

# Guinea Pig Basics

Guinea pigs make great companions because they are docile, rarely bite, and love humans. Guinea pigs not only love to be around humans, they also prefer to have another guinea pig living with them. Your guinea pig should have a large habitat with plenty of room to move around. They should only live indoors, and do well in cooler weather. They are extremely heat-sensitive, and is best to keep them indoors for play time.

The three most common breeds of guinea pig are the Smooth-Coated, with short, glossy fur; the Abyssinian, with fluffy tufts of hair all over their body; and the Peruvian, with long, silky hair that flows to the ground.

## Care & Handling

Even though guinea pigs are very social animals, it might take a little time for them to get used to being handled. Start by feeding them small treats. When they're more comfortable with you, carefully pick them up, with one hand supporting their bottom and the other over the back.

Brushing your guinea pig on a regular basis will help keep their coat clean and tangle free and will remove any loose hairs.

Guinea pigs love to get out of their habitat and exercise. Letting them roam in a small room with no openings would be recommended. Keep an eye on them so they don't gnaw on furniture or electrical wires. Be sure that no other pets can enter the room and that there are no house plants in reach that could be toxic to your guinea pig.

## Health & Veterinary Care

Make sure you take your guinea pig to the vet for a new pet exam, and for a wellness exam every six months. Ask your veterinarian how to clip your guinea pig's nails to prevent injury and infection. If you think your guinea pig is sick, don't delay—seek medical attention immediately. Common symptoms include sneezing, coughing, diarrhea, and lethargy. Guinea pigs are also susceptible to external parasites such as mites and lice. If you think your pet is infested, you'll need to treat the animal, their housing, and the surrounding environment.

## Environment

Place a lot of exercise playthings in your guinea pig's habitat, such as cardboard tubes and boxes for hiding. Guinea pigs need an enclosed sleeping area. You can buy a covered sleeping box at a pet supply store.



## Habitat

The habitat should be at least six square feet per guinea pig. A solid-bottom habitat or a plastic-bottom “tub habitat” works well. Line the bottom of the habitat with bedding made specifically for guinea pigs. Do not use cedar chips as aromatic oils in cedar bedding have been shown to have adverse health effects. Guinea pig bedding is comfortable for guinea pigs, which have sensitive feet.

**Daily:** Remove soiled bedding, droppings, and stale food from the habitat. Provide fresh water.

**Weekly:** Clean completely by scrubbing the bottom of the habitat and soiled accessories with warm water and a gentle soap. Completely replace litter and bedding. Make sure to rinse and dry everything completely before returning it to the habitat.

## Diet

Guinea pigs should have access to Timothy Hay or other grass hay at all times – it is great for their digestive system and it satisfies their need to gnaw. Their diet should also contain a stabilized form of Vitamin C, as guinea pigs cannot manufacture this vitamin on their own, so make sure you include 25mg of Vitamin C in tablet form in their diets every day.

Choose foods specially formulated to be a complete and balanced diet for your guinea pig, so you can be assured it is getting proper nutrition. Give sweet treats only on occasion because they contain natural sugars that can cause diarrhea. A small amount of fresh vegetables should be provided daily. Provide fresh water daily in a heavy ceramic dish.

