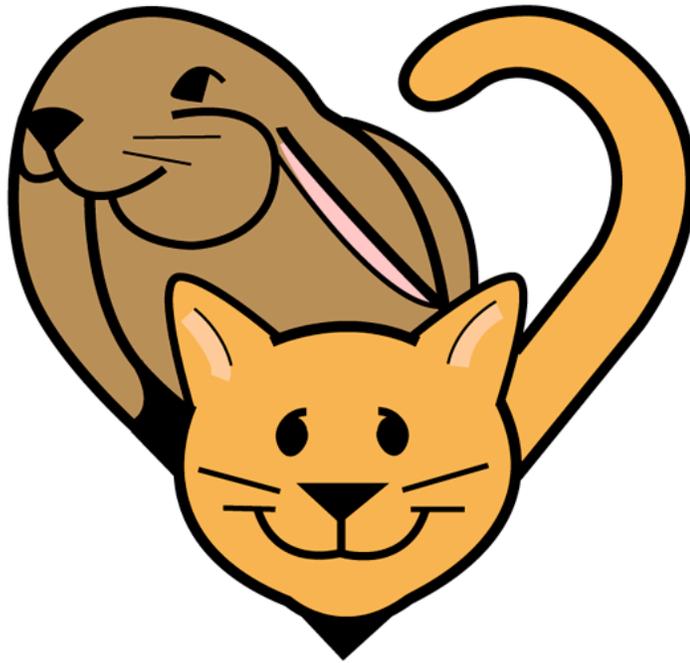


Guinea Pig Care



Furry Friends Refuge

1211 Grand Avenue
West Des Moines, IA 50265
515-222-0009

www.furryfriendsrefuge.org

Email: adoptions@furryfriendsrefuge.org

Guinea Pig Care

What do I need?

Cage

Igloo or other “hiding place”

Cage Bedding

Quality guinea pig pellet food with Vitamin C

Food dish

Water Bottle

Fresh greens

Toys

Cage

Minimum requirements:

2x3 feet for an average guinea pig—floor must be a solid surface. Ideally the bottom of the cage should have deep solid sides to avoid having the bedding and hay scattered outside the cage.

Guinea pigs enjoy having a “hiding place” so be sure to provide them an igloo, wooden cubby, or even just a box to climb into.

Line the bottom of the cage with some type of cage bedding. The cage bedding can be Carefresh, Celsorb, or Aspen wood bedding or even newspaper if changed on a daily basis. **Do not use pine or cedar wood.** The chemicals and oils in pine and cedar are harmful to guinea pigs and can cause respiratory issues.

Guinea pigs can be allowed to exercise in guinea pig proofed rooms. They should be allowed out of their enclosure for exercise each day.

Guinea-proofing

Watch your guinea when first allowing him to explore to see areas that need to be guinea-proofed. Make sure that cords are tacked to the wall, blocked off, or covered in a PVC or plumbing pipe if they are on the guinea's level.

Food

Diet is very important to guinea pigs. Feed all of the following each day:

- Unlimited timothy hay (avoid alfalfa hay—it has too much calcium and too many calories)
- ½ cup of dark, leafy greens per guinea pig
 - green leaf lettuce
 - red leaf lettuce
 - romaine lettuce
 - cilantro
 - parsley
 - green tops of carrots
 - green tops of beets
 - mustard greens
 - turnip greens
 - endives
 - green outer leaves of cabbage
 - feed spinach and kale only 1-2 times a week because of calcium content
- 1/8-1/4 cup of pelleted food per day without any seeds or colored pieces (Timothy hay based is healthier than alfalfa based—look at ingredients). The food should be fortified with Vitamin C or you should add Vitamin C to your guinea's diet. There is Vitamin C available in tablet form that most guinea pigs will take as a treat.
- Optional: Slices of banana (a guinea pig favorite), apple, pear, or orange, a baby carrot or any small amount of a fruit or vegetable.

