

Brant County SPCA

Degus Degus



GENERAL CARE INFORMATION

General Information

A Degus (pronounced DAYGOO) is a small rodent with tweed brown coloured hair. They are classified as mammals related to guinea pigs but many people believe that they are in actuality closer in relation to rabbits. The stomach has a cream colour and they have lighter circles around the eyes. They have long whiskers, and their ears are quite big. A full grown adult is about 6” long with another 6” in tail with some fluff on the end.

The teeth of a healthy Degu are orange. Light yellow or white teeth are an indication of a serious disease. Their Latin name is Octodon Degus. Octodon means “eight-toothed rodent” because their molar surfaces look like a figure “8”.

Degus were transported to Europe and North America from Chile, where they live from the West Coast to the Andes Mountains.

Degus make good pets as they are friendly and are generally awake during the day. They make a variety of sounds and seem to have quite a complicated language. Their distress call is a high pitched “beep beep” sound. They “chitter” when they are upset and will screech at each other when they are having a wrestling match or someone swipes their food. Some Degus are more vocal than others and will talk to you and even tell you off when a treat isn’t given as often as they would like. Degus will live between 5 and 10 years and possibly longer.

As a natural defense against enemies Degus can lose their tail. If caught by the tail it can lose the tip or the whole skin of the tail. This causes the animal no serious harm but is unpleasant for both you and your pet, so you should never try to catch a Degus by the tail.

Degus are also prone to Diabetes and have even been used in studies researching this disease. This means that they need to be fed carefully.

One or Two Degus?

Degus are very sociable and they can get quite lonely and depressed on their own. It is best, if possible, to keep at least 2 animals. Two or more Degus of the same sex are a good idea but if male Degus are kept together they should be kept away from females, as they will fight when the female comes into season. It is not a good idea to keep an unneutered pair together – females give birth to a large number of babies and can get pregnant again straight after giving birth. The baby females can also get pregnant quite young. Sadly rescue centres seem to find it difficult to get the little fellas homes so please don't breed.

Introducing Degus to each other can require time, patience and either two cages or one separated by a wire mesh divider to give them plenty of time to get used to each other. Neutered male to female introductions are the most straightforward. Introduce them in a neutral environment and then put them in a cleaned out cage. It is not a good idea to introduce a male Degus to an existing group as this can interfere with the existing pecking order and cause fights, which can be fatal.

Your Degu's Home

It is important to remember that babies will grow quite a bit and Degus are active creatures that like to climb. A large rat or even a chinchilla cage is ideal. The only disadvantage to this setup is that your Degus may kick their bedding out of the sides of the cage so a mesh cage fitted on top of a glass tank is also a good idea – however a tank on its own doesn't really provide the exercise that they need as they aren't great diggers. Also remove the mesh bottom if using a chinchilla cage as Degus made to walk on mesh flooring develop a painful foot condition called Bumblefoot .