



Guinea Pigs! What, Where, and How

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<https://youtube.com/watch?v=AGVkJGhtsjlk>

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Hey guys, welcome back to Animal Wonders! I've been getting a lot of questions asking about how to take care of certain animals. And I'd love to answer all your questions, but I'll do it one episode at a time. Today let's talk about how to take care of guinea pigs. Guinea pigs are so loved by so many that they've become a very common pet, mostly in America, but in other countries, too. So, let's learn, what are guinea pigs? Where did they come from? And how are we going to give them the best possible care? This is Pickles! Well, what are guinea pigs? Let's classify them using Taxonomy. So, they are a small animal in the class: Mammalia, and in the order: Rodentia, and the family: Caviidae. So, when you classify an animal being a mammal, it means they are covered in fur, they have live young, and they nurse their young. When you put them in the class: Rodentia, it means that they have two large ever-growing incisors on the top and the bottom. And when you put them in the family: Caviidae, it means they have four toes in the front and three toes in the back. So, where did these guys come from, and how did they end up in houses across the world? When the discussion of the origins of the domestic guinea pig come up between phylogeneticists the situation can quickly become heated. The controversy among Taxonomists of what genus to place these guys in goes down to the mitochondrial genome level! But they can mostly agree that they came from the grasslands and plains of the Altiplano region in South America. The most popular theory is that these guys originated from the Peruvian cavy. These small animals were referred to by Incan people as Cuy, which is still used today. But they weren't what we see today. They were smaller, thinner animal with more neutrally colored fur so they could blend in with their environment. So, their move from wild animal to domesticated animal...ehh... that's still some what fuzzy. It's, um, thought to happen around 5000 BCE and they're being kept and bred in backyard enclosures. And they were used in celebratory meals in Incan culture. So, what were guinea pigs to this ancient culture? Well, they were mostly food, but they were also woven into their culture. It was common for a boy coming of age to be gifted with their own guinea pig. And newlyweds were often given a pair so they could start breeding a herd for their new family. Some households, they liked having the Cuy inside, and so they would keep them in by putting little walls along the entrance ways and exits of their house. Guinea pigs are pretty terrible climbers, so just a small wall is needed. The keeping and captive breeding of these guys specifically for their meat lead to artificial selection for a fatter, larger Cuy, just like cows, pigs, chickens and turkeys. So, how did they go from the dinner plate to being a pet? I imagine there are quite a few times when a small child took a liking to one of their little guinea pigs and begged their mom to keep them as a pet instead of eating them. Now, there's no documentation of the first time a guinea pig was specifically, strictly a pet. But I'm comfortable imagining that scene. So, what are guinea pigs to us today? Well, they're mostly sold, kept, and rescued to be solely companions for humans. They have been bred in captivity for some 7,000 years. And since humans are naturally curious, they started experimenting with their coat texture and their color. Today we have three main types of fur: silkie, short-haired, and Abyssinian; the patterns and colors seems endless. I know, I know! You just want to learn how to take care of one! OK, the first thing you need to do is choose where you're going to get your guinea pig. There are so many guinea pigs that are surrendered by their owners for a multitude of reasons. So, please consider adopting one from your local shelter. So, before you bring your little friend home, get prepared. Get all the supplies that he or she is going to need. Get an enclosure, the larger, the better. You can see that we have quite the large enclosure for Pickles here, but... you know.... not everyone's going to have this for them. Uhm, just get as large as you can for them, 'cause they do like to run around and play. All right, so, the supplies you're going to need is... you're going to need food, but you're also going to need bedding. And I like bedding from a paper product. Uhm, that can be Carefresh or it can be shredding paper like this. Um, you're also going to need... (Pickles squeaking) I

