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# HOUSING

## CAGE

### Specs

Cages must be a minimum of 7.5 square feet for 1 - 2 guinea pigs and 13 square feet for 3. Guinea pigs cannot climb or jump vertically so they rely on lots of floor space.

### Temperature

The temperature inside the cage should always be between 65° and 80° F with the humidity between 30% and 70%.

### Material

Most guinea pig cages you find in the stores are much too small on their own. It is recommended to either build your own cage (see right) or expand your cage with fencing or an exercise pen.

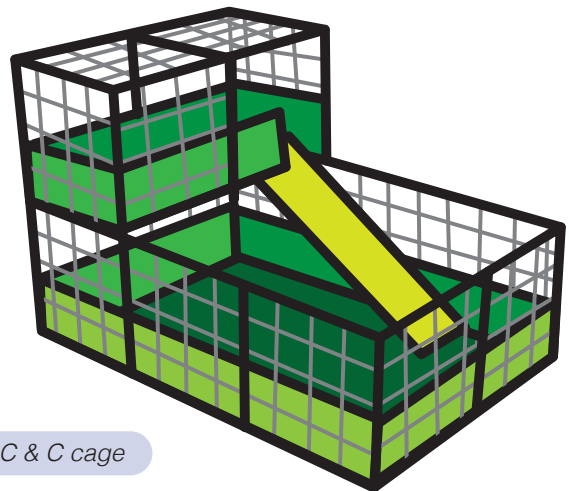
### Location

Pocket pets should never be housed outside as they are vulnerable to predators, parasites, and weather conditions.

### Examples

One of the best cage options is a homemade cage called a C&C (cubes and coroplast) cage. They are fairly easy to make and are quite inexpensive compared to cages sold at pet stores. They are also very easy to clean and provide appropriate space. The bigger the better! If you decide to put in a ramp to add a second story, make sure it is long with a gradual incline and traction on the bottom so your guinea pig can easily use it.

◀ One - two pigs: 7.5 sq ft  
Three pigs: 13 sq ft ▶



## BEDDING

MNPPR strongly recommends avoiding all wood-based beddings due to the general sensitivity of pocket pets. We like to use fleece to line the cage and cover any exposed wire floors, then use *unscented* paper bedding as litter placed in a litter box. When the fleece is soiled, simply throw it in the wash and replace it as needed. Some guinea pigs can be trained to use a litter box, which can make cleaning even easier.



fleece



pelleted paper



soft recycled paper



shredded paper



# HOUSING

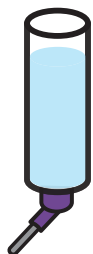
## FURNISHINGS

### Essentials

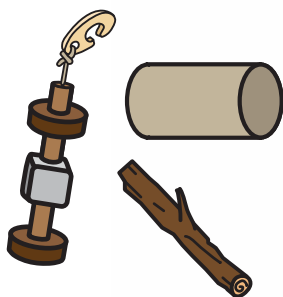
Set your guinea pig's cage up with the primary essentials including a water bottle, food bowl, lots of chew toys, at least one shelter/hide, and at least one bed. Some people choose to litter train their guinea pigs. If you do, be sure to incorporate at least one litter box that is large enough for your pet to sit in comfortably.

### Variety

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



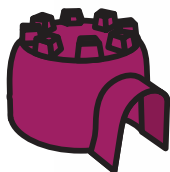
water bottle



toys



food dish



hides



litter box



beds



# FEEDING

## DIET

### Hay

Guinea pigs' 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 guinea pigs should not be given alfalfa since its calcium content is too high and can cause stones to form.

### Leafy Greens / Fresh Vegetables

Each day, offer about 1 cup of veggies per 2 lbs of body weight per guinea pig. The bulk of this should be leafy greens, such as romaine, green leaf, or red leaf lettuce. Iceberg lettuce should never be given as it can cause diarrhea.

### Pellets

Each guinea pig should be given 1/8 cup of timothy pellets per 5 lbs of body weight a day. Seed mix food should not be used because they are often missing vital nutrients and many animals will only eat their favorite tasting pieces causing an unbalanced diet. We prefer to use Oxbow brand pellets.

