

Rabbits & Guinea Pigs

Nutrition

Rabbits and Guinea Pigs have specific nutritional requirements that usually cannot be met by using their pelleted food alone. The primary source of nutrition for both of these species should be Timothy Hay. What especially needs to be avoided are the pellets that come mixed with seeds and dried vegetables. The dried veggies & seeds can be a source of obstructions, 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.



For rabbits we recommend the following:

Alfalfa Pellets: No more than ¼ cup of pellets per 5 pounds of body weight per day. The less pellets you feed the better.

Timothy 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. There are even different "flavors" of Timothy Hay which can be found with a little effort. Alfalfa Hay is not advised, due to the issues mentioned above.

Carrots, Fresh greens & Vegetables: Several times a week, you can make your rabbit a salad of fresh dark leafy greens (Not iceberg lettuce) mixed with some vegetables.

Grazing in the yard: If your yard is not chemically treated, then letting your rabbit graze in the yard is another way to expose it to a proper diet.

Guinea Pigs: Guinea pigs require Vitamin C in their diet. A Guinea Pig who is deficient in Vitamin C can develop bone and muscle abnormalities. The pelleted food mixes for Guinea Pigs do have Vitamin C added to them, but in many cases the added Vitamin C deteriorates unless the bags have been sufficiently refrigerated from the moment of manufacturing to arriving in your home. We prefer to supplement the Vitamin C with fresh fruits and vegetables, or to add it to their drinking water.



Guinea Pig Pellets: Once again, we avoid the pelleted mix foods that contain seeds and dried fruits. A pure timothy hay pellet is best. Occasionally some alfalfa pellets can be added as well.

Timothy Hay: Feed this as the primary food. Wild Cavies (The closest relative to the Guinea Pig) graze on grasses constantly in the upper Andes mountains. This is the best fit for your pig.

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.

Additional sources of Vitamin C: Broccoli Greens, Spinach, Kale, Green Peppers, Red Peppers, Oranges, & Cabbage

Fresh Greens & Vegetables: Can be added several times weekly. These should not exceed 15% of the total diet. Note that spinach, cabbage and kale have lots of vitamin C. Avoid iceberg lettuce. Wash thoroughly to remove pesticides.

Remember also that guinea pig and rabbit teeth are growing constantly! Contrary to what was believed in the past, it is now clear that rabbits and guinea pigs wear down their teeth by grinding them together (Not by chewing on wood). The best way to avoid dental disease in your pet is to provide it with the best possible diet. That chewy Timothy Hay gives nutrition but also helps with dental health!

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. Rabbit cages should be fairly large as they need a lot of exercise for their hind legs. Letting your rabbit roam about the house is another good way to encourage activity and to prevent obesity. Don't worry, most rabbits are fairly easy to litter train.

Many sources discourage the use of cedar shavings as bedding. The creosol oils in cedar can be an irritant to the animal's feet. Nowadays, Pine shavings or ash shavings are also starting to fall out of favor. Recycled paper bedding like Care Fresh is now preferred, but make sure your pet does not eat a lot of it because that can cause problems. The most important thing to remember is that bedding soaked with urine can breed germs. Clean the cage frequently.

If you have crystallized urine scald in the enclosure, sometimes vinegar can be used to break it down. However, vinegar does not do a good job at disinfecting contaminated surfaces. Neither does bleach. Cleaning can be done with a dishwashing detergent, or you can use an antibacterial cleaning agent like Wipe-Out. When it comes to disinfecting a surface, you should leave the agent in place for 10 minutes before rinsing it off. This increases dramatically the number of germs you will kill.

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.

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 should be spayed unless they are used for breeding. 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 or ovarian cancer as they age, and spaying helps to prevent that.