



FREE GUIDE

Guinea pig care basics

Frolicy's second guide beyond dogs and cats

Introduction

Guinea pigs are gentle, social, and genuinely rewarding pets — but the RSPCA reported a 40% jump in guinea pigs entering its care centers, attributing it partly to the cost of living and partly to owners simply not knowing what guinea pigs actually need. This guide covers the specifics that matter most, grounded in RSPCA and PDSA guidance.

The one nutrient dogs, cats, and even rabbits don't need: vitamin C

Unlike most mammals, guinea pigs can't produce their own vitamin C and can't store it for long, so it has to come from their daily diet. Good sources include bell peppers, tomatoes, spinach, asparagus, broccoli, and other leafy greens. A guinea pig-specific pellet fortified with vitamin C (not a rabbit pellet, which isn't fortified the same way) plus fresh veggies covers this reliably — a deficiency leads to scurvy, which is preventable but genuinely serious if missed.

They need herd company, not just yours

In the wild, guinea pigs live in groups of eight or more, and the RSPCA is direct about this: no amount of human attention replaces the company of another guinea pig. A same-sex pair or small group (introduced properly) is the standard welfare recommendation, not an upgrade for later.

Housing needs more floor space than a typical starter cage

The RSPCA's commonly cited minimum for an indoor shelter housing a pair is around 6 feet by 2 feet for the enclosed area alone, with room to stand fully upright and enough height (roughly a foot) for the natural 'popcorning' hop young guinea pigs do when they're happy. Most off-the-shelf starter cages fall short of this on their own.

Diet basics beyond vitamin C

Like rabbits, guinea pigs need unlimited grass hay as the foundation of their diet for both digestion and constantly growing teeth, with a measured portion of fresh vegetables and a small amount of guinea-pig-specific pellets. Sudden diet changes can upset their digestion the same way they can for rabbits, so new foods are introduced gradually.

- Unlimited grass hay, always available
- Daily vitamin-C-rich vegetables (bell peppers, leafy greens)
- A measured amount of guinea-pig-specific (not rabbit) pellets
- Fresh water always available
- New foods introduced one at a time, in small amounts

What's actually driving the current welfare gap

The RSPCA points to three overlapping causes behind the recent rise in guinea pigs needing rehoming: the cost of living making ongoing care harder to sustain, overbreeding leading to more guinea pigs than there are informed homes for, and a general public underestimate of what guinea pigs actually need day to day. Knowing the real requirements before bringing one home is the single best prevention for all three.

Guinea pig care checklist

- ☐ A same-sex pair or small group in place, not a single guinea pig alone
- ☐ Daily vitamin-C-rich vegetables as part of the diet, not just pellets
- ☐ Guinea-pig-specific (not rabbit) pellets, fortified appropriately
- ☐ Housing sized for a full stand and the natural 'popcorning' hop, not just a small starter cage
- ☐ Unlimited hay available as the diet's foundation
- ☐ A realistic understanding of the ongoing time and cost commitment before bringing one home

Summary

Guinea pigs need real herd company, daily vitamin C, and more space than most starter kits provide — understanding these specifics before bringing one home is exactly what the RSPCA says is missing for too many owners right now.

This guide is for general education only and is not a substitute for advice from a certified trainer, veterinarian, or veterinary behaviorist. If you're seeing signs of distress, aggression, or a sudden change in behavior, please consult a professional who can assess your pet directly.