### Supplements

Like humans, guinea pigs are unable to produce vitamin C on their own. While you can provide vitamin C to them by feeding certain vegetables, we recommend giving them oral supplements such as Oxbow Vitamin C. Do not use water additive supplements as this may alter the taste and may discourage them from drinking.

LEAFY GREENS 75% OF DAILY FRESH FOOD		VEGETABLES 15-25% OF DAILY FRESH FOOD		FRUIT TREATS ONLY	
<i>arugula</i>	<i>mustard greens</i>	<i>bell peppers</i>	<i>cucumber</i>	<i>apples</i>	<i>mango</i>
<i>basil</i>	<i>parsley</i>	<i>broccoli</i>	<i>radicchio</i>	<i>bananas</i>	<i>melons</i>
<i>bok choy</i>	<i>red leaf lettuce</i>	<i>brussels sprouts</i>	<i>spinach</i>	<i>berries</i>	<i>nectarines</i>
<i>dandelion greens</i>	<i>romaine lettuce</i>	<i>carrots</i>	<i>summer squash</i>	<i>cherries</i>	<i>peaches</i>
<i>dill</i>	<i>spring greens</i>	<i>celery</i>	<i>zucchini squash</i>	<i>kiwi</i>	<i>pears</i>
<i>endive</i>	<i>swiss chard</i>				
<i>green leaf lettuce</i>	<i>turnip greens</i>				
<i>kale</i>	<i>watercress</i>				
<i>mint</i>	<i>wheatgrass</i>				

## UNSAFE FOODS

*avocado*      *dairy*      *meat*      *onion*      *rhubarb*  
*chocolate*      *garlic*      *nuts*      *potato*      *tomato leaves*



# EXERCISE & SOCIAL NEEDS

## EXERCISE

### ***Activity***

Guinea pigs are naturally crepuscular, meaning most active at dawn and dusk, but easily adapt to their human's schedule if you set a routine and stick to it every day. Young guinea pigs are more active and playful than older animals. As they age, most are content to explore for a little then spend time cuddling in your lap.

### ***Floortime***

Floortime and exercise are very important for a guinea pig. Time outside the cage for a guinea pig should be spent running around and exploring. They should get a minimum of one hour per day of playtime with you outside their cage, even if they have a very large habitat.

### ***Wheels and Balls***

Never use a wheel or exercise ball for your guinea pig. These items can cause injury to your pig's back, feet, or toes.

### ***Pet-Proofing***

Make sure to pet-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. Alternatively, use a very large exercise pen or multiple pens linked together to let your pigs have floor time.

## SOCIAL NEEDS

### ***Mental Stimulation***

Guinea pigs are very social, smart animals who can be prone to boredom and weight gain if they are not offered a variety of toys, regular exercise, and additional mental stimulation. They love spending time with their humans, playing games, and investigating.

### ***Bonded Buddies***

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



# EXERCISE & SOCIAL NEEDS

## BONDING WITH YOUR GUINEA PIG

### *Key Components of Training*

**TRUST**

**PATIENCE**

**POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT**

**CONSISTENCY**

**REPETITION**



### ***Tips***

Every time you approach your guinea pig'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 pet to nip fingers. Offer treats with an open palm when possible.

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

Spend time around your guinea pig 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. For example, sitting on the floor while you do something else.

Guinea pigs can't see directly in front of themselves so when you go to pet a guinea pig, start with your hand about 5 inches from their eyes so they aren't surprised.

Do an activity where they can hear your voice such as read out loud, talk on the phone, or talk to your guinea pigs. They love stories and often will chat back!

The more time you spend with your guinea pig the sooner they will become comfortable with you.





# HANDLING & GROOMING

## SAFE HANDLING

### ***Picking Up Your Guinea Pig***

Most guinea pigs tolerate but do not enjoy being picked up and feel safer on the ground. Only pick up your pet if necessary. Talk to your pet and let them sniff your hand before attempting to pick them up so they know it's you. Always use two hands when picking up your guinea pig. One hand should support the rump while the other supports the chest and hold them close to your body. Waiting for your guinea pig to come to you before picking them up is a great way to develop trust.

