

Roger's Aquatics & Pet Supplies: Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs are fun pets for both kids and adults. They are more social than hamsters, and have a better size for children to handle. They typically live 5 – 7 years under proper care. Pigs are extremely entertaining to watch, as they can be more active than other rodents. They are also more vocal, and some will even squeak with delight at the sight of their owners, or food.

Enclosure: Size, Bedding, and Accessories

The minimum size recommended for a single piggy is a cage with a 30" by 36" floor space. Guinea pigs do not use much height, so this is not as important. A second level can be added, but will require a ramp. As guinea pigs are social animals, a large space should be used to accommodate the extra pig. An additional 3 square feet should be added per pig that is kept.

Fleece liners or paper beddings are the best for piggies. Which one you go with will depend on how much time you have for cleaning. Fleece looks nice, and is soft, but will require more work to keep clean, and you will need several extra liners on hand. Fleece liners can easily become disgusting if they are not cleaned daily – they will need to have the poop vacuumed or picked up daily, and should be washed weekly. A paper based bedding, such as Uber of Fresh N' Comfy, will stay cleaner longer as it is absorbent, and will be less smelly. Aspen shavings are another popular choice for pigs. Cedar products should always be avoided, as it can cause respiratory problems.

A house for piggies is a must. At least one per piggy should be provided, with one extra. Being a prey animal, they will also appreciate other places to hide such as plastic or hay tunnels. They will also need toys to keep them entertained. Hanging wooden chew toys, twine toys, and bendable wooden logs are just some of the things that will help keep your piggies entertained.

Diet

A quality hay should be available to the piggy at all times. Hay provides piggies with fiber, which they require in order to break down and process their food. It also has the added benefit of keeping their teeth clean. Timothy or orchard grass hay is preferred for most pigs, but if they are pregnant, nursing, or under 4 months old, a half timothy, half alfalfa mix can be given to them. Alfalfa should be avoided for adult piggies as it is high in calcium.

A hay based pellet should also be offered to piggies. Pellets are meant to enhance their diet, and should not be used to replace hay. Depending on the appetite of your piggy, they may eat 1/4 to 1/8 a cup of food per day.

Approximately a cup of fresh veggies should be given to the piggy every day. Romaine, butterhead, and red leaf lettuce can be given daily, as well as radicchio, raspberry leaves, and zucchini. Other fruits and veggies can also be provided – ask a staff member for a veggie list for ideas. Piggies will also require vitamin C added to their diet. It's best to rotate through vegetables that have adequate vitamin C content to meet their needs. Water soluble vitamin drops are not recommended for piggies, as the vitamin C will not remain usable in the water bottle due to heat, minerals in the water, and chlorine.



Hygiene

Guinea pigs are quite good at keeping themselves clean, so actual bathing of piggies is not advised unless certain health issues or coat types require it. Long haired guinea pigs will require daily brushing in order to keep the hair neat. Long haired piggies may also require a bath with shampoo every 3 – 4 months to help prevent matting. Short haired pigs can be brushed every few days, but should not require a bath. Skinny (hairless) pigs may require coconut oil on their skin every few months.

Playtime & Handling

Guinea pigs should have at least an hour a day where they can stretch their legs in a safe environment. If the piggy is kept in a smaller cage, the amount of time outside of the cage should be increased. An area in the house should be sectioned off with playpen fencing, and a fleece matt, which may need to be weighed down to prevent burrowing. The play fencing may need to be secured as well. The area you choose should be low-traffic, shouldn't have temperature fluctuations due to a window, and should have good ventilation, without being drafty. It shouldn't have plants, electric cords, furniture, or other hazards to the piggy. A house (one per piggy or more), food, and water should be available, as well as several toys that are different than the ones available in their cage.

Cohabitation

Guinea pigs are very social, and do much better when housed in groups or pairs. As with most animals, unless the male is neutered, he should not be housed with females. Whether or not piggies will get along with each other really comes down to their individual personalities. When introducing piggies, keep a careful eye out for bullying, and be prepared to separate the pigs if needed.

Checklist of Supplies

- ✓ Cage
- ✓ Play Pen
- ✓ Water bottle
- ✓ Bedding/Fleece
- ✓ Hay
- ✓ Hay rack
- ✓ Hay based pellets
- ✓ House (one per pig, plus one extra)
- ✓ Chew toys
- ✓ Food dish
- ✓ Veggie dish