



**P & K Pets
Info Sheet #10**

19 Magill Rd

Stepney

SA 5069

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GUINEA PIGS

(CAVIES)

C A R E



INFORMATION



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INTRODUCTION

Guinea pigs or cavies are rodents of South American origin. Their wild ancestors, *Cavia Cutleri*, can still be found in the natural state of Peru. In the wild they occur as small family groups but sometimes form large colonies with complex burrow systems. They are highly vocal, emitting a range of squeaks and grunts, and are completely vegetarian. The wild guinea pig has only one colour form and hair type (agouti, short hair), the domesticated species has three main varieties:

- English: Short hair (3-4 cm)
- Abyssinian: Short hair but rough in the form of rosettes
- Peruvian: Long haired (about 15 cm).

All three can be obtained as single, bi- or tri-coloured forms involving white, cream, ginger, rust-red, brown, black and agouti.



HOUSING

If you intend to keep your guinea pigs indoors, a specially designed indoor hutch is preferred. This will have a sealed base and usually a cage top much like a bird cage but with a flatter shape. However, a good cardboard box can do the job if maintained and cleaned daily. Cavies are able to be house trained, so you can eventually let them hop in and out of their home at their discretion. For outdoor housing use a hutch no smaller than 24"x15"x12" (60x45x38cm). This would be a permanent hutch and would need to be larger than an indoor one unless they are allowed out to roam. Keep in mind the dangers in allowing your guinea pigs to roam in your yard, cats & hawks will see your pet as a tasty meal.

Whichever enclosure you choose, you will need to line it with an appropriate material as bedding and to absorb waste. This can be either straw or wood shavings, preferably both. They need straw or hay to keep warm and also to eat, to aid in digestion. Ensure the enclosure is away from draughts as guinea pigs are very susceptible to colds. Also make sure it is not in direct sun, or has sufficient shelter so your guinea pig can hide, if left in the full sun they will dehydrate quickly and die. Do not expose them to either extremes of temperature. They will stay as clean as you keep them. Frozen bottles of water can be placed in the hutch on hot days to keep an area cool.



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FEEDING

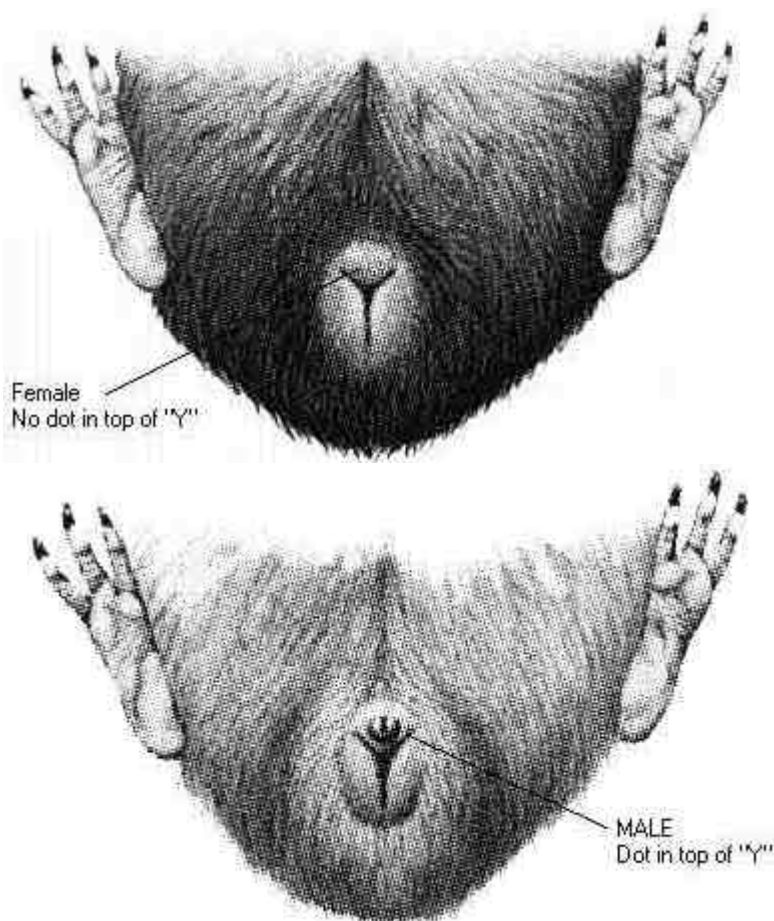
Grass, greens and fruit are the most suitable source of food for your guinea pig. These are supplementary foods as they should always have a supply of pellets. Pellets alone are insufficient as many of the vitamins (particularly vitamin C) are lost during storage. However, pellets are necessary as they provide a hard food to keep the ever growing rodent incisors trimmed, and also to provide essential minerals. They should be given both dry and green feed daily. A bran mash can be given in winter as it is warming. Bread and milk are also good. It is amazing the amount of food a guinea pig eats, some (but not all) have enormous appetites. Take care though, some things such as rhubarb leaves, sour sobs, onions, oleander and some garden shrubs are poisonous.

