

How to Have a Happy Guinea Pig

First of all rescue one, please do not go to a breeder or a pet shop

There are many sanctuaries out there, including ours that have many rescued guineas waiting for a new home and if you think a guinea pig is for you read on to make sure that you know what they require in order for them to be a happy rescued guinea!

Ensure you have the accommodation set up ready for their arrival as the journey home may have been stressful for your Guinea Pig. Place him/her straight into their new home and leave them to settle in.

If you are adding a Guinea Pig to an existing individual or group you will need to introduce them on a neutral ground i.e. the bath, before putting them together in an existing hutch. Keep a careful eye on them as they may take a dislike to each other and fight and guinea pigs can make deep cuts and bites with their teeth - separate immediately and try again later on - never leave them together the first few nights even if they look to be getting on.

Bonding With Your Guinea Pig

For the first few weeks your pig will be scared and it is up to you to build their confidence, this is best achieved with food! Pigs will soon associate you with tasty treats and will 'wheel' at you for their breakfast and tea! The key is patience to get the most out of these curious creatures.

Start by hand feeding them within their cage, talk to them so they know you are there. Guinea Pigs hate sudden movement as their eye sight is poor. This may take some patience but eventually they will happily eat from your hand if you remain still. After you have mastered this try moving your hand around the cage, adjusting their toys etc, so they get used to you. The final stage is gently stroking your pig and hopefully they won't run away! Always approach your pig from the side rather than from above and be gentle.

Guinea Pigs are very nervous creatures by nature so expect them to run away when you first approach, they may always do this but it is a natural instinct rather than them disliking you. It takes time - have patience!

When picking up your Guinea Pig put your hand underneath their stomach whilst supporting their back legs with your other hand. Always carry them against your chest to stop them struggling and falling. Your outside run should be large enough to sit in and spend time with your guinea pig, let them come to you or sit cross legged and stroke them gently when they are in your lap - do not leave guinea pigs unsupervised with young children.

A few tasty treats to try

Apple Basil Broccoli Brussels sprouts Cabbage Celery (cut up into small pieces)	Cherries (not the stones) Cucumber Kale Parsley Peppers Pumpkin	Raspberries Romaine lettuce (never use iceberg) Spring greens Strawberries Watercress
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Guinea Pigs can eat many varieties of vegetables, fruits and herbs. Remember to never give too much of any of the above. They also love grass, clover and dandelions - all washed in a bucket first and never give grass cuttings as they ferment too quickly. Feed a variety every day rather than the same things, they love a good mixture to graze on. Certain herbs are also a favourite and small amount of fruit can be fed as a treat. They cannot produce their own Vitamin C. Lots of green, leafy vegetables will ensure your Guinea Pig does not become sick.

Important points

Guinea Pigs need places to hide. If you take these away it will not make them more confident. Each pig needs a hidey-hole to make them feel safe. Pigloos, cardboard boxes, huts and tubes are perfect.

Their teeth are constantly growing. Therefore, they must be provided with wooden toys to gnaw on and most importantly hay to eat. Hay is crucial to their diet as well as their teeth. It is often cheaper, if you have the space to buy a bale of good quality hay from a farmer and put it in bin liners (biodegradable) ready to use - keep in a dry place. Check that the farmer hasn't sprayed any chemicals on it - organic is better but some farmers just don't use any sprays at all and don't see themselves as organic - always check!

They love company of their own kind. It certainly is a case of safety in numbers, and although some pigs prefer to live alone most benefit from being in pairs or herds. If introduced properly the following combinations can work: several girls can live together, a group of girls and a male (neutered!) or 2 males by themselves. Two males should never be put with females or near females as they will fight. Rabbits and Guinea pigs should never live together. N.B Always seek advice before attempting to bond guinea pigs.



Giving them something to do

Guinea Pigs can get bored. To stop this rearrange their hutch and run once a week. It is very entertaining to watch them exploring their new home.

Guinea Pigs are active creatures when healthy, content and living in spacious quarters. If your pig is not moving/very quiet this may be because they are scared (common when pigs are moved to a new home) or they could be sick. It is important to know what is normal behaviour for your pet and take them straight to the vet when they act differently. Also physically check over your pig every day:

What to look for:

- Coat - Should be sleek and shiny. Long haired breeds need grooming to keep fur clean and knot free. Skin No wounds, scrapes or swellings. Check for bald patches/flaky skin. This can be a sign of mites.
- Ears and Eyes - Eyes should be bright and wide open. They do produce a cream coloured liquid from their eyes for grooming, this is normal.
- Teeth - Check they are wearing evenly and not overgrown. Make sure claws are clipped to a correct length (ask a vet to show you how) and legs are working well.

Housing: Crucially important

Creating a suitable home for your Guinea Pigs is arguably the most important part of their care. Sadly, many pigs spend their entire lives trapped in a tiny hutch at the bottom of the garden. Not only is this cruel to your pig but you will never experience their fascinating, natural behaviour. This leaflet will give you many great housing ideas to inspire you and your pet!

Guinea Pigs can live both outdoors and indoors, but ideally they should live indoors to receive as much attention as possible.

All pet shop cages are far too small, even ones marketed for rabbits (they too are far too small for rabbits - think big!) A hutch (5ft x 2ft x 2ft) with access to a large run in the daytime is suitable for two guinea pigs and the run

(attached if possible) although you should be able to move everything around or have another separate run to move so they can 'lawnmower' your lawn for you - and never use weed killer etc on your lawn - let the guineas look after it - their dropping are brilliant to use on the compost too!

Housing - A garden shed with a run outside is ideal for a group of guineas. A shed is by far the best set up for Guinea Pigs. They are spacious and can be locked at night.

Guinea pigs need a minimum of 5 hours of exercise per day in a secure, weatherproofed run. A run attached to the hutch is ideal. It must be strong enough to keep your pet safe from predators. Guinea Pigs must not be left unattended for large amounts of time.

Fill the run with toys and hidey places so your pig feels safe and can play. Pet carriers make handy shelters in case it rains or upturned cardboard boxes or pipes - ask your local DIY or builders for off cuts - just make sure they are wide enough for your guinea to get through!

Shed

Sheds often make a large and adaptable home for your Guinea Pigs. They can be bought cheaply online and can range in sizes, a 6ft x 4ft is a perfect size to start with.

They can be customised to include a hutch, toys, litter trays and hidey huts. Food and hay can also be stored inside on shelves.

Line the shed with kitchen lino (can be bought for a few pounds) so it can be swept/wiped clean.

Make sure your shed is fitted with a lock for security.

Sheds can also be divided into 2 sections (if space is sufficient) so 2 groups of pigs can live side by side.

A money saving idea. Try looking for sheds on Ebay and other auction sites. They are often much cheaper than buying one new.

Toys, hidey huts and tunnels can make your pets home into a Guinea Pig palace!

Never keep a guinea pig by themselves - if you buy two and one dies and you do not want to have another as your children have lost interest please contact us or your local rescue and explain.

**Please contact us if you require information
about looking after any other companion animal**



Many thanks to our great friend Gilly.