

GUINEA PIGS

All About America's Favorite Pet Guinea Pigs

3 | Editor's Note

By Melissa Kauffman

Piggieeeeeees! That's one of the first things I say as soon as I walk in the door. Of course, Beatrice and Roxy rush into their igloos when I come bursting in, shouting my hellos. Then they poke their heads out, and seeing that it's only me, they cautiously make their way to the hay bin, staring at it, waiting for me to freshen it up.

I love guinea pigs. As an adult, I've had four of them. First there was Sophie, sweet and loveable, she lived with me for more than five years. Then there was the more outgoing and fun-loving Stanley that I adopted when he was 2. He made it to almost six years old.

4 | A Cavy Conundrum

Piece together the necessary information to find your perfect guinea pig.

By Audrey Pavia

White ones, beige ones, blacks and brindles. With all the guinea pigs in the world, picking the right one for you can be a challenge.

However, choosing a guinea pig requires much more than just picking the coat color you like best. When it comes to making that all-important decision, much more than aesthetic beauty comes into play, such as health, age, gender and breed.

Healthy Piggie

Probably the single most important factor of choosing a guinea pig is health. A guinea pig in good physical condition, free from disease and other maladies, makes the best pet.

12 | Feeding Frenzy

A happy, healthy guinea pig starts with proper nutrition.

By Sharyn Esposito, DVM

Native to South America, guinea pigs are herbivores, in other words, in the wild, they live on grassy plains and forage plants. You should mimic this diet for your pet by offering a variety of foods – a high-quality guinea pig pellet, fresh vegetables and fruits, clean hay and fresh water. This diet doesn't change much throughout life except that young, growing guinea pigs or pregnant sows require extra vitamin C.

A Need For Daily C

Unlike most mammals, guinea pigs cannot make their own vitamin C; therefore, they must receive it in their diet every day. To provide it, feed small quantities of fresh commercial guinea pig pellets.

20 | There's No Place Like Home

Building a habitat for your guinea pig – from the bottom up.

By Wendy Bedwell-Wilson

When Jackie Duboux brought Peruvian guinea pigs William and Harry home for her daughter from the local humane society, they got along splendidly in their small cage. They were used to it; it had been their home for the first six months of their lives.

But after the princely pigs overcame the shock of relocating, they fought like brothers.

Solution Sought

"I was upset because, I thought, this isn't going to work out," said Duboux, a former humane society educator in the San Francisco Bay area. "We knew there needed to be two together, but these boys together in a cage weren't getting on."

What were we going to do?"

After talking to people at the humane society and researching on the Internet, Duboux found what her pigs needed: space.

30 | Life With Guinea Pigs

You'll be amazed by the guinea pig's personality and need for interaction.

By Shannon Cauthen & Trina Swanberg Pelham

The first time you see a hairless guinea pig you may think to yourself, "What the heck is this thing?" But then you'll hold the smooth-skinned creature against your cheek, noting its unique form and the extreme warmth emanating from its skin. This hairless is known as a Baldwin. It has absolutely no hair anywhere on its body, but it is just as wonderful as its haired counterparts. "They are so ugly they are cute," said Carol Doan, a shelter volunteer in Colorado, "but then I never met a guinea pig that wasn't adorable to me."

Life with a guinea pig tends to evoke a similar sentiment among owners. So what can you expect if you share your home with them?

Breeds & Personality

When asked if differences exist between the different breeds of guinea pigs, it has been out experience, from a nonbreeding standpoint, that the only notable difference is not in breeds, but in personalities.

36 | The Beauty Routine

Keep your pet looking its best.

By Stacy N. Hackett

Taylor Calvetti of Wisconsin enjoyed grooming his longhaired Peruvian guinea pig, Hamlet. "He liked to hold his pet in his arms while combing him," said Calvetti's mother, Gwyn. "It game them both that extra cuddle time."

Frequent grooming sessions also help guinea pig owners stay aware of their pet's overall health, according to veterinarians. "This gives you the chance to interact and spoil your pet, and to look for any abnormalities," said Scott L. Thompson, DVM of East Side Animal Hospital in Evansville, Ind.

What should consistent grooming for your pet involve? Tasks and frequency will vary depending on your pet's coat length, but generally speaking, you should expect to brush or comb your guinea pig regularly, bathe it if necessary and trim its nails occasionally.

42 | Top 10 Health Problems

Be alert to these signs of illness to minimize your pet's suffering.

By Sharon Vanderlip, DVM

Guinea pigs are sturdy little animals, but when illness strikes, it's often serious. Preventing illness is much easier than treating it. By checking your cavy daily, from its nose to its toes, you can detect signs of health problems before they become severe. So, let's look at the 10 most common guinea pig health problems, how to identify them early on, and how to prevent them.

1. Scurvy (Vitamin C Deficiency)

What does your cavy have in common with monkeys, some fruit bats and you? A daily requirement for vitamin C. Most animals can make vitamin C from glucose in their bodies. Cavies, primates and some fruit bats are different. They don't have the special enzyme (L-gulonolactone oxidase) needed to do the job.

50 | First-Aid Crash Course

Learn how to care for your guinea pig during an emergency.

By Melissa A. Kling, DVM

Because guinea pigs are such gregarious little creatures, they are popular companion pets for children and adults. To enjoy life to the fullest, cavies require regular exercise as well as occasional outdoor recreation sessions and a variety of other enrichment activities. Any of these scenarios, however, can place guinea pigs at risk and set the stage for an emergency.

Establish a relationship with a qualified exotic mammal veterinarian and assemble a guinea pig first-aid kit as soon as you

bring your new guinea pig home. Having a guinea pig-proof environment and escape-proof cage will prevent some of the more common emergencies. Advanced preparation quite literally may mean the difference between life and death for your beloved pet.

