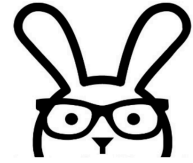


Guinea Pig Care



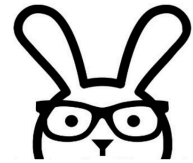
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- ***Cavia porcellus***
- Cute herbivorous rodents that are very popular pets.
- Originate from the Andes in South America but have been domesticated for many years.
- Although they are commonly childrens pets they are not ideal for this. Guinea Pigs (GPs) are prey species (many animals use them as a food source). This means that GPs are constantly on alert for threats. They don't like being picked up and are scared of loud noises. With time, patience and understanding of normal guinea pig behaviour they can grow to love and trust their owners.
- GPs are very social animals and best kept in groups or pairs.
- In captivity GPs can live 6-7 years.

Housing:

- GPs can be kept both indoors and outdoors. It is generally best to have them in an enclosure indoors as they can be quite messy.
- GPs can be free to roam in the backyard but it is best to only do this under supervision. If they are not put in secure enclosures they can be prone to being attacked by cats and dogs.
- Many things advertised at the pet shop for GPs are inappropriate. A lot of the housing options are too small and have ramps that many GPs do not like.
- These hutches can be used with extensions to allow the GPs more space to run around or always open within a bigger enclosure.
- C&C pens can make great indoor setups allowing the GPs to be able to be seen all the time and can be customised for the space available.
- Minimum house size for two guinea pigs is 150cm x 50cm
 - The larger the space the better for the physical and mental health of the GP. Larger spaces allow them to explore more, do zoomies and popcorns!
- GPs are not able to tolerate high temperatures and are prone to heat stress
 - Ideally they should not be subjected to temperatures higher than 20-22°C
 - Having a thermometer around their enclosure at their level can be a good idea during summer to make sure the GPs are not subjected to temperatures that are too high.
- Humidity can have an impact on the GPs respiratory system and coat quality. Ideally the humidity of the GP enclosure should be between 40-70%. If it is constantly too high a dehumidifier may be required.
- Substrate: carefresh, paper pellets or fleece
 - Wood shavings can lead to respiratory disease
 - Bedding should be changed every couple of days to prevent waste build-up (this can also contribute to health issues in GPs)
- A litter tray can be provided, though some GPs are not great at using them
 - Woodfire pellets or paper based pellets can be used.
 - Do not use wood shavings
- Enclosure should be cleaned at least once a week

- Daily spot cleaning is recommended
- More frequent cleans are generally required if there are more GPs or a smaller space leading to more waste build-up
- Do not house with rabbits
 - Rabbits carry *Brodetella* which can make GPs very unwell
 - Rabbits can bully GPs
 - Different nutritional requirements



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Exercise and Behaviour:

- As GPs are grazing animals a lot of their enrichment comes from foraging rather than from chasing.
- It is important to have many hides for GPs to be able to use to feel secure
 - Plastic igloos can be easy to clean
 - Many GPs love fleece based hides and pockets
- Tunnels are great for GPs to get around whilst feeling secure
- Foraging behaviour encouraged for enrichment
 - Scatter feeding
 - IQ puzzles
 - Hay based toys
 - Seagrass toys
 - Branches to destroy (willow, apple)
- Exercise balls are NOT recommended

Food:

- Have not evolved much from their wild counterparts. In the wild they forage through dry habitats.
- 90% hay, 1 tbsp pellets, greens
 - Timothy or meadow hay for adults. GPs will pick through the hay to find the tasty bits. It is best to provide fresh hay daily to encourage this to be the main food consumed. Hay should be provided to outdoor GPs as well. Hay encourages proper tooth wear (GPs front and back teeth grow throughout life). It also encourages the growth of a healthy microbiome). GPs are coprophagic (eat their own poop to get extra nutrients) which means the health of their microbiome is extra important
 - Babies, pregnant or lactating GPs can also have access to lucerne
- Pellets: 18-20% protein and 10-16% fiber
 - Good pellets are packed full of nutrients BUT they do not promote proper tooth wear and contain a high amount of calories
 - GPs less than 4 months of age, pregnant or lactating can have access to about 1 cup of pellets a day to help with growth.
 - Seen as a multivitamin to adult GP. Should be fed a maximum of 1 tablespoon per GP per day. More than this can lead to obesity and selective feeding
 - Recommended brands in NZ: Oxbow, Burgess, Science Selective

- Vitamin C supplement
 - GPs are like humans in that they are unable to produce their own vitamin C.
 - Vitamin C is a component of connective tissue within the body. Without this important vitamin deformities to not only the bones can occur but also the skin, teeth, heart and other vital organ systems.
 - An adult GP requires 25mg/day. Those that are young, pregnant or sick require up to 50mg/day.
 - Fresh or supplemented
 - The following site has a good list of high Vitamin C vegetables
 - Amount in fresh food is variable so often best to provide a supplement as well.
 - Oxbow Vit C tablets or Childlife sugar free Vit C drops (0.5ml per GP per day)
 - Vitamin C is light sensitive, temperature sensitive and will degrade with age. When just relying on Vitamin C in pellets deficiency often occurs as by the time the end of the bag is reached the vit C in the pellets has disintegrated.
 - Bowl and bottle recommended
 - Bowl is more natural but will need regular cleaning. A large, ceramic one that is unable to be tipped over is recommended
 - Some guinea pigs prefer drinking from a bottle. These need to be cleaned regularly to prevent mould build-up. Glass ones are easier to clean than plastic.



Preventative care:

- Desexing is recommended
 - Many female GPs that are not spayed will develop ovarian cysts. These can be functional (produce hormones that create a sick GP) or non functional (don't produce hormones but can be uncomfortable). Ovariectomy is recommended for GPs from 4-6 months old
 - Male GPs can be quite aggressive towards each other. Due to this it is recommended to desex male GPs at 4-6 months of age to ensure their bond is not broken.
- Microchipping is recommended at the time of desexing
- Routine flea, worm and mite treatment is not required.
- GPs are prey species. They will hide signs of illness until they are gravely ill.
- Yearly check up recommended until 5 years old. Following that 6 monthly check ups recommended