

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## HOUSING

Cage	2
Bedding	2
Furnishings	3

## FEEDING

Hay	4
Pellets	4
Treats	4
Safe/Unsafe Treats	4

## EXERCISE & SOCIAL NEEDS

Activity	5
Play	5
Wheels	5
Exercise Balls	5
Pet Proofing	5
Mental Stimulation	6
Bonded Buddies	6
Bonding with Your Degu	6

## HANDLING & GROOMING

Safe Handling	7
Grooming	7

## HEALTH

General Information	8
Signs of Illness	8
Common Illnesses	9

## BEHAVIOR

Vocalization	10
Body Language	10

## SUPPLY LIST



# HOUSING

## CAGE

### Specs

Cages must be a minimum of 2 cubic feet per degu. Taller cages with levels are preferred. Bar spacing should be no more than 1" for adult degus and 0.5" for young degus.

### Temperature

The temperature inside the cage should always be between 60° and 70° F with the humidity between 40% and 60%.

### Material

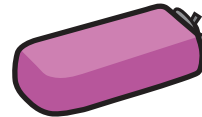
Wire-sided cages are preferable because they provide plenty of ventilation and options for climbing. All cage floors, ramps, and levels should be solid or covered with fleece since standing on wire can cause injuries and bumblefoot.

### Examples

Critter Nation cages are easy to clean, customize, and move around. Plus, they come in both single and double sizes depending on how much room you have and how many degus you want to keep.



60° - 70°



levels

2 cubic feet per degu



wire cage

## BEDDING

Fleece blankets or liners are the safest options for degu bedding since they may eat other types and get intestinal blockages. We like to use fleece to line the cage and cover any exposed wire floors.



fleece



# HOUSING

## FURNISHINGS

### **Essentials**

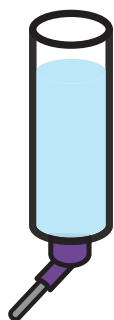
Set your degu's cage up with the primary essentials, including a water bottle, food bowl, lots of chew toys (wood or lava), a wheel, at least one shelter/hide, and a dust bath. Most degus love running on wheels so be sure to provide one of the appropriate size and material. Learn more about wheels in the exercise section of this handbook.

### **Variety**

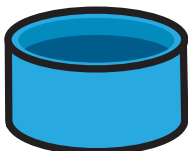
It is important to have a variety of toys, beds, and fun stuff you can rotate to keep your degu interested. Good examples include toilet paper tubes, fiddlesticks, tunnels, bird toys, bits of fabric, ladders, cardboard, and treat balls. Visit the homemade toys tab on our website for more ideas.

### **Chewing**

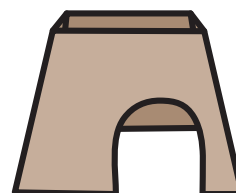
Degus are known to be prolific chewers. Because of this, many owners choose not to allow any plastic at all in their environment. This is the best way to protect your pets from ingesting pieces of plastic that can cause an obstruction and make them ill. There are glass water bottles, ceramic or glass dishes, solid metal or wooden wheels, and wooden hides available on the market.



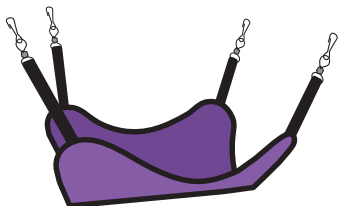
water bottle



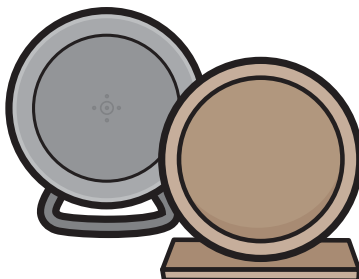
food dish



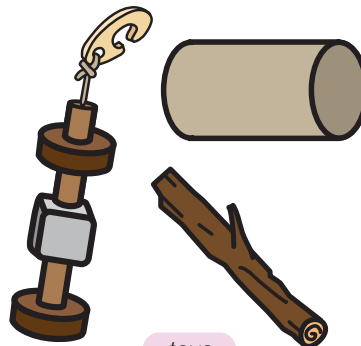
hides



hammocks



wheel



toys



# FEEDING

## DIET

### Hay

Degus' digestive systems require a constant supply of hay to function properly. An unlimited supply of timothy hay, orchard grass, and/or meadow grass should be available for them to eat at all times. Adult degus should not be given alfalfa since its calcium content is too high and can cause stones to form.