58 | The Hip Bone's Connected To The...

Discover how each part of your guinea pig's body functions.

By Jill D. Partlow, DVM

Natives of South America, guinea pigs have compact bodies, short legs, relatively hairless ears and no tails. Although guinea pigs are classified as rodents, they are distinct from other rodents in several ways; most importantly, they lack an enzyme needed to produce vitamin C and, subsequently, require daily supplementation of vitamin C. Without vitamin C, guinea pigs may develop bone fractures, loss of appetite, diarrhea, and poor appetite due to a deficient immune system.

Guinea pigs also have a long gestation period compared to other rodents. The average length of a guinea pig pregnancy is 68 days, compared to the 17-day gestation period of a hamster. Guinea pig pups are precocious; they are born with hair, have eyes open and are ready to nibble on solid food.

66 | The Cutting Edge

Ease your worries by knowing what to expect if your guinea pig needs surgery.

By Karla S. Rugh, DVM, Ph.D.

Many guinea pigs never need surgery. Without a crystal ball, it's impossible to know if your guinea pig will be one of those or not. Just in case you find yourself facing surgery for your little buddy, here's a primer on what to expect.

The Patient

Guinea pigs have certain characteristics that influence how well they tolerate surgery. These characteristics include innate behavior and personality; physical, physiological and anatomical traits; and physical condition at the time of surgery. Some of these traits can be modified or corrected, but others cannot.

74 | Your Piggie's Life Story

From babies to great grandparents, these pets have special needs.

By Rebecca Sweat

Guinea pigs make wonderful companions. They're generally friendly, affectionate and easy to care for. If you've owned guinea pigs before, you know this. But if you're new to these critters, you may not know exactly what to expect out of them. You may be wondering if that cuddly baby guinea pig you saw for sale in the pet store is going to stay sweet and adorable, or whether it will exhibit certain behavior problems when it becomes mature.

Of course, maybe you've decided to buy not just one, but a pair of guinea pigs and are toying with the idea of breeding them. Or perhaps you're buying several guinea pigs and know that, you could end up with babies down the road.

84 | You Can Train Your Cavy

Understanding your guinea pig's behavior is the key to a tame pet.

By Nikki Moustaki

If this little piggie went to market, and this little piggie stayed home, then where did the others go? To piggie boot camp, of course. Actually, more like "I'll-follow-you-anywhere-for-a-yogurt-treat camp." In any case, cavies are more trainable than most people think, though it takes a patient person with realistic expectations to achieve any learned behavior from a piggie, especially the piggie that went wee-wee-wee all the way home (or on your lap, but that's another story.)

Taming: Your Main Mission

Your main mission in piggie boot camp is to tame your cavy (another word for guinea pig). This is about the most training that the average guinea pig owner does.

94 | Do You Speak Guinea Pig?

Decode the messages your pet sends you with this one-stop guide to communication.

By Eve Adamson

When Diana Bull wakes up in the morning and opens the refrigerator door or rustles a plastic produce bag, Billy, Trixie and Splat know exactly what's up, and they say so with loud and boisterous wheek wheeks. "This typical and cery loud

‘wheeeeeek’ means they think something to eat is coming along soon,” said Bull, who lives in Middlesex, England. “Guinea pigs let you know what they want. Who can resist giving them a slice of cucumber when they wheek so endearingly and persistently every time you open the refrigerator to make a salad?” she said. Bull writes and maintains a comprehensive website on guinea pig care and behavior.

Whether talking in wheeks or purrs, shrieks or rumbles, freezing in a fear stance or engaging in that gleeful dance cavy caretakers call “popcorning,” your guinea pig has a lot to say.

102 | Who's The Fairest One Of All?

There's one way to find out – participate in a guinea pig show.

By Susan Chamberlain

Showing your guinea pig can bring a new dimension to your life. Your little bundle of fur will take you places you never imagined. You'll make new friends, visit interesting places as you travel from show to show, and learn a lot about these delightful little animals. Perhaps you'll join a guinea pig club or cavy association, and begin showing your guinea pig. Who knows? Your animal may be a champion in waiting!

Location, Location

Depending on where you live, and how popular guinea pig shows are in your area, you may find shows held throughout the year. Some clubs put on as many as five or six shows a year and many guinea pig (cavy) fanciers travel to five or six shows a month!

114 | The Guinea Pig Archives

Dig into ancient history to uncover this animal's origins.

By Gerry Bucsis & Barbara Somerville

Believe it or not, that cute little ball of fur you call your pet guinea pig has a long and fascinating history. Have you ever wondered about your pet's ancestors? Or where its “wild” relatives live? Have you ever questioned where the name “guinea pig” came from? Or, what the term “human guinea pig” means?

The pet we all know and love in North America is actually native to the western coastal regions and Andean Mountain areas of South America. Referred to as cavy by breeders and as a cuy by South Americans, the scientific name for the domesticated guinea pig is *Cavia porcellus*.

124 | New Beginnings

Discover why these new guinea pigs have something in common with monogamy and dinner.

By Ifsha Buttitta

Whether they are kept as pets, research animals or for exhibition, guinea pigs make their mark on the world. Sometimes species come about by accidental discovery, as in the case of the Muenster Yellow-Toothed Cavy, whose monogamous behavior sets it apart from other species in the guinea pig world. Other times, breeds are developed for a specific purpose; for example, the large guinea pig bred in the Andean section of Peru is about twice the size of the Peruvian domesticated guinea pigs, and provides a greater source of protein and income to the families who raise it.

Muenster Yellow-Toothed Cavy

“Til death do us part” is typically not a phrase one associates with the mindset of a guinea pig, but for one cavy species, the words quite aptly describe its mating pattern and outlook on life.

126 | Picture Perfect Guinea Pigs

128 | Resources