



## Hedgehogs! What, Where, and How

What, Where, and How

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=Dy68-bxIAxI>

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Hedgehogs! They rank really high on the cute list, seriously, and cute is cute - no one's disputing that, but let's move beyond cute, let's get our hands dirty. No, let's get our brains dirty! Have you ever wondered what else there is to know about this spiky little creature? This is our what, when, how on hedgehogs. Let's do this!

(Intro)

This is Groucho, and he's a domesticated hedgehog. I'm wearing the gloves because he's grouchy. First thing's first, what is a hedgehog? Let's classify him. He is an animal so his kingdom is Animalia. And they have a vertebrae, so phylum is Chordata. They are endothermic, they have hair, they have live birth, and they nurse their young, so class is Mammalia. Now this is where it gets really neat, so far we've been able to accurately place him in his groups just by looking at him. So if we're going on that same train of thought, most of us would say oh, he belongs in the same group as porcupines because he has those quills. However, that's not how classification works.

Upon further inspection you'll find that hedgehog teeth are nothing like rodent teeth. To be in the order Rodentia, you need to have two ever-growing top and bottom incisors. Hedgehogs have 36 to 44 sharp pointed teeth that are much like human teeth, nothing like ever-growing rodent teeth. This means that he needs to be placed in a different order, Erinaceomorpha, which basically means shrew-like animal with a long snout and digging claws.

Next, we go to family, and the only living family in the order Erinaceomorpha is Erinaceidae. These are the hedgehogs we know and love. And now moving on the genus. Among the five genera, we find the most common domesticated hedgehog in *Atelerix*. This genus has a central part in their front spines. Other not as commonly kept pets are the long-eared hedgehog and the Indian long-eared hedgehog.

Our most common household friends are usually a mix between the *albiventris* which is the four toed, and the Algerian species, *algirus*. But they're commonly just classified as *albiventris*. Now they do have 4 toes in the front, but since they're also smaller than the European hedgehog, they're often just commonly called the African Pygmy hedgehog.

Now we could just classify all day long, but look at these amazing adaptations. Covered in spikes! These modified hairs, made of keratin, like our hair, they're hard on the outside, they have air pockets on the inside, making them sturdy but lightweight. When they feel threatened, they flex their back muscles creating this impenetrable force of criss-crossing quills, and then they'll hiss and jump slightly, trying to poke their quills into their attacker's nose or mouth.

Unlike porcupines, hedgehogs don't lose quills into their attacker and they don't shoot them. Instead, a hedgehog can pull his head and feet against his belly and a different muscle circles his body and he can flex it like a draw string. Effectively turning him into a ball of spikes.

When a hedgehog is not being threatened, they're going to spend most of their time looking for food. Their nose is incredibly powerful and it can detect a worm 3 inches underneath the dirt. They're going to dig it up with their little claws and munch it on down with their sharp pointed teeth.

And there you have it. That's what a hedgehog is, but where did they come from and when did they become domesticated?

There are many stories that include hedgehogs. Author Beatrix Potter, she brought Miss. Tiggy-Wiggle into the hearts of children in

Europe and across the world. And Sonic, he made hedgehogs cool. Let's face it, hedgehogs appeal to most everyone.

Actually, hedgehogs have been in the evolutionary works for 25 million years, when their ancestors were gallivanting around Europe and Asia. They've been sharing interactions with humans for thousands of years. The Romans started domesticating them in the fourth century and they used them in a multitude of ways. One of them includes combing their wool with their spine.

They were also farmed and used as a food source in Egypt and over the centuries of close contact with humans, they became a beloved pet.

Wild hedgehogs are loved and hated alike, some really enjoy having them visit their gardens and cellars because they naturally control the bug population. Others hate them in their gardens because they do like eating the berries too, they are omnivores after all.

Alright, we've got the what, the why and the when, now let's get into the how.

How do we provide a happy and healthy life for a domesticated hedgehog.

So let's focus on the African pygmy hedgehog, which is what Groucho is. First you're going to need the right space and environment for your hedgehog. These guys are really bad with cold temperatures so keep them between 72 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit - 20 to 27 degrees Celsius. A large guinea pig cage or other large solid bottomed enclosure is gonna work really well. Shelves are not needed, they don't do well with edges they just fall right off the edge. You wanna cover the bottom of the enclosure with carefresh bedding, or shredded paper or aspen which is what we use. Clean at least once a week.

Next, give them something to do all night, hedgehogs are nocturnal so they don't want to be awake during the day, so you need to provide them with activities. If you have decided that you want to provide a home for a hedgehog, don't try and change their natural way of life - hedgehogs are nocturnal, let them be nocturnal. So toys and furniture are essential to keep them mentally and physically engaged with life. A running wheel is essential, hedgehogs love to be active. You wanna make sure that the running wheel doesn't have holes or gaps while they're running so they can't catch a toe or a leg or a nail. This is a Wodent wheel. And now give them some toys to mess around with they can roll they can climb on them they can smell them, leather is great for chewing and smelling on, balls and bells are interesting. This thing, this is pretty fun to move around, give 'em things to just play with.

Proper diet is a big one, it can be controversial, a lot of people struggle with it. Providing the right percentages of protein fat and fiber can be difficult. You can feed a hedgehog cat kibble if it's the right percentage of protein and fat, but be mindful that the kibble pieces might be too large and hard for their mouths and teeth. We feed, and I recommend, