

Brant County SPCA



GUINEA PIGS GUINEA PIGS

GENERAL CARE INFORMATION

GENERAL INFORMATION

As with any pet a guinea pig will need care, attention and a commitment to look after it, including veterinary treatment when ill. Although guinea pigs are fairly easy to care for, once ill they can deteriorate quickly and proper care will go a long way to ensuring that your guinea pig remains happy and healthy. The average lifespan of a guinea pig is 4 –7 years although up to 10 years has been known.

Guinea pigs are sociable and will appreciate the company of others and live happily in single sex pairs. However, boars kept together should be paired from young and it is best to adopt two that are already living happily together. Sows mix more easily and if adopting sows to live together they need not be from the same source and they can also be kept in larger groups without problems. Boars should not be housed together if sows are nearby as fighting may occur between the two as the boars become sexually mature.

HOUSING

Buying a cage or hutch is the largest expense in keeping a guinea pig and it is important to provide the best and largest accommodation for your guinea pig that you can. Cages with a plastic base and either a ventilated plastic or a coated wire top are recommended. Any cage with a plastic top should have plenty of ventilation to avoid condensation build up. This type of cage should be at least 30-36 inches in length for a single guinea pig, and larger for two or more guinea to be kept together.

The plastic cages often allow the top to be unclipped from the base making it easy to get the guinea pig out of the cage or to clean the cage and are lightweight and

durable. As well as the cage, there are various “furnishings” that you need to provide within the cage and also other items, which you may like to consider which assists in keeping your guinea pig amused and happy. If the cage is completely “open” without an enclosed area a house; can be added to give your guinea pig an area of privacy. There are large houses designed for use with guinea pigs available in some pet stores made from wood or plastic.

The cage should be picked clean daily and fully cleaned weekly by removing the guinea pig from the cage and throwing away all the old floor covering, bedding and food and replacing with fresh.

FLOOR COVERINGS/BEDDING

A covering is required for the floor of the cage to provide a comfortable surface for the guinea pig and also to soak up the urine. The most common type of floor covering available is wood shavings – fine sawdust should be avoided as this can cause irritation to the eyes. Cedar wood shavings (usually distinguished by a red tint) should not be used as the phenols they contain can cause severe irritations in guinea pigs. Pine shavings cause fewer problems than cedar and kiln dried Pine can be used without problems. Any form of scented shavings should be avoided as these can also cause irritation. Wood shavings from hardwoods such as Aspen or small animal litter made from, wood pulp (such as Carefresh) are the safest form of floor covering to use.

A guinea pig will appreciate some bedding material in which to “nest” and this is best provided with a deep layer of wood shavings and large amounts of hay.

Any hay given should be clean and free from dust or mould as the guinea pig will eat the hay as well as use it for a bed and this is vital for their digestive system. Therefore hay needs to be topped up daily.

DIET/VITAMIN C

Each guinea pig will have different tastes and not all guinea pigs like the same things to eat. However, it is important to know what can and cannot be fed to guinea pigs to avoid harming the guinea pig and to help keep the guinea pig healthy.

Guinea pigs must have a constant supply of hay as this is vital to their digestion and forms the bulk of their diet in addition to guinea pig mix. Any hay must be dry, clean and free from dust and mould. Grass hay such as Timothy or Oat hay is best – Alfalfa hay although beneficial for young and nursing or pregnant guinea pigs is too rich in calcium and protein and should not be used continually but can be given as an occasional treat to adult guinea pigs.

Most pet stores sell mixed specifically designed for guinea pigs and these usually consist of a variety of grains, pellets and dried vegetables and fruit. Mixes containing

nuts or sunflower seeds should be avoided, as these are high in fat and oils and guinea pigs have also been known to choke on shell fragments.

There are also guinea pig pellets sold in some stores. These are compressed food pellets and although they are designed to meet a guinea pig's nutritional requirements they do not give the guinea pig any variety within the dry diet and so it is important to provide variety in the fruit and vegetables fed to the guinea pig. A mixture of guinea pig pellets with a good quality guinea pig mix can provide an adequate main diet and offer more variety to the guinea pig.

Food mixes specifically designed for other animals should not be given as these may not be suitable to meet your guinea pig's dietary requirements and could even harm your guinea pig. Any changes in diet, even changing to a different guinea pig mix, should be more gradually as a sudden change in diet can cause your guinea pig to become ill. Although the guinea pig mix and hay will provide the guinea pig with a good basic diet it is necessary also to feed fruit, vegetables or plants as a source of Vitamin C as guinea pigs lack the enzyme to produce this.

Vitamin C deficiency can develop within weeks and symptoms include loss of appetite, weight loss, ruffled fur, nasal discharge, swollen joints which may result in lameness and bleeding gums.

The guinea pig should be fed foods high in Vitamin C immediately. In severe cases where the guinea pig has lost its appetite that it will not eat sufficiently it will be necessary to take the guinea pig to a vet for a course of vitamin C injections. An adult guinea pig needs 2.3 mg of Vitamin C per pound of their body weight and pregnant guinea pigs require 13.4 mg of Vitamin C per pound of body weight. The guinea pig will appreciate some variety and so it is best to feed a mixture of fruit, vegetable and plants.

Some fruits, vegetables and herbs that are safe to feed a guinea pig are listed below with the mg Vitamin C per 100 grams marked in brackets (according to USDA Nutrient Database).

• Apples (seedless) (5.70)	• Kale (120.00)
• Asparagus (13.20)	• Kiwi fruit (98.00)
• Basil (18.00)	• Orange (71.00)
• Broccoli (93.20)	• Parsley (133.00)
• Carrots (9.30), Baby Carrots (8.40)	• Peas (40.00)
• Cauliflower leaves and stalks (88.10)	• Red Cabbage (57.00)
• Celery (7.00)	• Romaine Lettuce (24.00)
• Chicory Greens (24.00)	• Savoy Cabbage (31.00)
• Cabbage (32.20)	• Spinach (23.10)
• Cucumber (5.30)	• Tangerine (30.80)
• Endive (6.50)	• Tomato (dependent of variety/season)
	• Turnip Greens (60.00)

Some vegetables and herbs that should NOT be fed are:

- Potatoes and Potato Tops

- **Rhubarb and Rhubarb Leaves**
- **Tomato Leaves**

There are a large variety of guinea pigs treats sold in pet stores and most guinea pigs relish these. Although these are designed for guinea pigs, they are designed as treats and should not be fed in large quantities to your guinea pig. The overfeeding of treats, which are high in sugar, could lead to your guinea pig becoming obese.