

Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs originally come from the Andes in South America where they were domesticated at around 5000BC and kept for food and later as pets, living in the house off the family's vegetable scraps. They were bought over to Europe in the 1500s and quickly became popular pets.



Guinea pigs are very sociable animals and are best kept in pairs or small groups. They also really enjoy human company and regular handling is important to create a good bond with your pet. Guinea pigs like to take part in social grooming so brushing your pet can be a good way to interact.

They live an average of **4-6 YEARS** however the official world record for the oldest guinea pig is 14years and 10months old!!

In their hutch it is important to have a safe area that they can hide in and keep warm. Large floor space is important rather than height of the hutch, guinea pigs do not climb, burrow or build nests but do seek shelter.

They love being outside during the warmer months but in extreme winter weather it is best to bring their hutch into somewhere sheltered and out of the wet. They can be outside most of the year as long as they have access to shelter.

Common health problems effecting guinea pigs include respiratory infections, diarrhoea, dental problems and abscesses. If you are concerned about your guinea pig, you should bring them down for a check-up.

When guinea pigs are excited and happy they often jump straight up in the air – this is known as '**POPPING**'.

A complete pelleted diet for guinea pigs is best for them to eat, they also need fresh vegetables such as broccoli and kale as well as dandelions, but as they are herbivores 90% of their diet should be made up of hay or grass. They need fresh water available at all times.

They are not able to make their own vitamin C so it is important they get enough in their diet, most guinea pig diets have enough in them, but extra supplements are available for the water if required. This is why it is important to feed a guinea-pig specific diet and not to feed them rabbit food.

Their teeth constantly grow - providing adequate hay and grass will allow enough for their teeth to grind together and to wear evenly. When they don't have enough fibrous material to chew on they can get overgrown teeth which can create problems, these are often burred down at the vets and most guinea pigs will tolerate this really well.

Guinea pigs will breed all year round, their gestation period lasting an average of 65days. In guinea pigs who have not been bred from before, the pelvis can fuse at 6-10months old; if they get pregnant for the first time after this age they will often need a caesarean as will not be able to pass the piglets naturally.

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