### Pellets

Each degu should be provided 2 tablespoons of timothy pellets per day. Seed mix food should not be used because they are often missing vital nutrients and many degus will only eat their favorite tasting pieces causing an unbalanced diet. If you are unable to find degu-specific food, molasses-free guinea pig pellets can be mixed with chinchilla pellets at a 50/50 ratio.

### Treats

Degus are prone to getting diabetes and should not have treats high in molasses or sugar.

## SAFE TREATS

*alfalfa hay cubes*

*basil*

*carrots*

*dandelions*

*dried rose hips*

*fruit tree twigs*

*sugar-free wheat  
cereal*

*mint*

*oregano*

*parsley*

*pumpkin seeds*

*sweet pepper*

## UNSAFE TREATS

*avocado*

*chocolate*

*dairy*

*garlic*

*meat*

*onion*

*potato*

*rhubarb*

*tomato leaves*



# EXERCISE & SOCIAL NEEDS

## EXERCISE

### **Activity**

Degus are generally most active during the day, so spending time with them during these times can be the most rewarding. Degus require at least four hours of free-range playtime every day, even if they have a very large habitat or a wheel in their cage. This includes running around, exploring, and playing with their humans.

### **Play**

Some fun things to try with your degu are making a maze, playing chase with a toy, creating an obstacle course, and hiding food for them to find. Never chase your degu to get them back in their cage, instead tempt them back to bed by placing a dust bath in their cage.

### **Wheels**

With all that energy most degus love to run on wheels. Any wheel should have a solid base and be of the appropriate size for your degu. Never use wire or mesh wheels since tails, toes, and other body parts can get stuck in the mesh or bars and cause serious injuries.

### **Exercise Balls**

Do not use an exercise ball for your degu.

### **Pet-Proofing**

Make sure to degu-proof before play by covering outlets and cords, putting away anything you don't want chewed on, moving houseplants, blocking any small space you cannot reach into such as under the fridge, and securing other pets in a different area or room. Exercise pens can be useful in keeping your pet secure while providing lots of room to run.

## SOCIAL NEEDS

### **Mental Stimulation**

Degus are very social, smart animals with lots of energy. They love spending time with other degus, their humans, playing games and solving problems.

### **Bonded Buddies**

Degus are herd animals and will be happiest when living with other degus. It is strongly recommended to keep a minimum of two degus at a time. Unaltered degus should be kept only with other degus of the same sex.



# EXERCISE & SOCIAL NEEDS

## BONDING WITH YOUR DEGU

### *Key Components of Training*

**TRUST**

**PATIENCE**

**POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT**

**CONSISTENCY**

**REPETITION**



### ***Tips***

Every time you approach your degu's habitat, bring a small treat for your pet so they learn to associate you with pleasant things and look forward to your visits. Never feed treats through cage bars since this can encourage your degu to nip fingers. Offer treats with an open palm when possible.

Speak softly to your degu and call them by their name so they get used to your voice and learn their name.

Spend time around your degu in a location that allows them to come to you if they want to be pet but gives them space to leave if they don't feel like being touched, such as sitting on the floor while you do something else.

Don't grab your degu to put them into or take them out of their cage. Instead, open the doors to let them come and go as they please or use a transport box.

The more time you spend with your degu, the sooner they will become comfortable with you.



# HANDLING & GROOMING

## SAFE HANDLING

### ***Picking Up Your Degu***

Waiting for your degu to come to you before picking them up is a great way to develop trust. Talk to your degu and let them sniff your hand before attempting to pick them up so they know it's you. To teach your degu to feel secure while being held, place a treat in the palm of your hand and rest it flat, palm up on the floor of the cage without moving for as long as you are able. When your degu feels comfortable, they will come to sniff your hand and climb onto your palm to take the treat. Once your degu is comfortable being on your hand, you can take them out to play. Always use two hands when picking up your degu. One hand should support the rump while the other supports the chest. Hold them close to your body and speak softly to comfort them. If your degu is new or too nervous to climb into your hand, utilize a small bed or box using the transport box method. Never pick a degu up by the tail.

