

Guinea Pig Bonding

Are you looking to add another guinea pig to your family? Should they be male or female? Young or old? First and foremost, you want to make sure that you do not end up with a breeding pair. This is the easiest path to take, since it doesn't require surgery to spay or neuter. It's a matter of matching up personalities and each guinea pig has its own personality. It is important to know that putting two guinea pigs together can lead to some fighting. Most of the time, they figure it out for themselves, but occasionally, the fighting is extreme and they must be permanently separated.

Old & Young Pairing

An important consideration to make is that you are not trying to place a very feisty younger guinea pig with a laid back older guinea pig. When you pair up a young guinea pig with any other guinea pig (young or old), there is a chance that the younger guinea pig goes through its adolescent period and will challenge the other guinea pig for top guinea pig position. This can lead to some fighting. The adolescent period occurs between 3-5 months of age.

Quarantine

Keep the new guinea pig in a separate room with a separate habitat for 2-3 weeks before trying to put them together. This period acts as a form of quarantine to ensure that the new guinea pig does not have any medical problems which could be transmitted to the other. You should handle the new guinea pig last and wash your hands afterwards. It's a good idea to keep a smock in the room with the new guinea pig to reduce the risk of transmitting parasites or other contagions on your clothing.

The Dating Game

Have patience, take your time, always do this on neutral territory, and don't give up too soon. Bonding may happen in one afternoon or it may take months. What you don't want to do is plopping the new guinea pig into your existing guinea pig's habitat. Introducing guinea pigs in one of their habitats can cause problems. We recommend following the five steps below.

1. Have a two large bath towels handy.
2. Spread one towel on the couch or other neutral, unfamiliar territory.
3. Have two people, each person holding a guinea pig, sit at opposite ends of the couch. Make sure the towels are between you and there is a good amount of space.
4. Let the guinea pigs find each other on their own. You may need to nudge them in the right direction. Have the second towel handy to toss on them if they need to be separated.



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5. Usually, the first 15 minutes is just getting acclimated to the new surroundings and the idea that there is another guinea pig. It's the next 15 to 30 minutes that can get interesting. But keep your interactions and interference to a minimum. Some guinea pigs will get along great, some will decide on peaceful co-existence right from the beginning, and others will act like long lost buddies. Most guinea pigs, however, will go through the standard dominance dance where they get to know each other and try to figure out who is going to be the boss.

Standard Safe Behavior

These behaviors may sound serious and they should be monitored very closely, but do not separate the guinea pigs exhibiting these behaviors. Most of the time the behaviors will continue for a while until one backs down.

- Butt sniffing
- Butt nudging
- Chasing
- Butt dragging (leaving scent)
- Mounting
- Nose face-offs
- Teeth chattering
- Raised hackles
- Posturing for possible attack
- Nips, light bites
- Wide yawn
- Snorting

Fighting With Intent to Harm

If the posturing of the nipping and bite attacks gets more serious, it's time to separate the guinea pigs. If blood is drawn, it's definitely time to stop the session. Look for these behaviors as an indicator of when to separate them:

- Bite attacks are no longer warning nips, they are lunges with intent to harm.
- A combination of raised hackles (hair on the back of neck is raised), loud and angry teeth chattering, rumble-strutting in place with the head staying in one position while facing the other guinea pig doing the same thing. This is usually a signal of a biting attack. They may back down before they engage.
- Both guinea pigs rear up on their haunches, face to face. This is a clear, brief signal of their intent to launch full attacks at each other. Separate if possible before the attack.
- Separate if a full fight breaks out as this is very serious. Be sure you keep yourself safe; throw a towel over them and use a dustpan or something other than your hand to separate them. Unintended bites can cause serious damage as their incisors are very sharp.

