Broccoli, dandelion greens, green/red/yellow peppers, kiwi, carrot tops, tomatoes, peas, spinach, oranges, papaya, strawberries, and guava are all appropriate choices. Remember not to overfeed fruits as it can cause diarrhea and guinea pigs do not handle sugars well.

Avoid grass or weeds with insecticides, onions, garlic, and keep high calcium greens (such as Kale, Bok choy, spinach, collards) in moderation.

Feed 1/8 cup of pellets once daily in a heavy weighted crock (to reduce tipping). Greens can be fed in the same crock once daily and any remaining should be removed to prevent spoilage. Water is best provided in a water bottle as water dishes often are easily contaminated with waste. Water should be cleaned and filled daily as guinea pigs hold food in their mouths which could contaminate the tip of water bottles.

Guinea pigs do not synthesize their own vitamin C and become deficient very easily. Vitamin C supplementation is recommended in the form of a Vitamin C tablet (Oxbow hay tablet) in addition to feeding vegetables or fruits with high vitamin C content. Vitamin C in water is very unstable and breaks down within a few hours of being added.

### **Cleaning**

Guinea pigs should be removed from the cage for exercise while their cage is being cleaned. Spot cleaning of corners and removal of uneaten veggies should occur daily. Depending on the size of the cage and the number of guinea pigs most need a full cage cleaning weekly. Cage should be dumped or scooped of all bedding. Rinsed with warm diluted bleach water. Bleach can be diluted to ½ cup bleach to 1 gallon of water. Scrub floors of cage, rinse, and allow it to dry. Also scrub down toys/hide boxes or replace disposable cage items (cardboard boxes, paper bags) with fresh items. Food crocks and water bottles should also be disinfected either with dilute bleach solution and rinsed or put through the dishwasher.

Nails can be trimmed monthly with human or small animal nail trimmers and longer haired varieties should be brushed daily.

## Enrichment

Even though we do our best as pet owners to provide the best care possible, sometimes that is just not enough. Some pets need additional stimuli/enrichment in addition to the right food, water and housing. Below are some options to increase the value of your pet's day-to-day lives:

- Increase floor space: Either simply upgrading your cage size (see housing section) or adding a play pen/enclosed area for your pet to run around in.
  - Guinea pigs really enjoy running “laps” around their cage, so more space is always better.
- Friends: Guinea pigs are very social animals and should be housed in same-sex pairs – make sure to account for the extra space and food.
  - Take care to introduce slowly. It would be helpful to house separately for a time until your pets get to know one another.
- Hide outs /tunnels: Guinea pigs naturally desire to hide when startled and enjoy hide boxes and tunnels.
  - PVC piping can be used to create tunnels and cardboard boxes provide nice hiding opportunities.
  - Some commercially available hay-based igloos or houses can provide an edible house.
- Toys: Guinea pigs enjoy toys which can be as simple as a paper bag or a fruit tree or willow branch.
  - Some light plastic toys are great to get thrown around as well. (try bird or small cat toys)
- Foraging: Hiding high value treats (such as fruit) in something to make your pet work a little for their food is beneficial.
- Destruction: Anything that your pet can rip apart such as a crumpled-up paper ball, toilet paper tubes, or newspaper is simple and fun!

Just make sure if making anything at home to avoid sticky tape, sharp edges, and chemicals. Be careful about disease transfer using anything from outside or another animal. Keep in mind that your pet can and will eat things they are not supposed to – monitor closely.