## GROOMING

### ***Nails***

Degus nails wear down naturally if you provide toys and levels that have rough surfaces for them to climb on such as lava ledges or bricks. Occasionally, they may need their nails trimmed. To do so, hold the degu still, cover the toe with your finger so only the nail is exposed, and use a human nail clipper to clip the clear part of the nail. If you accidentally clip the pink vein (or quick) dip your degu's foot in styptic powder to stop the bleeding. It can be helpful to have a second person holding the degu, to give them lots of treats, and to keep sessions short. Alternatively, view our events page on our website for our nail trim clinic dates and we can do it for you!

### ***Dental Care***

You do not need to brush your degu's teeth, but you must provide chew toys so they can wear down their teeth. Check your degu's teeth regularly to make sure they are not overgrown or misaligned and that they are the correct color. Unlike most other animals, the enamel of degu's front incisors should be orange unless they have a nutrition deficiency. If symptoms of dental issues present themselves take your degu to the vet.

### ***Bathing and Brushing***

Degus do not need water baths. They require dust baths to keep their fur clean and control oil. Place a small amount of small animal dust in a dust bath house or a small dish and let your degu roll around. Once your degu is done it's best to remove the dust bath or they may start using it as a toilet. Change out the dust regularly or if it gets coarse or dirty. A toothbrush can be used as a brush to remove any debris or tangles in the fur.



# HEALTH

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### ***Lifespan***

Degus live an average of 6 to 9 years.

### ***Reproduction***

Degus can reproduce by 6 months of age, and sometimes as early as 12 weeks. While it's possible to spay or neuter degus, the surgery can be risky so most people instead choose to only house them with the same sex.

### ***Routine At Home Health Checks***

At least once a week, spend some time examining your degu's fur, skin, and teeth for any physical changes such as lumps, wounds, overgrown teeth or nails, poor coat quality, etc. If any abnormalities are found, it is a good idea to make an appointment with your veterinarian for assessment, as any health concerns can progress quickly.

### ***Annual Exam***

All degus should be given a yearly veterinary exam to ensure they stay in good health. Degus do not require any vaccines.

## SIGNS OF ILLNESS

Like all pocket pets, degus are very good at hiding when they get sick. If you see any of the following signs get in contact with your veterinarian immediately:

ANY BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

CHANGES IN GROOMING

OVERGROWN TEETH

LETHARGY

DISINTEREST IN TREATS

HEAD TILT

DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION

POOR COAT QUALITY

WATERY EYES

DISINTEREST IN INTERACTION

PAWING AT THE MOUTH

CHANGES IN EATING / DRINKING





# HEALTH

## COMMON ILLNESSES

### ***Upper Respiratory Infection***

Degus are sensitive creatures and can easily develop respiratory infections that can become pneumonia. To avoid this, keep your degu's cage away from drafts, clean it often, use fleece bedding, provide as large a habitat as possible, and keep stress to a minimum. *Symptoms include sneezing, eye and nose discharge, lack of appetite, and lethargy.*

### ***Dental Problems***

Because a degu's teeth continuously grow throughout its life, they must be constantly worn down by grazing hay and nibbling chew toys. If a degu does not have the correct diet or if their teeth are not properly lined up, they can grow out of control causing pain, abscess, difficulty eating, GI status, and eventually death. This is called malocclusion and can require x-rays, tooth filing, or abscess removal under anesthesia. *Symptoms include drool or saliva build-up on their face, bad breath, decreased appetite, weight loss, lumps on their face, and change in bathroom habits.*

### ***Diabetes***

Degus can easily become diabetic. This is due to a congenital defect, or more likely an unbalanced diet that is high in sugar. There is no cure for diabetes, but it can be avoided by feeding lots of roughage and limiting the intake of sugar to the occasional treat. *Symptoms include excessive water drinking, being overweight, increased urination, cataract, and lethargy.*

### ***Cataracts***

Cataracts are a structural deformity that gives the eye a cloudy, milky, or hazy appearance. They can be caused by diabetes or congenital defect. They can come in various sizes and may grow over time affecting a degu's vision and coordination. If your degu develops cataracts it's important to have them checked out by a vet to make sure there are no underlying health problems. *Symptoms include a white cloudy or cotton fuzz appearance as well as problems with sight and coordination.*

### ***De-gloved or Detached Tail***

As a defense mechanism, degus can shed or detach their tails to get away if captured by a predator. This is why you should never grab a degu by the tail. Losing all or part of a tail is incredibly stressful for a degu and leaves them vulnerable to infections and future behavioral problems.



