

Best Companion For A Pet Guinea Pig

What animal makes the best companion or friend for a pet guinea pig?

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Q: I have had my guinea pig for about three years. I thought I should get him a playmate, so I bought a male rabbit to live with my guinea pig. After they lived together for awhile, my rabbit started trying to mount my guinea pig; this really frightened my guinea pig, so I separated them. I'm wondering about getting my guinea pig another playmate. Do you think this is a good idea? If so, what kind of animal should I get?

A: A guinea pig that acts lonely or won't interact or come out of its house may need a friend. Ideally a guinea pig would do best with its own species because guinea pigs are herd animals.

It is possible to have a guinea pig neutered, so you could get your guinea pig a female guinea pig companion once he is fixed. It is rare to find a spayed female guinea pig because this is still a risky surgery; it is easier to have a male guinea pig neutered.

If neuter surgery is too costly or you do not wish to risk it, it is possible to find a male guinea pig as your pet's companion. A guinea pig that's a bit younger than your own often works well.

Try introducing the guinea pigs on location so that if they do not get along you know right away. You may have to try several guinea pigs before finding the one that best meshes with your guinea pig's personality. It is just like interviewing someone to move in as a roommate for yourself. You don't always mesh with the first person through the door.

When a guinea pig male meets another male guinea pig they pace around each other smelling under the chin (Are you a friend?) and around the bottom (What is your rank in the herd?). This may continue for some time until one guinea pig permits the other to dominate it, usually by being mounted from behind.

If two guinea pigs are not going to mesh well, they purr and rumble around each other, chatter teeth and bump their head against the side of the other. They repeat this action and come back with hair in their mouth. They may even yawn at this point to show how big their teeth are before they go in for the final move of biting. They could roll around or kick up bedding. Any of these signs mean the guinea pigs are not going to get along.

It may take several tries before a friend can be found. There may be a point when your guinea pig may just not want a companion and finds your company to be enough. If this happens, you will know because it will be apparent after time and trying to find a friend that your guinea pig's behavior shows it isn't interested in a guinea pig friend.

As you search for a friend for your guinea pig, stay within his own species so he will not be overwhelmed or feel threatened by the size of another animal, as in the case of a rabbit. Rabbits tend to be very territorial, kicking and biting when unhappy. A guinea pig's only defense is to flee, and it can be injured easily. Hamsters and gerbils are nocturnal and hate to be woken up, which might even shorten their lives. Ferrets are carnivores and would cause serious injury to a guinea pig, perhaps killing it instinctively. Chinchillas are also nocturnal and take dust baths, which might cause respiratory irritation for a guinea pig, making them a poor match. That then brings us back to guinea pigs as a natural companion and, ultimately, a companion your guinea pig can most identify with.

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