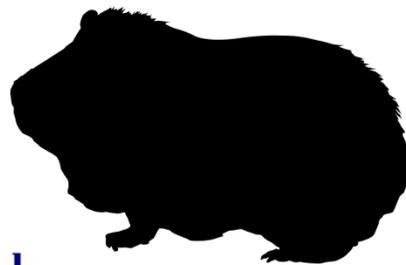


# FORT WAYNE ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL

## GUINEA PIG FOSTER MANUAL



**Fort Wayne Animal Care and Control**  
HELPING PEOPLE . HELPING ANIMALS



# Contacts

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For basic foster questions please email us at [Foster.help@cityoffortwayne.org](mailto:Foster.help@cityoffortwayne.org)

We have a closed group Facebook page specifically for our foster families to see what animals are in need of loving foster homes. You are welcome to post questions to this page but please realize that it is not checked regularly after hours or on the weekends. If you have an emergency please follow the emergency protocol below.

## Emergency Protocol

- Contact the volunteer/foster department during regular business hours: Mondays 10am-6pm and Tuesday-Friday 8am-6pm.
- If after hours call **260-449-3000**. An animal control officer will be available to assist you.

<b>Table of Contents</b>	
<b><u>Section 1: Introduction</u></b>	<b>4</b>
<b><u>Section 2: Frequently asked questions</u></b>	<b>4-5</b>
<b><u>Section 3: Guinea Pig Proofing</u></b>	<b>5-6</b>
Supplies you'll need	5
Foster proofing your space	6
<b><u>Section 4: Caring for your foster Guinea Pig</u></b>	<b>6-7</b>
Feeding and watering	6
Weighing	6
Confinement and Cage Setup	6
Housing multiple guinea pigs together	7
Grooming	7
Appropriate Fruits/Vegetables for Guinea Pigs	7
<b><u>Section 5: Handling</u></b>	<b>7-8</b>
<b><u>Section 6: Cleaning</u></b>	<b>8-9</b>
Daily Cleaning Protocols	8
Deep Cleaning Protocols	8
Bleach Rules	9
<b><u>Section 7: Pre and Post Natal Care for Guinea Pigs</u></b>	<b>9-10</b>
Signs of Normal Labor	9
When to Notify	10
<b><u>Section 8: Medical and Emergency Protocols</u></b>	<b>11-12</b>
Signs of illness and what to do next	11
Criteria for emergencies	11
Emergency protocol	11
Euthanasia	11-12
<b><u>Section 9: Scheduling appointments for your fosters</u></b>	<b>12</b>
Picking up and returning your fosters	12
Scheduling vet appointments for your fosters	12
Picking up supplies	12
Scheduling your fosters to return to the shelter for adoption	12
<b><u>Section 10: Helping your foster guinea pig get adopted</u></b>	<b>12</b>
Frequently asked questions	12
<b><u>Section 11: Breaks</u></b>	<b>13</b>
<b><u>ASPCA Guinea Pig Care</u></b>	<b>14</b>
<b><u>Oxbow Caring for your Guinea Pig</u></b>	<b>15-16</b>
<b><u>The Spruce Guinea Pig Vocalizations and Body Language</u></b>	<b>17-18</b>

## **Section 1: Introduction**

Thank you so much for your interest in fostering for Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control. By opening up your home to foster, you're not only helping to save lives, you're providing the individual attention and care these animals desperately need.

Once you have completed your foster profile, our volunteer/foster coordinator will get in touch with you to schedule a training, answer questions you may have and add you to our Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control foster Facebook page where you can see all animals who are awaiting loving foster homes.

We also have a great group of volunteer mentors that are admins on our foster Facebook page as well that are equipped to answer many questions about fostering. They triage questions and contact the volunteer/foster coordinator accordingly.

Fosters are asked to provide care for the animals and provide transportation to and from shelter appointments as needed. Although fostering can be a lot of work, it is a very rewarding experience!

## **Section 2: Frequently asked questions**

### **What do foster families need to provide?**

Foster families need to provide:

- A healthy and safe environment for foster animals.
- Transportation to and from the shelter for all appointments
- Socialization and cuddle time to help teach the foster animals about positive relationships

### **How much time do I need to spend with the small animal?**

As much time as you can. The more time you spend with your foster animal, the more socialized they will be to people.

### **Can I foster small animals even if I have a full-time job?**

Yes. The volunteer/foster coordinator will match you with the foster animal appropriate for your schedule. We will need you to be available, however, to take the foster animals to all shelter appointments, including nonscheduled ones if they get sick.

### **How long will the small animals need to be in foster care?**

Time frames are determined on a case by case basis. You will know what our plan is when you take an animal to foster.

### **Will I need to give medicine to the small animal fosters?**

While we do our best to ensure that we are sending out healthy animals to foster care, most illnesses have incubation periods, meaning that if the animal picked up something at the shelter, symptoms can arise after you take them home. So, some animals do not require any medicine, while others do. If your foster animal needs medication, we can show you how to administer it before you take them home.