know, buddy.... a water bottle, and a food dish, and some nail clippers. And you're going to need some non-chewable and chewable toys for them. And remember to get them some hiding places as well. So, food. Really, really important for your guinea pig. Uh, you're gonna wanna start with a high quality guinea pig pellet. This is going to have the nutrients in it that you need. Do not give your guinea pig rabbit pellets. I know they look exactly the same, but guinea pig pellets have vitamin C in it that your guinea pigs really need. If they don't get enough vitamin C a lot of bad things can happen. One of those things is a disease called scurvy. So, you wanna give them pellets. And that's going to be a big portion of their diet, but you're also going to want to include some fresh produce as well. So, I like giving them broccoli. And they can chew this up, so, you don't have to make it teeny, teeny tiny for them. They can take big chunks of it; remember they have ever-growing teeth. Um, so, just give them little bits of produce... got some sweet potato and some broccoli. Also, give them some lettuce. That's going to help with their fluid intake. Give them a little bit of that. And then, occasionally some fresh fruit. That's going to keep them happy. All of this is going to keep them healthy, but a little bit of fruit is going to keep them happy. Next, you'll need some Timothy hay. Now, Timothy is the best hay. You can also use meadow hay, but I would really strongly suggest that you find Timothy hay. Don't give alfalfa hay unless they're-- you're breeding or the mom is nursing. Timothy hay free fed, really, really important for your guinea pig's health: for their teeth and for their whole digestive system. Free feed hay. So, you wanna change their bedding at least once a week. Spot clean when necessary. You're also gonna wanna fill up their wattle bottle whenever it gets less than half full. Give them fresh water. Dump the whole thing out, give them fresh water. And I don't know if you can see it, but you can see there's a little bit of a gap right here at the top. When you fill your water bottle, you're going to want to fill the water bottle all the way, all the way to the top, so, when you tip it back over it's going to create a pressure seal. Right now, because I didn't fill it all the way, you can see it's just going to drip and drip and drip and drip. And that's going to get the bedding wet in your guinea pig's enclosure, which can cause them to get cold and sick. So, fill your water bottle all the way full. Since guinea pigs are rodents, they have ever-growing teeth, and they're gonna have to have to gnaw and chew on hard things to make sure that they wear those teeth down. So, give them items to chew. I mean the hay, the hay is going to come in really handy to help them chew down like that, but give them pieces of wood. Um, you can see we've constructed some wood for them to chew on. Um, here's another chewing toy. Here's a chew toy I made myself. I just used an old bird perch, and I put a lot of blocks of wood and some cardboard on there and a little calcium chew. They just... they love this thing. Guinea pigs are naturally really nervous animals. Their instincts, when a predator comes, is to run and hide. That's their only defense. They don't have sharp claws or huge fangs to defend themselves. They can't climb. They just have to run and hide. So, that's a really completely normal behavior for them. The more interaction you have with them, the more you'll reduce that, but you're never going to completely eliminate it. So, you wanna make sure you give them a lot of places for them to hide and snuggle. You can see here, Pickles loves this little cooshy, soft hiding thing. But you can also give them other hides like this Timothy hay hut or, I really like these little stumps as well. So, give them lots of places to run and hide so they can feel safe. If you've previously watched our episode on a few of my friends, you'll know that animal communicate verbally and non-verbally. So, guinea pigs have some nonverbal communication, but a lot of it is verbal as well. So, these guys, they will purr when they are content; they rumble when they are upset or displaying dominance; they "wheel" when they are excited or contacting members of their group; they scream when they are in pain or scared; and they will chatter their teeth when they're trying to threaten something away. So, pay attention and know these communications so that you know what your guinea pig is trying to



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tell you. So, now that you know what they are, where they came from, and how to take care of them, the only thing left is to make them a promise that if you take one into your home that you're going to care for them to the best of your ability for the rest of their life. And enjoy your little furry companion for all the awesomeness that he or she contains. Thank you for joining us on this week's episode of Animal Wonders! If you have any questions or comments, you can find me at Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook. If you would like to go on an adventure every week, join our YouTube channel: Animal Wonders Montana. Links are below.