

Pet Care of a Guinea Pig



Guinea pigs are small mammals with short legs and no tail. They originally come from the grasslands of the Andes Mountains in South America and are an important food source in that region.

Diet

Guinea pigs need a high fibre diet because of the way they digest their food. Good quality hay helps their digestion system work properly. They also need grass based pellets high in Vitamin C. Their bodies are not able to store Vitamin C so they need to have it in their food, regularly.

Guinea pigs should have daily vegetables like broccoli or kale, and some fruits, but only in small amounts. They should never have fruits like lemons or limes, and neither have many root vegetables, like carrots. These foods can make them ill if eaten in large amounts.

Environment

Guinea pigs need a large area like a hutch, where they can explore and stand on their back legs when they want to.

They should have a safe, warm, dry and clean area where they are away from other pets, and safe from foxes and ferrets.

The temperature must be no warmer than 26°C as they can suffer with heat stroke, and anything colder than 15°C can give them a chill.

Guinea pigs must be in a quiet area as noises can make them scared.



Did You Know?

Guinea pigs make different sounds for a range of reasons. For example, when they are missing a companion, enjoying some attention or when they get excited.



Did You Know?

Their teeth grow all the time so they need to chew hay. This wears their teeth down.



Did You Know?

When guinea pigs are born, they are already furry, have their eyes open and can eat solid food straightaway! They still have their mother's milk for a further 3 weeks though.

Guinea Pig Behaviour

Guinea pigs need regular exercise. They like to run through tubes and pipes. Guinea pigs cannot climb or dig but do like to be able to hide in burrows and shelters.

They are prey animals so are easily scared. When this happens, they will freeze for seconds or minutes. They can see all around themselves so they can see when they might need to escape!

Guinea pigs are naturally sociable animals and need to live in pairs or small groups. They become very unhappy if they are on their own. Many like contact with people too. They need to get used to being picked up so the earlier they are with adults and children the better.

Dangers to Guinea Pigs

- Don't be tempted to give guinea pigs grass that has been cut by a lawnmower. It can cause problems with their digestion.
- Make sure they don't have bedding that can be pulled into strands, like cotton wool. Guinea pigs can get tangled up in it, which can be dangerous.
- Make sure other animals cannot frighten them. They are nervous animals.



Guinea Pig Signs of Stress:

- overgrooming;
- chewing the cage bars;
- over drinking;
- walking around in circles.

Take your guinea pig to a vet if it is showing these signs.

Questions

1. What does it mean when the text says that guinea pigs are “an important food source in that region”?

2. Summarise the main points in the paragraph written in italics.

3. What sort of foods should they not have, and why?

4. What sort of environment would not suit a guinea pig?

5. What is the most interesting fact you have learned in the ‘Did you know...?’ section and why

6. Name two things guinea pigs are not able to do.
