

A Guide to Guinea Pig Care

Everyone knows them as Guinea Pigs. We in the Fancy know them as Cavies. By either name, they are great! Cavies are found in pet stores around the world but do not get the attention they deserve as pets. they are desirable for children and will squeal with delight in anticipation of a treat or attention.

They are easy to handle and care for. They take up little space in the house. Cavies never need to be walked in the rain and will never bring home dead mice or birds. They will sit quietly on your lap while you watch your favorite television program enjoying any attention you are willing to give them.

There are many misconceptions regarding cavy care and many pets could enjoy a much better life if their owners understood more about their needs. This pamphlet has been designed to help new cavy owners provide good care for their pets so each can enjoy a long and loving relationship.

Your Cavy's Care

Habitat

Cavies should have a warm and secure place to call home. You can use an aquarium, a wooden box or a wire cage. Be sure to allow adequate space for your cavy to move about freely. a space 12"x18" is about right. You should be sure to cover the bottom with a reasonable amount of bedding. Bedding may be in the form of hay, straw or wood chips. Be sure only to use pine chips or aspen chips as cedar chips are toxic to cavies. Keep your cavy's home out of drafts and direct sunlight. Make sure the bedding is clean and dry. Cavies should not be kept directly on wire as their tiny feet may become entangled and they could easily break a foot or leg.

Cavies should never be housed outdoors. They cannot tolerate the cold. An ideal temperature range would be between 60 and 70F. Remember, if you are comfortable, they will be comfortable.

Hygiene

It is important to keep your cavy's cage clean and dry. Usually, a weekly cleaning is sufficient, depending

upon the number of animals in the cage. Your nose will tell you when it has been too long since the last cleaning.

Care should be taken when choosing a disinfectant to clean the cage. We recommend a solution of 20 parts water to one part chlorine bleach for rinsing the bottom of the cage periodically.

Remember to keep the food dish and the water bottle clean as well. Use a bottle brush to clean the bottle and don't forget to clean the sipper tube with a cotton swab or small brush.

Rations and Liquids

A cavy's diet is a simple one. Use a food dish that is heavy enough so the cavy does not tip it over. The feeds recommended are guinea pig pellets (in a pinch rabbit pellets can be used, but they may contain antibiotics which may be dangerous to the cavy). A good pellet will contain various grains, minerals and vitamins. Remember, if you feed a pellet other than guinea pig pellets, you must supplement extra Vitamin C as this is an essential part of a cavy's diet.

Fresh leafy greens such as lettuce, cabbage, carrot tops and alfalfa are excellent for supplementing a cavy's diet. Fresh picked grass, clover and dandelion leaves are good also. Good clean hay may also be fed but should not make up the entire diet. A piece of carrot, apple, banana or any other fruit may also be given as a treat. Remember that citrus fruits are an excellent source of Vitamin C and cavies love them!

Clean fresh water should be available at all times. A small animal water bottle is best for this as cavies tend to kick their bedding into open water containers. Be sure to use a water bottle with a metal tube as cavies will chew on them and break them if they are made of glass.

Spiff and Polish

Cavies should be brushed on a regular basis. You may use a small slicker brush to remove the excess fur. A toothbrush is also an excellent way to groom these small animals.

Check your cavy's toenails regularly. they should also be trimmed. You may use a small fingernail

clipper. Care should be taken so that you don't cut them too short and expose the blood vessel running through the nail.

You may want to give your cavy a bath occasionally. Please, make sure that you dry him completely, if you do. A small hand held hair dryer works well for this purpose and you will find that your cavy will actually enjoy it!

Cavy Contraception

A cavy owner should be careful of over breeding. Baby cavies are adorable but not everyone wants to keep them when they mature. Many people buy them as babies and abandon them when they get older. You would be surprised at the number of cavies that end up in animal shelters or are abandoned alongside the road.

It is necessary to keep males and females in separate cages to prevent breeding. It is possible to spay or neuter a cavy but it is not advised because of the dangers associated with surgery.

Cavy Contact

The personalities of cavies differ between animals. Some are very friendly and like to be held while others would rather be left alone. Generally, if handled as a baby, and the attention is continued, the cavy will respond favorably to being cuddled and loved as an adult.

Teach young children to handle cavies while sitting on the ground as this will help to eliminate accidental squeezing or dropping of the animals. Remember to always support the hindquarters as this helps the cavy to feel secure and will help to eliminate some unnecessary scratches.

Aches and Pains

You will find that a well cared for cavy rarely gets sick or needs medication. Cavies are susceptible though to respiratory problems such as colds and pneumonia. If you need to medicate your cavies, do not give them penicillin! cavies are allergic to all forms and it will kill them. A sulfa drug or tetracycline is suggested. Be sure to consult your veterinarian.

It is advisable to give your cavies Vitamin C at least once a week. a cavy with a Vitamin C deficiency will develop "scurvy" which looks like a form of paralysis.

Cavies do not get fleas but can get lice and should be treated with a spray approved for use on kittens or birds.

Breeds

The following is a list of the 12 breeds of cavies currently recognized by the American Cavy Breeders Association (ACBA):

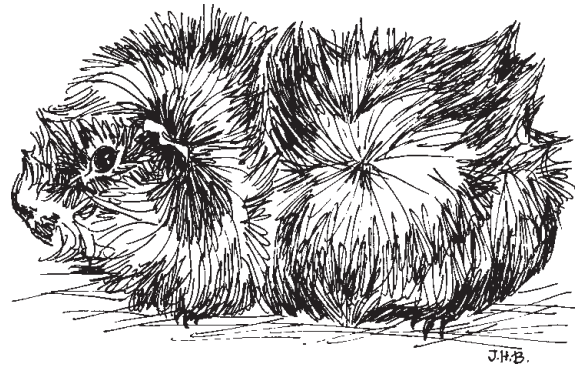
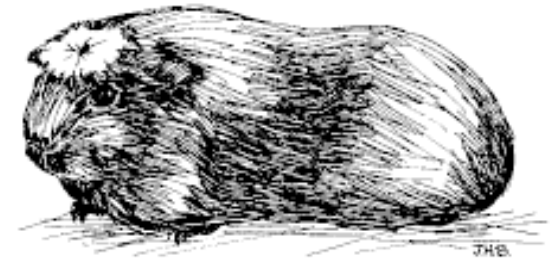
American	Satin American
Abyssinian	Satin Abyssinian
Teddy	Satin Teddy
Silkie	Satin Silkie
Peruvian	Satin Peruvian
Crested	Coronet

They all come in many varieties of colors.

In closing, cavies are an ideal indoor animal. Their requirements are few. In return, their affection is great! If you choose to own a cavy, he is your prisoner and you are his keeper. Treat him kindly and keep him well. Remember that your cavy is completely dependent upon you!

The information in this pamphlet was prepared, researched and edited by the Saratoga County 4-H Club - Fur Balls in Action - for all those who presently own cavies, prospective cavy owners and anyone else who is just plain interested in the lovable little animals! It may be copied by anyone wishing to help us promote proper care and handling of cavies.

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A Cavy to Cuddle

