

Is It OK To House Chinchillas Outside In Cold Climates?

Will chinchillas be OK if housed in a barn?

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Q: We have chinchillas, and one person we gave an offspring to asked if she could keep hers in the barn with the other animals over the winter. We live in Indiana. What do you think?

A: Domesticated chinchillas do not tolerate very low temperatures. Prolonged exposure (more than a few days) to temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit often results in respiratory infections that can very rapidly progress to pneumonia and death.

Young, weak or older chinchillas are most affected. Breeding pairs kept in low temperatures have a higher death rate among kits (young) because the kits cannot survive the cold.

If there is no warmer place to house the chinchillas during the cold months, then use a safe heat source to keep the chinchillas warm. A standard utility lamp (the type with an aluminum bowl around the bulb) can be placed directly on top of the cage. Chinchillas will chew anything soft, so be sure the lamp cord is kept away from the sides and top of the cage. Chewing a lamp cord may end in electrocution for a chinchilla.

The wattage of the light bulb should warm the area where the chinchillas sit in the cage to between 55 and 65 degrees Fahrenheit. A small thermometer is helpful to check the temperature. It takes between 40 and 75 watts to adequately warm an 18-inch tall cage. The final wattage will depend on distance from light bulb to the chins and also what the air temperature is in the barn. It is also helpful to place a couple towels around the cage to help keep the heat in. Use care when placing towels, however, to avoid creating a fire hazard. Also, watch that the chinchillas don't chew on the towels.

Remember, if the light bulb burns out and temperatures are very cold, the chinchillas may freeze to death quickly, so keeping the chinchillas inside where temperature is more controlled is the best solution.

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