Here is a list of food to **AVOID** feeding your guinea pig:

- Iceberg lettuce. This has no real nutritional value.
- Stalks of celery. Those stringy pieces are hard for your guinea pig to digest. Cut celery up into smaller pieces before you give it to your pet.
- Shelled nuts or seeds. Your guinea pig can easily choke on the pieces of the shell. Also, be careful about the guinea pig treat sticks that are sold in pet stores because these often contain shelled seeds.
- Rhubarb, beans, or potatoes with green spots. These are all **poisonous** to your guinea pig.
- Plants such as daffodils, hyacinths, poppy and buttercups as well as others are **also poisonous**.
- Do not feed your guinea pig any dairy products because they are lactose intolerant, which means their bodies cannot properly process dairy products. Excess calcium will cause guinea pigs to develop kidney and/or bladder stones.

If you inadvertently feed your guinea pig something from the list above that is poisonous take him to the vet right away. If the food he ate is not poisonous, just watch him or her for signs of sickness.

Water

Your guinea should have access to clean water at all times. There are several types of water bottles available. Check the water bottle daily for water level and to make sure it is not leaking.

Toys

Give your guinea cardboard rolls, wood to chew on, newspapers to tear up, and balls to bump around.

Health Problems

Always **watch your guinea pig for signs of illness. SYMPTOMS WHICH WARRANT A TRIP TO THE VET ASAP:** If your guinea pig has any of the following symptoms, you should take it to the vet immediately.

- Injury due to a fall or other accident
- Refusal to eat or drink
- Diarrhea
- Constipation or bloat
- Weight loss of more than 2 ounces
- An obvious cold (which could develop into pneumonia or an upper respiratory infection)
- Labored breathing, wheezing, frequent sneezing, crusty eyes
- Blood in the urine, or whining while urinating
- Lethargy, hunched posture, failure to respond to you as usual

Remember – prompt, competent veterinary care is crucial to saving the life of a sick cavy. Unfortunately NONE of the symptoms above are universally safe to treat at home ... so please know that if you choose not to take your piggy to the vet, there is always a risk.

The following veterinarians treat small animals in the Des Moines area:

University West Pet Clinic - 8145 University Blvd, Clive (515) 223-8185

Starch Pet Hospital - 2222 University Ave, Des Moines (515) 283-1576

Oaks Veterinary Clinic - 2030 27th St, Des Moines (515) 279-3654

Heartland Animal Hospital – 4115 University Ave #200, Des Moines (515) 255-4464

Handling

The best way to pick up your pet is in a cradlelike manner. Put one hand against the chest and with the other hand gently cup their rear. Now, slowly lift the guinea pig out of its cage and then place it on your lap, on the floor or against your chest. As long as the guinea pig is near you or its feet are on something solid, it feels safe.

If your guinea pig wiggles and squirms that means it is scared and you are probably not holding it correctly. How long you can hold a guinea pig depends on how active it is. Energetic animals will only sit still for a short time.

Let small children practice holding their guinea pig with a stuffed animal. Show them the proper way to cradle the guinea pig and watch as they pick up their stuffed animal and hold it. Talk to them about how it feels to be squeezed too hard and emphasize the feelings of the guinea pig. Always supervise your child when he or she handles the guinea pig, as dropping and hurting an animal are frequent mishaps for young children.

Just like any dog or cat, a guinea pig likes to be petted and shown affection. They will enjoy your attention and holding. If your guinea pig starts to squirm while you are holding him, it is time to let him get back to the things he was doing in his cage. Sometimes the animal will just want to get something to eat or drink and sometimes he may just not enjoy being held for too long a period of time. Being held too much can make a guinea pig unhappy, so watch for signals from your pet that it needs to be put down.

Important “Do’s”

Spend a lot of time with your guinea, especially if he or she does not have a guinea companion. They need a lot of reassurance in this time of big changes, and lots of play to stay a happy guinea!

Check your guinea for matted fur, and brush the guinea at least a couple times a week even though they may not be shedding. It will start a routine and will get the guinea will get used to brushing.

Check their nails to see if they need trimmed—they grow very fast. Trim off the tips of the nails to avoid injury to the guinea or you may take them to the vet or to Furry Friends Refuge for nail trimming.

For behavior questions, call Furry Friends Refuge at 222-0009 or e-mail behavior@furryfriendsrefuge.org