## GROOMING

### ***Nails***

Guinea pigs need their nails trimmed about every 4 - 5 weeks. To do so, hold the pig still, cover the toe with your finger so only the nail is exposed, and use pet nail trimmers to clip the clear part of the nail. If you accidentally clip the pink vein (or quick) dip your pet's foot in styptic powder to stop the bleeding. It can be helpful to have a second person holding the animal, to give them 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 guinea pig's teeth but you must provide plenty of chew toys so they can wear down their teeth naturally. Check your pet's teeth regularly to make sure they are not overgrown or misaligned and take them to the vet if symptoms of dental issues present themselves so they can be trimmed by a professional.

### ***Bathing***

Guinea pigs are naturally very clean animals and unless they are ill, injured, or kept in a dirty environment, they should not need bathing. If something happens and they do get extra dirty or are not cleaning themselves, only use kitten or small pet shampoo.

### ***Brushing***

Depending on their coat, guinea pigs need to be brushed anywhere from every day to every few months. Soft bristle brushes are best to gently work through tangles and remove shedding fur.

### ***Anal Impaction***

As some guinea pigs get older they need help removing poop pellets from their perianal sac. To do this, carefully flip them on their back, gently push back the folds around their anus, and remove any debris with a cotton swab soaked in warm water or a small amount of mineral oil.



# HEALTH

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### ***Lifespan***

Guinea pigs live an average of 5 to 7 years.

### ***Reproduction***

Guinea pigs can reproduce by the age of 4 months old. While it's possible to spay or neuter guinea pigs, the surgery can be risky, so most people instead choose to house guinea pigs of the same sex together to ensure companionship and prevent breeding.

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

At least once a week, spend some time examining your pet'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 guinea pigs should be given a yearly veterinary exam to ensure they stay in good health. Guinea pigs do not require any vaccines.

## SIGNS OF ILLNESS

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

**ANY BEHAVIORAL CHANGE**

**LETHARGY**

**DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION**

**DISINTEREST IN INTERACTION**

**OVERGROWN TEETH**

**CHANGES IN FECES**

**CHANGES IN EATING/DRINKING**

**CHANGES IN GROOMING**

**DISINTEREST IN TREATS**

**POOR COAT QUALITY**





# HEALTH

## COMMON ILLNESSES

### ***Vitamin C Deficiency***

Just like humans, guinea pigs do not produce their own vitamin C and rely on fruits and veggies to get it. A well-balanced salad of leafy greens and vegetables high in vitamin C plus an Oxbow Vitamin C tablet should be given daily to prevent deficiencies that may lead to scurvy. *Symptoms include rough coat, lethargy, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and swollen feet and joints.*

### ***Dental Problems***

Because a guinea pig's teeth continue to grow throughout its life, they need to be constantly worn down by grazing hay and nibbling chew toys. If a guinea pig 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.*

### ***Gastrointestinal Stasis***

Guinea pigs have very sensitive stomachs that can become blocked. Eating a high fiber diet with lots of hay, slowly introducing new foods, proper grooming to prevent hairballs, and daily exercise that keeps the gut moving are all ways to prevent GI stasis from occurring. If your guinea pig shows any signs of having a blocked gastrointestinal system, take them to the vet immediately as without treatment it can be deadly. *Symptoms include a lack of eating, lack of drinking, not defecating and/or small, stringy, misshapen droppings, lethargy, or hunched over in a secluded area.*

### ***Urinary Tract Infections***

Like many animals, guinea pigs can develop urinary tract infections that are painful and if left untreated can create a life-threatening blockage in the urinary tract. Prevention includes ensuring your guinea pig always has a supply of fresh water and avoiding feeding any guinea pigs over the age of 8 months alfalfa hay or pellets. If an infection does develop, a round of antibiotics from your vet should be able to clear it up. *Symptoms include darkened or beige-colored urine, bloody urine, or frequent urination in small amounts.*

### ***Respiratory Infections***

Guinea pigs can easily develop respiratory infections that can turn into pneumonia. To avoid this keep your pet's cage away from drafts, clean it often, use fleece bedding, provide as large of a habitat as possible, and keep stress low. *Symptoms include sneezing, eye or nose discharge, lack of appetite, and lethargy.*