### **Can I let my foster animals interact with my personal pets?**

No, animals are susceptible to illness and can carry or catch dangerous ailments easily. For this reason, we require that foster parents isolate foster animals with their own supplies in an area that is separated from your personal pets. We also advise that you consult with your veterinarian before fostering to ensure that all of your personal pets are healthy and up-to-date on all vaccines. If, for any reason, your personal pet becomes ill while you are fostering for Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control, we cannot provide medical care for your personal pet.

### **Will any of my foster animals die?**

Sadly, it is possible for them to become ill and pass away while in a foster home. This may be the hardest thing about fostering. Keeping in close contact with the volunteer/foster coordinator will hopefully help catch any issues early on.

### **Who will take care of my foster animals if I need to go out of town?**

If you have travel plans while you are fostering for Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control, you will need to contact the volunteer/foster coordinator and make arrangements to return your fosters to the shelter for the duration of the time that you are gone. Please provide at least one week's notice to ensure that we can make alternate arrangements for your fosters. If your trip is over a holiday, please provide a minimum of two weeks' notice.

You cannot leave your foster animals with an unauthorized person or pet sitter. We have specific training for foster parents, and pet sitters have not undergone that training or signed the release waivers for the foster program.

### **What if a foster animal bites me?**

If you are having any behavior issues with your foster please let us know right away. We may be able to offer some suggestions or remove the animal from your home if necessary.

### **What if I want to adopt one of my fosters or know someone who does?**

If you would like to adopt your foster, or find someone who wants to adopt your foster, we will need a completed adoption profile from the potential adopter (with foster's name and animal number) and the full adoption process will be followed. Please contact the volunteer/foster coordinator right away with this information because once the guinea pig is up for adoption, we cannot hold him/her for anyone, including the foster parent.

### **Will it be difficult for me to say goodbye to my foster?**

Saying goodbye can be the most difficult part of fostering. Keep in mind that by fostering these vulnerable pets, you are playing a crucial role in helping to save lives.

### **Section 3: Guinea Pig Proofing**

It is very important that guinea pigs have a place where they feel secure and safe. Choose a room in your home that will be the primary room the guinea pig will reside in. This room should be able to withstand accidents and other messes the animal may make. You may choose a bathroom or spare bedroom but be sure there are no small hiding spots that the animal can get in. If you use a room with carpet you may want to consider putting down some linoleum which can be placed over the carpet which makes cleaning/disinfecting very easy.

\*Remember that all foster animals must be kept indoors –housing them in hutches/garages is not permitted.

### **Supplies you'll need**

Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control will provide you with any supplies that you may need. However, we greatly appreciate any help that you can provide in supplying items for your foster animals. Here's what you'll need to care for your fosters:

- A large spacious cage with a solid bottom, no aquariums please
- Water bottle
- Food pellets
- Timothy hay
- Bed shavings

- Food dish
- Litterbox
- Recycled newspaper litter for litterbox
- Hiding house (Igloo)
- Carrier for travel

Additional supplies helpful to have on hand for fosters:

- Extra water bottle
- Toys
- Extra cage/portable playpen if housing multiples
- Brushes/combs
- Fresh fruit/veggies

### **Foster proofing your space**

Foster guinea pigs are tiny and cute, but just like children, they are also very curious. They will try to get into everything to explore, so you will need to guinea pig proof your space. Here are some tips:

- Be sure there are no cords they can chew on
- Put away anything the animal could become tangled up in
- Block any holes/gaps that they could get stuck in
- Tie up cords from blinds
- Be sure that toilet lids stay closed

### **Section 4: Caring for your foster Guinea Pig**

Guinea pigs make great pets. Once settled into their home they are friendly and talkative. Their average life span is 4-8 years. Regular exercise out of their cage is essential for guinea pigs. Guinea pigs like a variety of safe toys such as wide tubes, cartons and wood bird toys. Most guinea pigs are cautious about being handled but don't mind being petted once they are on your lap. Children must always be supervised when handling guinea pigs as they may try to hold too tightly or allow the guinea pig to jump or fall. Guinea pigs are easily injured and may nip if not handled gently.

### **Feeding and watering**

Please make sure you have guinea pig food pellets available at all times along with timothy hay. You may also provide fresh fruits and/or vegetables. See the chart below on appropriate fruits/vegetables your guinea pig may have. Guinea pigs must also have adequate vitamin C in their diets. Please make sure there is always fresh water available to your guinea pig.

### **Weighing**

Please weigh adult guinea pigs every few days to make sure you are monitoring any significant loss/gain. If you are caring for babies it is very important you weight them every day. Weight loss can be an indicator that something more serious is happening.

### **Confinement and Cage Setup**

It is important that your fosters stay confined to their foster area at all times unless they are under close supervision for some free time.

The ideal cage set up would be large enough for each guinea pig to have 4 square foot of space (the larger the better) with a solid bottom (no wire bottoms and no aquariums please). The guinea pigs must be housed indoors with a temp between 60 and 80 degrees. You will line the bottom of the cage

with bedding, have a hiding house available, food bowl with food, a water bottle filled with water, and timothy hay available.

