

Responsibility involves providing proper housing, nutrition, grooming and veterinary care

Background

- Guinea pigs originally came from South America. They're larger than hamsters, but smaller than rabbits. They generally live for five to seven years, and are very sociable animals.
- The various breeds of guinea pigs include Abyssinian, Abyssinian Satin, Peruvian, Peruvian Satin, Silkie (Sheltie), Silkie Satin, Teddy, Teddy Satin, Texal, American, American Satin, White Crested and Coronet. There are a wide variety of different hair types, colors and markings.
- Guinea pigs make wonderful companions. They bite only when very frightened, usually from such things as mishandling or fear of a threatening animal. Children caring for guinea pigs should always be supervised by an adult, since these animals need to be treated gently. They are not toys. Primary responsibility should be with the parents. One of a guinea pig's most endearing traits is his tendency to whistle when excited by someone coming into the room or offering a special treat.

Housing

- The minimum space recommended for a single guinea pig is 2' x 2' x 2'. More space must be provided for any additional guinea pigs. Wire-bottom cages can be used if something is put down as flooring to keep the guinea pig's feet from getting caught in the wire bottom. Never use a glass aquarium, due to the poor ventilation that it provides. Always keep the cage indoors away from drafts and extreme temperatures. The bottom of the cage should be lined with wood shavings or some other form of safe bedding. Do not use cedar or pine chips—the oils they contain can be dangerous to the animal. Timothy hay is a good choice of bedding. Be sure to change the bedding often enough to keep it dry and odor-free. It is possible to train a guinea pig to use a litter box, but the process is a slow one and a great deal of patience is required.
- Guinea pigs love to hide when they play, so be sure to place cardboard tubes

and/or empty coffee cans with smoothed edges in the enclosure. Guinea pigs can be allowed to run free in one room to get some additional exercise, but the room should be carefully checked for any openings from which the guinea pigs can escape, get lost and possibly end up hurt. These animals must be supervised when they are loose because they will chew on anything in their paths—including electrical wires.

Diet

- It is essential for you to provide your guinea pig with enough vitamin C. A quarter of an orange will meet her recommended requirements, and you can also offer other high-C foods such as kale and strawberries. Guinea pig pellets are supplemented with vitamin C, but rabbit pellets are not. Therefore, it is best to buy only guinea pig food.
- You can give your guinea pig small amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables to complement his or her basic diet, but always make sure to clean up any leftover fresh food before it spoils. The ASPCA also recommends that you make grass hay available to your pet. It's great for the digestive system, and will satisfy your pet's need to gnaw. Fresh, clean water should be available at all times. Use an inverted bottle with a drinking tube, and change the water daily.

General Care

- Guinea pigs' teeth grow continuously, just like those of all other rodents. So, it is important for you to give your guinea pig a piece of wood that he or she can gnaw on to wear his or her teeth down. It's best to provide a tree branch that has not been treated with pesticides or any other chemicals, but any small piece of unpainted wood that hasn't been treated with chemicals will do.
- Guinea pigs are very conscientious about grooming themselves, but brushing them on a regular basis will help keep their coat clean and remove any loose hairs. Long-haired guinea pigs

should be brushed daily in order to prevent tangles and knots from forming.

- Guinea pigs are social animals who prefer to live in small groups. If necessary, two young males generally can be kept together, but fighting usually breaks out among adult males. Several females can be kept together without problems, however. Since guinea pigs, like all rodents, multiply rapidly, keeping males and females together is not recommended.
- A guinea pig who is ill should be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND A GUINEA PIG?

The ASPCA recommends getting yours from a responsible breeder or adopting one from a shelter or small-animal rescue group. Call your local shelter and search on sites like www.petfinder.com for guinea pigs in need of loving homes.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- "ASPCA Pet Care Guides for Kids – Guinea Pig"; Mark Evans; Dorling Kindersley; London, England; 1993.
- In case of accidental poisoning, call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (ASPCA/APCC) 24-Hour Emergency Hotline Numbers: (888) 4ANI-HELP (426-4435) (\$50 per case; Visa, MasterCard, Discover or American Express when you call.)



The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
National Headquarters • 424 E. 92nd St. • New York, NY 10128-6804 •
(212) 876-7700 • www.aspcanet.org

Midwestern Regional Office • 1717 South Philo Road, Suite 36 •
Urbana, IL 61802 • (217) 337-5030 • www.aspcanet.org/apcc

TM and ® are protected by The ASPCA. ©2004 The ASPCA