GUINEA PIGS AS PETS

Often seen as undemanding and easy to care for, these "small" animals are a popular choice when it comes to finding a new addition to the family. But keeping guinea pigs is time-consuming and requires a thorough knowledge of their needs.

In brief
- Guinea pigs are not cuddly toys! The pleasure of keeping these fascinating animals should come from observing them. This means they are not suitable for children under ten years old.
- Life expectancy: seven to ten years.
- Acquiring: Give a new home to a guinea pig from a shelter. Don’t buy from a pet shop. That way you won’t be supporting the poor conditions in which these animals are often kept and bred commercially.
- Keeping: Guinea pigs need at least one companion of the same species and an enclosure of eight square metres that is as similar as possible to their natural environment. This will enable them to live according to their nature.
- Reproduction: Male guinea pigs become sexually mature when they reach a weight of about 250 grams, and should be neutered immediately.
- Time: Caring for guinea pigs takes at least one hour per day.
- Allergies: Guinea pigs’ fur, hay and bedding can cause allergies in humans.
- Holidays: Make sure your guinea pigs are well looked after (e.g. by a pet-sitter or in a good pet hotel) and have enough supplies while you are away on holiday.
- Costs: There are always costs associated with keeping an animal. These include buying and equipping the enclosure, food, litter and veterinary fees.
- Food: Please note that your guinea pigs will become overweight if you feed them too much grain.

Designing the habitat
Guinea pigs can be kept either outdoors or indoors.

Keeping outdoors
- The enclosure should be well insulated and provide good protection from the weather.
- Two to three animals should be given a minimum floor area of eight square metres.
- The enclosure fence should be at least 150 cm high and be fitted with a lockable door. A roof will provide protection from the weather and keep predators out.
Keeping indoors

- In addition to their enclosure, guinea pigs need opportunities to run around indoors (keep them away from electric cables and poisonous plants).
- Again, two to three animals need an enclosure of at least eight square metres.
- The enclosure should be placed somewhere calm and bright, free from draughts and extremes of temperature.

For both outdoors and indoors

- You can use various natural materials when designing the enclosure, such as branches, clay pots and bricks.
- Guinea pigs are flight animals, so their enclosure and area for running around in should always include places to withdraw to and hide.
- Read specialist literature to learn more about the basics of keeping guinea pigs in a species-appropriate way.

Above: Hay is the staple of a guinea pig’s diet. There should be a plentiful supply at all times.

Centre: In addition to dry food, guinea pigs should be given vegetables two to three times a day. They should have fruit only once a week.

Below: Guinea pigs kept outside.