### **Housing multiple guinea pigs together**

Guinea pigs are very social animals and prefer to live in pairs. FWACC will do our best to be sure the guinea pigs are getting along before sending them to your home.

### **Grooming**

Brush your guinea pig regularly to keep their coat clean and free of tangles and loose hair. Long haired guinea pigs need brushed daily to prevent matting of the hair. Please do not bathe your guinea pigs.

### **Appropriate Fruits/Vegetables for Guinea Pigs**

Recommended vegetables: 10-20% (2-3 cups daily for an adult) of a guinea pigs diet should be from fresh, green, leafy veggies.

- Carrot tops- the green part
- Celery- especially the leaves
- Kale
- Leaves from broccoli and cauliflower
- Dark colored lettuces and purple lettuces
- Herbs such as mint, coriander and parsley

Recommended fruits: roughly a teaspoon may be fed.

- Kiwi
- Papaya
- Citrus
- Mango
- Melons
- Banana
- Cherries
- Berries- any kind
- Peach
- Apple
- Pear

\*Please do not feed Iceberg lettuce, potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, or anything that is old/spoiled.

### **Section 5: Handling**

Guinea pigs can be nervous when handled. It is very important to always great them gently and ensure they are fully supported. By training guinea pigs to being handled it will allow for a better relationship between them and their caregiver. Training for handling should be done by ensuring all handling is low stress and a pleasant experience. By using treats and food it can help condition the animals to enjoying handling.

When picking up guinea pigs you should place your hands quickly and firmly around their body. Make sure you have a firm grip on them before picking them up. When picking up be sure that both the body and the rear legs are supported. Guinea pigs should be held close to your body with all limbs supported.



### **Section 6: Cleaning**

Once you've returned your fosters to Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control for adoption, you must sanitize your fostering room or area before you can take home new fosters. Remove anything the fosters touched and clean it with a weak bleach solution, consisting of one part bleach to 32 parts cold water (see below).

If you have items that can be washed in the dishwasher, please do so since the heat will disinfect those items. Plastic or metal items that need to be sterilized, such as litter boxes or plastic toys, should be soaked in the bleach solution for 10 minutes and then rinsed off. Throw away any toys that cannot be sterilized. Being conscientious about sterilization will help ensure that your next foster will not catch any illnesses from the previous foster.

### **Daily Cleaning Protocols:**

- Soiled bedding should be scooped out and replaced with new bedding
- Empty dirty litter pans and replace litter
- Provide fresh water, food pellets, hay and fruits/veggies
- Guinea pigs will require a full change of bedding at least once a week

### **Deep Cleaning Protocols should be utilized as needed and after your foster is returned to FWACC**

- Remove ALL items from cage.
- Throw away all disposable items. When available, use metal/ceramic bowls instead of plastic. Plastic is porous and can harbor bacteria.
- Clean out all bedding, litter, debris from the cage.
- Thoroughly spray all surfaces with bleach solution.
- (Bleach solution is 1:10 ratio; 32oz Spray Bottle = 3oz of bleach + 30oz of water)
- Let the chemical sit for **10 minutes** while it disinfects the kennel.
- Dampen towel with more bleach solution and wipe down the cage while making sure to clean any nooks, crannies, and surfaces as thoroughly as possible.
- Make sure the cage is **completely dry** before setting back up with all fresh items.

## **Bleach Rules**

Make a new batch of bleach solution for each use. Bleach rapidly degrades in the presence of light and when mixed with water.

Let it sit on the surface for 10 minutes. Enough solution should be applied to ensure it does not evaporate within 10 minutes.

Discard any remaining solution.

## **Section 7: Pre and Post Natal Care for Guinea Pigs**

Often times we send female guinea pigs to foster care to monitor for pregnancy. This is typically when the female has arrived to FWACC paired with a male. The only way to determine if the female is in fact pregnant is to send her to foster care for the gestation period. If she does not have any babies during this time she will be returned to FWACC for adoption.

Gestation is from 59 to 73 days and average litter size is 1-4 but can be as many as 7 or more. Please weigh your foster guinea pig each week and monitor weight gain. Significant weight gain (more than a few ounces per week) can be an early sign of pregnancy

A guinea pig's pelvic bone (just above her genitals) will open to approximately 2-fingers width when she is about to have her babies. For most guinea pigs, this full dilation will occur about a day before birth. The pelvic bone will usually start to slowly open from 1-2 weeks before full dilation. This is your best indication that her body is responding well, and she should be ok to deliver her babies

- A good diet and exercise are extremely important. As delivery approaches and your guinea pig increases in size, handle her very carefully or not at all.
- It is vitally important that you get an accurate scale and weigh each pup and the mother daily (at a regular time) after the birth for several weeks to ensure they are healthy and thriving.
- You can carefully hold the new babies right away. The sow will not reject them if they have been handled. Handling new babies often will help socialize them.
- If you notice the pup not gaining weight please inform FWACC.
- Pregnant guinea pigs, new mothers, and pups have similar requirements. Monitor closely for any issues and provide a standard healthy diet with plenty of pellets and timothy hay.
- The ideal age to separate the male pups from the female pups and mother is at 3 weeks of age. This will ensure the male pups have the maximum benefit of companionship and can more naturally wean from the mother, while also preventing accidental pregnancies should the pups mature early. Female pups can be housed with the mother. We will have you bring the family in around this time to properly sex them and separate accordingly.

