



KEEPING GUINEA PIGS IN AN OUTDOOR ENCLOSURE



Living outdoors in a garden enclosure is the most appropriate arrangement for guinea pigs because conditions that are very similar to those found in nature can be achieved here. However, the effort and expense involved are considerable. Provided the enclosure design is appropriate, guinea pigs are capable of coping with the climate conditions in our latitudes. Nevertheless it is important for them to acquire the necessary coat outdoors during the summer before they are exposed to winter temperatures. The open-air enclosures available in shops are too small and are unsuitable for permanently keeping guinea pigs outdoors. But you can build a suitable enclosure out of wooden slats and a fine-mesh fence or aviary wire mesh even with only modest DIY skills.

Before getting guinea pigs, every potential owner should be aware that keeping them requires time and money, although the better the enclosure is planned out at the start, the less trouble it will be to care for them later on. To keep guinea pigs outdoors, you should acquire a group of at least three or four.

- **Location:** close to the house (visual contact); half-shady, half-sunny; rainwater must be able to drain off.
- **Size:** basically the bigger the better. Two to three guinea pigs should have at least eight square metres at their disposal.
- **Escapes and incursions:** to prevent escapes, the fence should be fixed in the ground. A canopy will protect the guinea pigs from rain and stop predators getting in.
- **Care:** to allow you to cater and care for the guinea pigs as easily as possible (and several times a day), the enclosure must be easy to access. The fence should be at least 150 cm high, to help you clean the enclosure.
- **Weather:** the feeding area must be covered, and the enclosure must include plenty of shady spots (open pipes, overhanging fir tree branches, etc.) designed

to protect your guinea pigs from the sun, as they are very sensitive to heat. You should also make sure air is able to circulate sufficiently inside the shelter when temperatures rise. A waterproof insulated shelter with bedding and hay must be provided for each guinea pig. However, this should be spacious enough to accommodate several guinea pigs at once. If the drinking water inside a shelter does not freeze in winter, then it is sufficiently insulated. The entrances to these shelters should be constantly kept free of snow, and at least half the enclosure should be dry – in other words, roofed.



- **Structure:** fencing off part of the garden is just the start. The enclosure must be designed for variety, so as to provide the animals with enough stimuli. Since guinea pigs are flight animals, you should also ensure that they have plenty of opportunities to withdraw or hide. Many natural materials are suitable for use in constructing the enclosure, e.g. tree trunks, branches, pottery vessels, pipes (made of clay or concrete, or fashioned out of a hollowed-out tree trunk etc.), inverted wooden crates, bricks, pieces of roots or bark. Another thing guinea pigs much appreciate is fir tree branches hanging down: these are suitable both for gnawing and for hiding beneath. You can also plant bushes (e.g. hazel bushes) inside the enclosure and build up little mounds of earth. Let your imagination run wild. The habitat should also be rearranged time after time to maintain your guinea pigs' interest in it.



Above: Guinea pigs are best kept in groups of at least three.

Centre: Hutches must offer plenty of space.

Below: Take a lot of different natural materials.

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