# BEHAVIOR

All guinea pigs sound and act a little different and 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>Wheeking</b>	Long loud squeal or whistle.	<i>Excitement, happiness, wants attention.</i>
<b>Rumbling</b>	Deep rumbling sound with a little dance. Sometimes called "rumblestrut."	<i>Displaying dominance or romantic interest, sometimes followed by mounting.</i>
<b>Teeth Chattering</b>	Loudly grinding their teeth.	<i>Anger or annoyance.</i>
<b>Deep Purring</b>	Low purr.	<i>Contentment.</i>
<b>High Purring</b>	High pitched purr.	<i>Annoyance or uncertainty.</i>
<b>Whining</b>	Moaning.	<i>Annoyance or dislike.</i>
<b>Singing</b>	Soft high pitched chirping.	<i>Possibly happy, although it's very rare and its meaning is not much understood.</i>

## BODY LANGUAGE

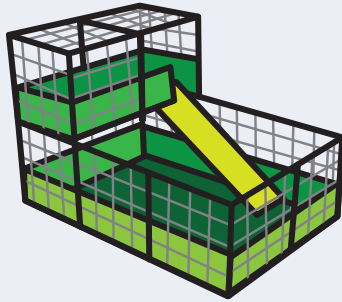
BEHAVIOR	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
<b>Scent Marking</b>	Rubbing their chin on things.	<i>Marking that item as their own.</i>
<b>Popcorning</b>	Hopping, bouncing, leaping, and running.	<i>Happy and having fun.</i>
<b>Grooming</b>	Licking.	<i>Friendship and love between two guinea pigs or pig and their human.</i>
<b>Fidgeting</b>	Moving around a lot.	<i>Tired of being held or needs the bathroom.</i>
<b>Head Toss</b>	Shoving your hand away when you're petting them.	<i>"Stop it!" or "Go away!"</i>
<b>Fighting Stance</b>	Rising on hind legs, shuffling from side to side with stiff legs, hair puffed up, hissing, teeth chattering, showing teeth.	<i>Angry, annoyed, or frightened.</i>
<b>Freezing</b>	Suddenly stopping and holding still.	<i>Startled or frightened.</i>



# GUINEA PIG SUPPLY CHECKLIST

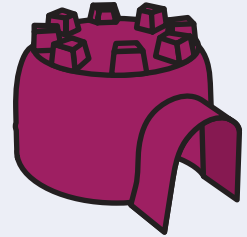
## CAGE

7.5 square feet for 1 - 2 guinea pigs, 13 square feet for 3 pigs minimum.



## SHELTER

Guinea pigs 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.



## BEDDING

Fleece.



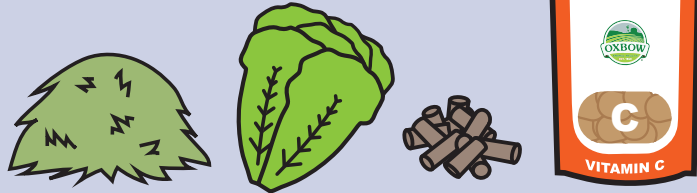
## BED

A dog or cat bed, a small animal bed, or extra fleece.



## FOOD

A guinea pig's diet should consist of four parts: hay, greens, pellets, and vitamin C. MNPPR recommends Oxbow brands. Do not feed alfalfa as a staple hay to adult guinea pigs.



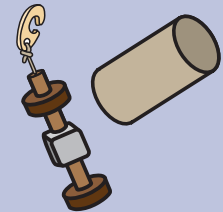
## CHEW TOYS

Wood, lava, etc.

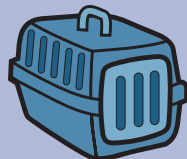


## ENRICHMENT

Be sure to provide your pet with lots of fun toys. Check out our homemade toys page for ideas.



## PET CARRIER



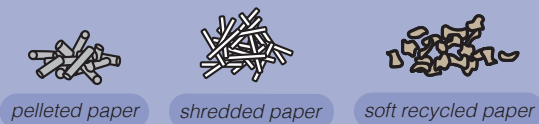
## LITTER BOX

Optional.



## LITTER

For the litter box. MNPPR strongly recommends avoiding all wood-based beddings due to the general sensitivity of pocket pets. Only use *unscented* paper litter.



# 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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