## **Signs of Normal Labor**

- Normal labor should be short and sweet. The whole process from first contraction to last baby can be as short as 15 minutes, and up to 40 minutes depending on how many babies she has.
- There should be little or no blood, especially before any babies have been produced. If you see your sow bleeding, more than a tablespoon, dripping blood, or many pieces of bloody bedding with no babies, please let FWACC know.

- The sow will sit very squarely, and make a "hiccupping" type of motion. When she has a contraction, she will hunch up. With a contraction, she will reach under her and pull the baby out. Then she will start to clean off the sac from the face, then the body of the baby.
- Sometimes, the babies come so fast that the mom has no time to tend to each baby. If you are present, and she is still cleaning up a baby and is not tending to the next one, get a clean towel and carefully pick the baby up, take the sac off the baby, and rub it gently to make sure it is breathing. Be especially careful around the newborns eyes, as they are normally wide open, and you can scratch the cornea. After you dry it off, put it back down beside the mom.
- Try and make sure that the afterbirths have been delivered. There should be one for every baby. You will most likely not see the placentas, as the mom will eat the afterbirths and all the bloody wet shavings. Some sows deliver at night, and by morning you would never know she had babies except there are little pigs in the cage. If you are present, you can help her out by removing some of the placentas and some of the soiled bedding. She eats those to keep predators from discovering the babies. The afterbirth will be a round flat bloody object ranging in size from a nickel to a quarter.
- NEVER try and pull anything out of the mom. If you see the baby partway out, and the mom is making no effort to help it, and you are SURE it is a baby, then you can gently try and help maneuver the baby out.

**When to Notify: If you witness any of the signs listed below, please notify FWACC.**

- Sow straining for more than 10 minutes and not producing a baby
- Sow bleeding
- Sow squealing loudly with each contraction
- Sow getting exhausted and just giving up from trying
- No placenta being produced with the babies
- Sow smelling like nail polish remover, or acetone. This can occur from 2 weeks before until 2 weeks after the birth

Some first time moms are not the greatest and may not know what to do right away. Usually, by the second day, they realize that no one else is tending to these little noisy creatures so they might as well do it. If this happens do not interfere right away, give mom a chance to do what she should naturally do. If by day three mom still wants nothing to do with the babies please notify FWACC.

Please interfere if she is biting the babies, or attacking them. If this happens please separate and notify FWACC. Keep in mind many moms are very vigorous in cleaning up these babies. They will grab the baby's hair in their teeth and pull, till the babies squeal. They will lick and lick till you think she is trying to remove their fur. That is normal. Her instincts are to remove any smell that will lead predators to her babies.

Moms may continue to spot for up to 4-5 days after delivery, although 1-2 is more normal. If there are large quantities of blood, gooey bloody discharge after 2-3 days, or the sow is not acting normally contact FWACC.

Here is a good website for more information: <http://www.guinealynx.info/labor.html>

## **Section 8: Medical and Emergency Protocols**

Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control provides all medical care for our foster animals through our shelter veterinarian. Because we are ultimately responsible for your foster's well-being, our staff must authorize any and all treatment for foster animals.

If your foster needs to see the shelter veterinarian, please notify the volunteer/foster coordinator by email or phone. The volunteer/foster coordinator will schedule the appointment and notify you of the date/time.

Remember, foster parents will be responsible for payment of any medical care if they take their foster animal to a veterinarian without authorization from the volunteer/foster coordinator.

### **Signs of illness and what to do next**

Guinea pigs do a good job of masking when they don't feel well, so determining if a foster is ill will require diligent observation of daily activity and appetite levels. Signs to watch out for are: repeatedly sneezing, crusty eyes, dirty ears, diarrhea, hair loss, weight loss or a change in behavior. If you have any questions about the health of your foster, please contact the volunteer/foster coordinator, who will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

### **Criteria for emergencies**

Here are some specific symptoms that could indicate an emergency:

- Not breathing or labored breathing
- Signs of extreme dehydration
- Abnormal lethargy or unable to stand
- Unconsciousness or unable to wake up
- Cold to the touch
- Any trauma
- A large wound or profuse bleeding that doesn't stop when pressure is applied
- Loss of appetite for more than 12 hours

If a foster displays any of these symptoms, please follow the emergency phone protocol. If the animal is vomiting or has diarrhea, but is still active, eating and drinking, you can probably wait until the next day to get help. However, if the animal is lethargic and shows no interest in food or water, start the emergency protocol.

