

Rabbits & Guinea Pigs

Nutrition

Rabbits and Guinea pigs have specific nutritional requirements that usually cannot be met by using their pelleted food alone. But with a little effort, providing them with balanced diets can be a simple task.

Rabbits: Contrary to popular belief feeding rabbits a diet of alfalfa pellets and carrots can be dangerous. Alfalfa is a very rich food, and too much of it can lead to obesity, hairballs, and diarrhea. Some of these conditions can make your rabbit extremely sick, to the point where he may need intensive medical care. So for rabbits we recommend the following:

Alfalfa Pellets: No more than $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of pellets per 5 pounds of body weight per day

Hay: A good grass hay like Timothy hay should be fed constantly. This should comprise the majority of your rabbit's diet. Timothy hay can be found in pet stores or at feed stores.

Carrots, Fruits & Vegetables: On occasion. Freshly squeezed pineapple helps prevent hairballs.



Guinea Pigs: Guinea pigs have special diets made for them, which contain Vitamin C. The only animals which require Vitamin C in their diet are monkeys and guinea pigs, so be careful to provide them with a diet specifically made for guinea pigs and not hamsters, rabbits or mice. Also, Vitamin C in these diets usually only lasts for 90 days after the diet is produced and that 90 days is only if the food is refrigerated. We recommend buying small bags of food, and then keeping them in the refrigerator. A Guinea Pig who is deficient in Vitamin C can develop bone and muscles abnormalities.

Guinea Pig Pellets: As the primary source of nutrition. Keep the bags refrigerated.

Additional sources of Vitamin C: Spinach, Kale, Oranges, & Cabbage

Vitamin C Supplement: We also recommend purchasing from the drug store 250 mg Vitamin C tablets. Get vitamin C tablets only...do not get a multivitamin. Dissolve one tablet in 1 liter of water. Keep that water refrigerated and change the water in the pig's bottle daily.

Fruits, Vegetables & Hay: Can be added several times weekly. These should not exceed 15% of the total diet. Wash thoroughly to remove pesticides.

Housing

Both rabbits and guinea pigs need to have their enclosures kept clean to prevent disease. At least once weekly the entire cage should be broken down and disinfected. Sometimes vinegar must be used to break down crystallized urine scald in the enclosure. Wire flooring is sometimes used but must be kept clean and free of sharp edges. Some animals kept on wire will develop infections and ulcerations on their feet. If these occur, the wire needs to be eliminated. In fact, we recommend avoiding wire if possible.

Remember also that guinea pig and rabbit teeth are growing constantly! There should be wood in the cage to provide them with a means to grind their teeth down. Hard woods like oak and maple work best. Usually a few dowels from Home Depot or a few branches off a tree make good chew toys. Softer woods should be avoided, because they do not provide enough friction. Most wood chews at pet stores are too soft to do a good job at filing down teeth.

Many sources discourage the use of cedar shavings as bedding. The creosol oils in cedar can be an irritant to the animal's feet. Pine shavings or ash shavings work well. Each week all shavings should be removed from the cage and replaced. Damp urine soaked shavings breed germs.

No additional heat source is required for these pets. Rabbits may even be kept outside year-round, provided they have an enclosed area insulated from the wind and cold and are provided ample hay as bedding. Guinea pigs must be kept inside during the winter months, and during the summer must be protected from overheating on sunny days.

Housing multiple animals

Guinea pigs and rabbits are not usually highly territorial, so housing together is allowed. Make sure you don't mix sexes if you don't want babies. If you want to breed your Guinea Pigs you MUST breed them before the female is 7 months old. Failure to do that will require a cesarean section at the time of birth, a risky procedure for pigs and babies. Sexing these animals can be tricky, and should be done at the veterinarian to avoid potentially disastrous mistakes.

Spay & Neuter:

We do not routinely spay Guinea Pigs, but in situations where a male and female pig need to be housed together, the male can be neutered. Similarly male rabbits may be neutered as well. Female rabbits can be spayed, but the surgery should be done at a young age (5 months or so) to avoid complications from fat buildup on the uterus. Many female rabbits can develop uterine cancer as they age, and spaying helps to prevent that.