

enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables. Pigs have different preferences, it is best to introduce new fruits and vegetables one at a time for you to find out which fruit and vegetable that your cavy prefers. Fruits and vegetables should be washed before feeding to your pet in order to insure the removal of pesticide residue. Dandelions are another excellent food source for the cavy and can be found in almost everyone's lawn. Make sure your harvest is made in untreated lawns. Cavies mostly eat and drink in the early morning or early evening, but they will eat small amounts throughout the day and night, so food and water should be accessible at all times.

GROOMING

There are several things you can do to groom your cavy. If you own a longhaired breed, combing can be done on a regular basis to keep the coat free from any mats. Trimming of the coat is also a general practice in order to keep the coat from becoming soiled or matted. Usually the rear part requires more attention, but the sides can also be trimmed to floor length to keep the cavy from stepping on its own coat. Pure bred long-haired breeds grow coats at the rate of approximately one inch per month.

Baths can be given to any cavy, regardless of the structure of the coat. This helps keep the coats clean and in preventing parasite infestation. A shampoo for cats and kittens is recommended, as most human shampoos are too harsh or may cause an allergic reaction. About six inches of water in the kitchen sink is most commonly used to bath guinea pigs, with a small towel placed in the bottom of the sink for stability. Place the back legs of the guinea pig in the sink while supporting the front with your hand. Use a cup to wet the coat of the animal, and then apply a small amount of shampoo to the lower neck, back and hindquarters. Work up later, keeping the shampoo out of the animal's eyes, ears and nose. For rinsing, you should use warm water and be sure to rinse the cavy thoroughly by either using the faucet or pour water over the cavy with a cup. Wrap the cavy in a towel and carefully clean the ears with a Q-tip. Use a blow dryer on warm setting to dry the hair. Massage the body while drying to diffuse the heat from the blow dryer and move the dryer continuously to avoid excess heat in the same spot. If

the cavy shows any fear of the blow dryer, you may want to offer a treat or talk to it in a soft voice to calm it down. After the hair is dry, brush the coat to enhance its appearance and redistribute the natural oils. Always brush the coat in the direction it grows except for the Teddy coat, which can be brushed towards the head of the cavy. Excess bathing may result in a dry skin condition. It is recommended that the cavy be bathed once a month if needed.

MEDICATIONS

It is not advisable to use medications on your cavy until you check with your veterinarian or experienced cavy breeders. Many medications, such as penicillin are harmful or toxic to cavies. Cavies do get parasites; you need not to be alarmed. They are not transmittable to humans and can be treated. Besides giving your cavy a bath, there are powders, etc. that can be used; but as stated, contact your veterinarian or an experienced breeder to find out what is safe or harmful.

More information regarding cavies may be obtained by contacting the American Cavy Breeders Association. Their information can be found on the ARBA website.

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Caring For Your Pet Cavy

EQUIPMENT



MAINTENANCE



OVERALL HEALTH



Congratulations on your new pat cavy (pronounced K-V). As you will discover, the cavy is a pet that requires minimal care, will give you hours of enjoyment, and does not require a large space. A cage space of 24 inches by 24 inches per cavy is more than adequate.

The cavy, more commonly known as the Guinea Pig, dates back to the Indians of South American. They were then introduced to Europe in the 1600's by the Dutch sailors and have since been bred for exhibition, as pets, and for medical research in many countries.

Upon first acquiring your cavy, it may seem a bit nervous; it may not be used to being handled, or just isn't used to its new surroundings yet. Allow your animal to get acquainted with you and its new home. When it becomes accustomed to you, it will soon be squealing if it does not think it is getting enough attention. Cavies love treats, so this is a good way to tempt your guinea pig into responding to your presence. Speak gently and do not make fast grabs at your cavy, as it is easily frightened and may scurry away from you in an attempt to hide.

GENERAL

There are thirteen recognized breeds of cavies and over twenty varieties/colors. Basically their body types are very similar, but the hairs on various breeds differ. Some have short hair, some long. There is silky hair, kinky hair and normal textured hair. Swirls or rosettes appear on some breeds, making them distinct from others. No matter what kind of cavy you are looking for, there is one that will find a way into your heart.

HANDLING

To pick up your cavy, place one hand over its shoulders while sliding the other hand under its body. Lift and hold the animal against your body to give it a feeling of support and security. Do not let your cavy dangle and do not squeeze it. Sometimes it is good to have a towel in your lap when holding your pet, as this gives you protection from accidents and also adds support for the cavy.

HOUSING

It is better to keep cavies on solid bottom floors, however, wire bottoms are used occasionally. It is fine

to use wire sides and tops. Make sure they are strong enough to keep other pets or predators out of your cavy's cage. Approximately two square feet of area should be provided for each animal so it has plenty of room to move about and exercise. Cavies should be kept free of drafts, as upper respiratory infections and even death may result from a direct cold draft on the animals. Occasional sunlight, like morning sun is OK on the cages, but they cannot tolerate extreme heat. Your cavy should be kept in an area with adequate ventilation and out of direct sunlight. Pregnant females are especially at risk of death when temperatures go into the 90-degree range. Guinea pigs are very susceptible when exposed to cold and dampness as well. Sixty to seventy degrees is a comfortable temperature range for your cavy.

Pet cavies seem happiest when they have at least one companion. Two or more females usually get along well together. Short skirmishes to establish superiority are not uncommon when introducing cavies that have not grown up together. It is not advisable to have more than one male cavy per cage. Baby males that grow up together may get along into adulthood, but once separated will not tolerate each other again.

Wood shavings are excellent to use for bedding in your cavy's cage. There are also other bedding materials on the market but be sure it is not cedar bedding. Oils from the cedar may be toxic to your guinea pig. Newspapers are not recommended as the ink will stain white coats as well as possibly be harmful to your animal if the paper is eaten. The inks in today's newspapers may not be as toxic as they once were but it is best not to take a chance. If absorbent bedding is not an option for you, use a couple layers of towels. The towels must be changed daily and be laundered. Some breeders of longhaired cavies have been very successful using the towel method in keeping their longhaired cavies out of shavings.

PRODUCTION

The male cavy is called a boar and the female cavy is known as a sow. The babies are called pups. A sow should not be bred before the age of four months old and ideally should be just over five months old before

her first breeding. The gestation period is between 62 to 65 days. Average litter is two to four pups. The pups are born with hair, open eyes and are mobile at birth. This is different from the domestic rabbit that has 29-33 days of gestation period and is born naked and with eyes closed. The pups can begin nibbling on solid food at one day of age and can be weaned at three to four weeks of age. It is advisable to wean the pups at intervals, from the largest to the smallest, in order to allow the sow the opportunity to dry her milk up slowly. Weaning all the pups at the same time may result in caked breasts. Mastitis may result. The boar should be separated from the sow prior to having the pups, as guinea pigs can have a postpartum heat period and if the boar is in the pen when the sow delivers, he will rebreed her with 12 hours. It is best not to handle pregnant sows any more than is necessary, as this may cause damage to the unborn pups.

FEEDING

Heavy stoneware crocks are best to use for feed, as cavies like to tip over their dishes if given the opportunity. Cat dishes with a lower edge are the best. Also available are many metal or wire feeders, should you desire to use different kinds. Water bottles are the most accepted method of watering, as crocks and bowls become dirty fast; again, the cavies like to tip them over. A commercial cavy pellet with vitamin C supplement is the best for your animal. Guinea pigs, like humans, lack the appropriate enzyme to produce vitamin C. It is necessary to supplement a cavy's diet with vitamin C to prevent scurvy. Fresh water should be available to your pet at all times. The vitamin C may be added to the cavy's diet by the way of its water. There are vitamin C pills or powders that can be dissolved in its water bottle, and the recommended dosage is 100 mg per eight ounces of water. Pregnant sows or those who have recently had pups should have a slightly higher amount of vitamin C supplement. Hay, especially Bermuda hay, is an important additive to your animal's diet as this provides protein, vitamin A and chewing exercises that are necessary for the proper wearing of their teeth. Hay also aids in digestion and helps prevent hair blockage in the stomach and intestines. Alfalfa hay is most widely used and is available through most pet stores in compressed cube form. Guinea pigs