### **Emergency protocol**

- Contact the volunteer/foster department during regular business hours.
- If after hours call **260-449-3000**. An animal control officer will be available to assist you.

### **Euthanasia**

Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control never sends an animal out to foster care intending the end result to be euthanasia. Through the use of foster homes we find out information that we would otherwise never know. Although most of the information we gain is very positive there are times when serious issues occur once the animal is in foster care.

The decision to euthanize an animal is not taken lightly and is used only when we have exhausted all reasonable alternatives. Some animals may display behavior patterns or have physical conditions that make it difficult, with limited resources, to care for them at the shelter or in a home environment. There are also times that an animal may show behaviors that could make them potentially dangerous to people or other animals. Euthanasia by injection, performed by certified euthanasia technicians, is

currently recommended as the most humane method for all companion animals and is the only method used by Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control.

Euthanasia is an emotional issue for everyone involved. Please know that we will be open and honest when talking about this sensitive topic should it arise with one of the animals you are fostering.

### **Section 9: Scheduling appointments for your fosters**

Please note that all appointments, including your pickup and drop-off appointments, should be scheduled in advance. If you cannot make an appointment, please notify the volunteer/foster department immediately to reschedule as appointment times fill up quickly.

#### **Picking up and returning your fosters**

To pick up and return your fosters, simply schedule an appointment with the volunteer/foster coordinator. This is typically done straight through our foster Facebook page when you comment on the status of a group waiting for foster. Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control does have the right to assist foster families in selecting fosters that are best suited for their lifestyle and experience.

#### **Scheduling vet appointments for your fosters**

Fort Wayne Animal Care & Control provides all medical care for our foster animals through our shelter veterinarian. Because we are ultimately responsible for your foster's well-being, our staff must authorize any and all treatment for fosters.

If your foster needs to see the shelter veterinarian, please notify the volunteer/foster coordinator by email or phone. The volunteer/foster coordinator will schedule the appointment and notify you of the date/time.

Remember, foster parents will be responsible for payment of any medical care if they take their foster animal to a veterinarian without authorization from the volunteer/foster coordinator.

#### **Picking up supplies**

If you need additional supplies for your fosters please help yourself to our foster supply pantry. If you do not see what you are looking for please find volunteer/foster department staff as they can assist you.

#### **Scheduling your fosters to return to the shelter for adoption**

The volunteer/foster coordinator will be in touch when your fosters are able to return to the shelter for adoption. This will be scheduled in advance to make sure we have room for your fosters upon returning.

### **Section 10: Helping your foster guinea pigs get adopted**

#### **Frequently asked questions**

##### **How can I help my fosters find great homes?**

We welcome any quality photos that you take of your fosters in your home; we can use the photos to create a kennel card. You may market your fosters through word of mouth, social media, etc.

##### **What if I know someone who's interested in adopting my foster?**

If you would like to adopt your foster, or find someone who wants to adopt your foster, we will need a completed adoption profile from the potential adopter (with foster's name and animal number) and the full adoption process will be followed. Please contact the volunteer/foster coordinator right away with this information because once the guinea pig is up for adoption, we cannot hold him/her for anyone, including the foster parent.

## **Section 11: Breaks**

We understand bringing your guinea pig back may be an emotional time for many fosters. A one to two week break between foster assignments is generally enforced for reasons of sanitation and mental health.

Volunteering in the animal welfare field often times put you at a greater risk of developing compassion fatigue. When your emotions build up you may feel exhausted, angry, sad, etc. A combination of these symptoms can lead to burnout and is often responsible for the loss of many talented foster volunteers. In order to maintain your emotional and physical health, take frequent breaks and reach out if you are struggling with anything, we are here to help!

Thanks again for opening your home for guinea pigs in need. Please reach out to the volunteer/foster department for any additional questions/concerns.



**WHERE TO GET A GUINEA PIG:** There are many guinea pigs available for adoption at animal shelters and small-animal rescue groups. Call your local shelter and visit websites like [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com) for guinea pigs in need of loving homes.

## BACKGROUND

**ALSO KNOWN AS:** Cavy

**WEIGHT:** Up to 2 pounds

**LIFESPAN:** 5-7 years

**COST PER YEAR:** \$635

**GOOD WITH KIDS?:** Great pet for older children who've mastered proper handling techniques.

**FUN FACT:** A happy guinea pig will jump straight up in the air—this is called popcoming!

## FOOD

- Guinea pig pellets are the basis of your pet's diet. An average guinea pig will eat about 1/8 cup daily. Timothy hay-based pellets are recommended for adults, and avoid those made with nuts, seeds, dried fruits and corn products.
- Grass hay and fresh, clean water should be available to your pet at ALL times.
- Offer small, bite-sized amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables daily; half a handful of veggies and a slice of fruit per pig is plenty.
  - >> **Recommended:** green leafy vegetables, green peppers, peas, apple, blueberries, oranges and grapes.
  - >> **Avoid:** iceberg lettuce, potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, anything that's old or spoiled.
- Guinea pigs cannot manufacture vitamin C, so make sure your pet gets enough of this essential nutrient. A quarter of an orange will meet the requirements; other high-C foods include kale and strawberries.

## CAGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Guinea pigs are social animals who prefer to live in small groups. Two or more females will become great friends. If you want two males, it's best to choose two babies from the same litter. Since guinea pigs multiply rapidly, keeping males and females together is not recommended.
- Provide a minimum of four square feet of cage space per guinea pig—but please try to get as large a cage as possible. Make sure it's a solid-bottom cage with a wire cover—no glass aquariums, which don't provide adequate ventilation.
- Keep the cage indoors, away from drafts and extreme temperatures, in an environment maintained at 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Line the bottom of the cage with bedding (see Supply Checklist for recommendations). Do not use cedar or pine chips, which contain oils that can be dangerous to your pet.
- Your pig will need a cave for sleeping and resting, such as medium-sized flower pot or covered sleeping box, readily available at pet supply stores.

## BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

- Guinea pigs are known for their expressive vocalizations. They'll whistle and grunt when they're excited, and squeak with delight when their favorite humans enter the room.
- Guinea pigs rarely bite, but they can nip if mishandled or fear a threatening animal. It's important to get your pet used to you—and used to being

handled. Start by feeding her small treats in her cage. When she's comfortable with that, carefully pick her up, one hand supporting her bottom, the other over her back.

## EXERCISE & TOYS

- Once your pet is hand-tamed, let her play in a small room or enclosed area for additional daily exercise. Carefully check the room for any openings from which she could escape. You'll need to supervise at all times, because guinea pigs will chew on anything in their paths—including electrical wires.
- Your pet will also enjoy playing in her cage. Provide cardboard tubes, empty oatmeal containers and/or coffee cans with smoothed edges for hide-and-seek, and bricks or rocks for climbing.
- Provide your pet with appropriate chew toys to help wear down her teeth, which grow continuously.
  - >> **Recommended:** branches and twigs from trees that have not been sprayed with pesticides, small pieces of unpainted, untreated wood.

## DAILY CARE

- Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale food from the cage daily.
- Scrub the cage with warm water and mild soap weekly; let dry before adding fresh bedding.
- Brush your pet regularly to keep the coat clean and remove tangles or loose hair; long-haired guinea pigs should be brushed daily to prevent knots.

## SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Bring your guinea pig to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly appointment if you think your pet is sick—seek help immediately. Common signs that something isn't right include sneezing, crusty eyes, dirty ears, severe diarrhea, hair loss, weight loss, change in behavior and bloody or gritty urine.

IF YOU THINK THAT YOUR PET MAY HAVE INGESTED A POTENTIALLY POISONOUS SUBSTANCE, CALL THE ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL CENTER AT (888) 426-4435

A \$65 consultation fee may be applied to your credit card

## GUINEA PIG SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Solid-bottom cage with wire cover or plastic bottom "tub" cage
- ✓ Guinea pig pellets
- ✓ Cage bedding (aspen or hardwood shavings, timothy hay or processed paper products)
- ✓ Small, heavy food dish
- ✓ Grass hay
- ✓ Bricks, rocks, cardboard boxes, plastic pipes & other safe toys
- ✓ Medium flower pot or covered sleeping box
- ✓ Brush and comb
- ✓ Attachable water bottle with drinking tube
- ✓ Unpainted, untreated piece of wood or safe chew toy



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# Caring for Your GUINEA PIG

This care guide from Oxbow Animal Health will teach you everything you need to know about keeping your pet guinea pig healthy and happy.



## FEEDING YOUR GUINEA PIG

Your guinea pig is a herbivore, which means he eats only plant material.

Grass hay should be the high-fiber cornerstone of every guinea pig's diet. The fiber in hay helps meet the important digestive health needs of herbivores such as guinea pigs. A daily recommended amount of a uniform, fortified food provides essential vitamins and minerals not found in hay. Fresh greens are also an important component of a guinea pig's diet, and healthy treats can be beneficial when given in moderation.



## HAY

Your guinea pig should have unlimited access to a variety of quality grass hays. Among many benefits, hay helps prevent obesity, dental disease, diarrhea, and boredom. Since replacing the hay in your guinea pig's habitat can encourage picky eating, we recommend changing it only when soiled.

Young (less than six months old), pregnant, nursing, or ill animals can benefit from eating alfalfa hay in addition to grass hay because of the higher nutritional elements. Otherwise, alfalfa should only be given occasionally as a treat.

Generally, your guinea pig should be eating a pile of hay twice the size of its body daily.

### Hay Selection

**Keep in mind:** Grass hay should make up the majority of your pet's daily diet. Offer a variety of hay to your guinea pig to promote optimum health. Since hay is a natural product, each bag will look and feel different. Use our Taste & Texture Guide located on every hay package to determine your pet's taste and texture preferences.