IF IN DOUBT DO NOT FEED IT TO YOUR GUINEA PIG!

Fresh water should always be available. It is recommended to use a sip/drip bottle available from most pet shops. Water in a bowl can quickly become soiled and will not stay fresh.

BREEDING

Ideally do not buy a male (boar) and a female (sow) unless you intend to breed with them. If you do, keep them apart to prevent any unwanted litters. Sows come into season every 14-16 days. They carry their young for 65-72 days, and wean at 3-4 weeks. Young boars, which have been left with the litter after 5 weeks have been known to father litters at this age, so they should be removed at about 4 weeks. You can run as many sows together as your cage size permits. Young boars, which have not been separated or mated, can usually be caged together up to 6 months of age.





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They will have to be separated when 6 months old, as they will fight. Adult boars cannot normally be caged together as they will fight. They may damage one another badly and the grating (chattering) of teeth is the first sign of a fight. One boar in a pen of sows is the usual when breeding. The pair should be separated when you find the sow is pregnant

It is recommended that very pregnant or 'in pig' sows are removed to a maternity hutch to have her young quietly. Handle pregnant sows as little as possible or you may have problems, as you can damage the unborn young. If for any reason, you lose a sow, another nursing sow may foster the newborns.

A guinea pigs life span is about 5 years. Breeding a sow up to 3 years of age is advisable, then retire her. Begin breeding a sow by 5 months if she is well developed and in good condition. Only plan 2-3 litters a year and give them a good rest between litters. Having litters one after the other will weaken the sow and produce poor quality young. It may also eventually kill her. Two to four young in a litter is the norm.

GROOMING

This can be done with a soft brush to remove loose hair. A dampened hand run over the fur also does a good job. Toe nails often grow too long and are uncomfortable for your pet. You can clip with ordinary nail clippers or dog nail clippers, but be very careful and only cut the tip of the nail and not the darker portion(blood vessels) as it will bleed and be very painful. If the toe does bleed, apply cornflower or styptic powder(from your local pet store) to the nail to stop the bleeding.





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PROBLEMS

If you have any problems with your guinea pig and you are unsure what to do, take them to a vet for a check up. The following are common problems that may be resolved at home if they can be identified.

LICE- Often caused by mouldy straw or hay, look for tiny white specks, especially behind the ears and inside the back legs. Treat with a small animal mite/lice spray available from your local pet shop.

COLDS- Keep them warm, preferably indoors if you suspect a cold. Try a dab of eucalyptus oil on the inside front paws to prevent a cold going too far. Check the hutch for draughty spots or dampness. Wet bedding will lead to colds, and can be fatal. With care they can be avoided.

BAD STOOL/STOMACH- Droppings should be firm. If looseness is noticed, limit greens, especially lettuce and give a little more dry food. When 'normal' again, gradually introduce green feed. Too much lettuce can cause this problem, as can stale, limp old greens.

MITES- Constantly scratching guinea pigs usually means mite. If you suspect mites, use a small animal mite/lice spray from your local pet shop. There may also be sores from scratching which will need to be treated separately.

GENERAL

Guinea Pigs are prey animals. They are timid by nature, but will learn to trust you as they develop. They will make excellent pets, especially for children that need to learn the responsibilities involved in caring for an animal. They are well mannered, clean and will make the perfect companion. Because they can be litter trained, they can also have a free run of a room or even the whole house. They also don't chew your possessions like rats or rabbits.

Keeping guinea pigs is interesting, fun and easy.