# BEHAVIOR

All degus sound and act a little differently. Only by spending time with them will you fully be able to understand them. Below is a general guide of their communication to get you started.

## VOCALIZATION

BEHAVIOR	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
<b>Whining</b>	High pitched, drawn-out squeal.	<i>Annoyed or wanting space.</i>
<b>Chittering</b>	Soft repetitive bird-like tweet.	<i>Saying hello, wanting to bond.</i>
<b>Chaffing</b>	High-pitched, raspy chirp.	<i>Friendly, encouraging approach.</i>
<b>Warbling</b>	High-pitched chirp.	<i>Pleasure, arousal, excitement, ready to play.</i>
<b>Wheeking</b>	Loud squeak.	<i>Alarm call signifying something is unusual or scary.</i>

## BODY LANGUAGE

BEHAVIOR	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
<b>Tail Beating</b>	Rapidly hitting their tail on the ground.	<i>Very excited or wanting to mate.</i>
<b>Popcorning</b>	Hopping, bouncing, leaping, and running.	<i>Happy and having fun.</i>
<b>Agonistic Tooth Grinding</b>	Very fast teeth grinding.	<i>Angry and ready to lunge.</i>
<b>Passive Tooth Grinding</b>	Very fast teeth grinding possibly accompanied by a yawn.	<i>Relaxed, comfortable.</i>
<b>Chewing</b>	Nibbling on everything.	<i>Degus are powerful chewers and will often nibble on everything around them.</i>
<b>Biting</b>	Nipping.	<i>"Stop it!", "Go Away!" or "Put me down!"</i>
<b>Freezing</b>	Suddenly stopping and holding still.	<i>Fear, nervous about something new or strange.</i>



# DEGU SUPPLY CHECKLIST

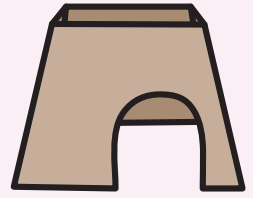
## CAGE

2 cubic feet per degu minimum.



## SHELTER

Degus like to hide in shelters when they are nervous or relaxing. Wood or grass huts, cardboard boxes, etc.



## WATER BOTTLE



## FOOD DISH

Ceramic is best to prevent chewing.



## FOOD

Timothy pellets and timothy hay, orchard grass, or meadow hay. If you are unable to find degu specific food, molasses-free guinea pig pellets can be mixed with chinchilla pellets at a 50/50 ratio.



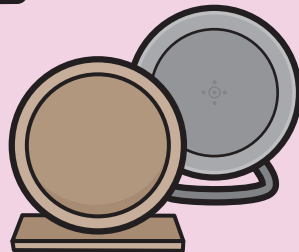
## BEDDING

Fleece.



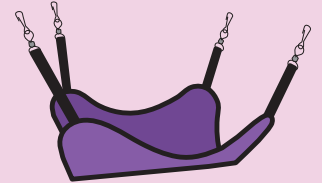
## WHEEL

Solid base only. No wire, bars, or mesh. Wood or solid metal base is ideal.



## HAMMOCKS

Degus love hammocks! Monitor for chewing.



## BED

Many pocket pets enjoy relaxing in a cozy bed such as a dog or cat bed, a small animal bed, or extra fleece. Monitor for chewing.



## CHEW TOYS

Wood, lava, etc.



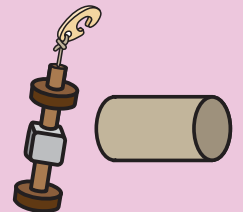
## DUST

Make sure to get volcanic dust, not sand.



## ENRICHMENT

Degus are busybodies! Be sure to provide them with lots of fun toys. Check out our homemade toys page for ideas.

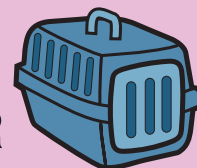


## DUST BATH

You can purchase a ceramic dust bath or use a sturdy bowl.



## PET CARRIER



# DISCLAIMER AND CREDITS

## DISCLAIMER

All information shared by MN Pocket Pet Rescue is researched, up to date, and accurate to the best of our ability. We are not a licensed veterinary organization and do not intend to present ourselves as such. All educational material contains our best recommendations for care specific to each species. However, all animals are different and some may have unique needs. MN Pocket Pet Rescue does not assume any liability for the well-being of any animal not under our care. Always use your best judgment and follow veterinary recommendations whenever necessary. If you have any questions or find inaccurate information please contact us.

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