We have many all-natural farm-fresh hays to choose from including Western Timothy, Orchard Grass, Oat Hay, Botanical Hay, and Organic Meadow Hay. Also, check out our Harvest Stacks line of compressed hays for extra enrichment.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Your guinea pig's teeth never stop growing. Hay is essential because it stimulates normal chewing and dental wear patterns, helping decrease the risk of dental disease.

## FORTIFIED FOOD

Providing a daily recommended amount of a high-fiber, age-appropriate fortified food with stabilized vitamin C will help ensure that your pet receives essential vitamins and minerals not found in hay.



### Pellet Selection

Always choose an age-appropriate pellet specifically formulated for guinea pigs. Our Essentials Young Guinea Pig Food is ideal for guinea pigs under six months. For guinea pigs over six months, choose one of our three adult formulas.

### AVOID:

Mixes with nuts, corn, seeds, and fruit because guinea pigs have a tendency to select those tempting morsels over the healthy pellets



## GREENS

Fresh greens are a vital part of your pet's daily diet. Greens contribute to hydration and provide necessary vitamins and minerals, as well as enrichment. Check with your qualified exotic veterinarian for a full list of appropriate greens. A good starter list of varieties to offer and avoid includes:

OFFER:	AVOID:
Romaine, bib, and red leaf lettuce	Leeks, chives, and onions



## TREATS

Treats (including fruits and veggies) are great for encouraging interaction between you and your pet, but they should only be given after daily foods have been eaten. Offering too many treats can cause your guinea pig to refuse his healthy, essential foods. It's important to remember that not all treats are created equal! All Oxbow treat varieties are designed to be as wholesome as they are delicious.



## HOUSING YOUR GUINEA PIG

Guinea pigs need a safe place that allows enough room to climb, jump, and explore, as well as to escape potential environmental stressors.

Choose a well-structured habitat with a solid floor and set it up near household activities, but away from drafts. Your guinea pig's habitat should be outfitted with environmental essentials such as a space to hide (Timothy CLUB Bungalow or Tunnel), some toys, grass hay, a food bowl, and two sources of fresh, clean water.

The confines of a habitat do not allow enough space for a pet's exercise needs. All animals benefit from activity and love to move and explore; a play yard allows you to create a safe, secure exercise area for your pet.

## SUPPLIES FOR YOUR GUINEA PIG

- Fortified age-specific food:** Oxbow Essentials Young Guinea Pig Food for guinea pigs under six months of age. For guinea pigs over six months of age, choose one of Oxbow's three adult formulas.
- Two or more varieties of **Oxbow's farm-fresh hay**
- Oxbow treats** for healthy bonding and enrichment
- Water bottle** and heavy **water dish**
- Heavy **food bowl**
- Large habitat** with solid, non-slip flooring
- Large play yard** for safe exercise outside the habitat
- Hiding space** such as Oxbow's Timothy CLUB Bungalow or Tunnel
- Litter and bedding material** such as Oxbow's Eco-Straw and Pure Comfort Bedding
- Natural Science Vitamin C supplement, as needed\***

\*In times of stress, a guinea pig's need for vitamin C can fluctuate. Supplement with Natural Science Vitamin C to ensure your guinea pig is getting what he needs.

## GUINEA PIG BEHAVIOR

Guinea pigs are most active at dawn and twilight, taking naps throughout the day.

Guinea pigs often show their affection through vocalizations. For example, you may hear a sound called "wheeking" when your pet is looking for a treat, or purring when being held. Also, your guinea pig may "popcorn" - bounce excitedly and repeatedly to express happiness. The best way to interact with your guinea pig is to play with him on the floor. As creatures of habit, guinea pigs need to be introduced to changes slowly in regards to feedings and routines.

Some guinea pig behaviors can seem rather strange. For example, you may see your guinea pig eat its own poop. This is a normal, healthy behavior that provides essential vitamins and nutrients.



Guinea pigs are **INQUISITIVE & CURIOUS** by nature.

## YOUR GUINEA PIG'S HEALTH

You should visit a qualified exotics veterinarian at least once a year for check-ups on your guinea pig's diet, behavior, and health.

Be prepared for your pet's visits by making a list of any questions or concerns you may have ahead of time. Ask your veterinarian to recommend an appropriate age to have your guinea pig spayed or neutered; this will increase the chances of a longer, healthier life for your pet. Many guinea pig health problems are preventable with proper diet and care.

### REASONS TO CONTACT YOUR VET:

- Loose, soft, or lack of stool
- Small, dry, or infrequent stools
- Blood in the urine
- Sneezing or trouble breathing
- Hunching in a corner or lack of activity (lethargy)
- Overgrown front teeth
- Observed difficulty with chewing
- Bald patches in the fur
- Sores on the feet
- Abnormal eating or drinking



For more information about guinea pig's nutrition and behaviors, visit [www.oxbowanimalhealth.com](http://www.oxbowanimalhealth.com).



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Murdock, Nebraska

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## Guinea Pig Vocalizations and Body Language

By Lianne McLeod, DVM Updated 10/30/16



Guinea pigs don't talk, but that doesn't mean they don't communicate using sounds and postures. Though we may not understand all the noises and actions guinea pigs make, there are some things they do that seem to have a fairly clear meaning and that can help you understand your guinea pigs.

### Vocalizations of Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs make a variety of noises, some of which most guinea pig owners will recognize.

Contented guinea pigs just going about their day often make a variety of squeaks, chortles, and quiet grunts which also seem to accompany casual guinea pig interactions. Along with these frequent squeaks and chortles, there are a variety of other quite distinctive noises you might hear from your guinea pig.

- **Wheeking:** This is a distinctive (and common) vocalization and it is most often used to communicate anticipation or excitement, particularly about being fed. It sounds like a long, loud squeal or whistle. Sometimes wheeking may simply serve as a call for attention. Many guinea pigs will make a very loud wheeking noise when their owners open the fridge or get out the food container in anticipation of getting some tasty treats!
- **Purring:** Purrs have different meanings depending on the pitch of the sound (and the accompanying body language). Guinea pigs that are feeling contented and comfortable will make a deep sounding purr (accompanied by a relaxed and calm posture). However, if the purr is higher pitched, especially towards the end of the purr, this is more likely a sound of annoyance (a guinea pig making this noise will be tense and may seem to vibrate). A short purr (sometimes described as a "durr" type noise) may indicate fear or uncertainty (usually accompanied by the guinea pig remaining motionless).
- **Rumbling:** This is a deeper rumble than the purr. This noise is made by a male romancing a female, and sometimes also by females in season. Often accompanied by a sort of "mating dance," this is also sometimes called motorboating or rumblestrutting.
- **Teeth Chattering:** This is a sign of an agitated or angry guinea pig and is an aggressive vocalization. It is often accompanied by showing the teeth (which looks like a yawn) and means "back off" or "stay away."
- **Hissing:** Like teeth chattering, this is a sign of an upset guinea pig.
- **Cooing:** Cooing communicates reassurance. It is a sound most often (but not exclusively) made by mother guinea pigs to their young.
- **Shrieking:** A piercing, high-pitched squeak that is fairly unmistakable as a call of alarm, fear, or pain. If you hear this type of sound, it is good to check on your guinea pigs to make sure everything is okay and no one is hurt.
- **Whining:** A whining or moaning type of squeak can communicate annoyance or dislike for something you or another guinea pig is doing.

- **Chirping:** This sounds just like a bird chirping and is perhaps the least well-understood (or heard) noise guinea pigs make. A chirping guinea pig may also appear to be in a trance-like state. The meaning of this "song" is the subject of much discussion but is still not well understood.

## Body Language of Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs can also communicate via body language. It's a good idea to get to know what is normal for your guinea pigs so you can spot changes in their movement and body language to use as clues to know what is happening with them.

- **Popcorning:** Easy to recognize, popcorning consists of hopping straight up in the air (sometimes repeatedly), just like popcorn popping, and is most often seen in young guinea pigs when they are especially happy, excited, or just feeling playful. It can also be seen in older pigs though they usually don't jump as high as younger pigs.
- **Freezing:** A guinea pig that is startled or uncertain about something in its environment will stand motionless.
- **Sniffing:** Sniffing is a way to check out what is going on around them and to get to know others (guinea pigs particularly like to sniff each other around the nose, chin, ears, and back end).
- **Touching Noses:** A friendly greeting between guinea pigs.
- **Aggressive Actions:** can include raising their head and/or rising up on their hind ends with stiff legs, shuffling side to side (again, on stiff legs), fluffing out their hair, and showing their teeth (yawning). These actions are often accompanied by hissing and/or teeth chattering. If your guinea pigs do this with each other, be on high alert for fighting.
- **Strutting:** Moving side to side on stiff legs can be a sign of aggression (often accompanied by teeth chattering), while strutting around another guinea pig while rumbling is a typical "mating dance" (thus the term "rumblestrutting").
- **Scent Marking:** Guinea pigs will rub their chins, cheeks, and hind ends on items they wish to mark as theirs. They may also urinate on things or other guinea pigs to show their dominance.
- **Mounting:** This can be either a sexual behavior (males to females) or a behavior used to show dominance within the guinea pig herd's social structure (especially between females).
- **Fidgeting While Being Held:** This can often be a sign that your guinea pig needs to go to the bathroom, or that your guinea pig is just tired of being held. Either way, try returning your guinea pig to his or her cage for a bit.
- **Tossing Head Up in the Air:** A guinea pig getting annoyed with being petted will toss their head back as a way of asking you to stop.
- **Licking:** Most owners consider this a sign of guinea pig affection (though it is possible that they just like the taste of the salt on our skin).
- **Running Away From Being Picked Up:** Guinea pigs tend to be timid, especially at first. Running away from you is not a rejection but rather a natural defense mechanism. Given time and patience, almost all guinea pigs will come to accept being picked up for cuddles and play time out of the cage.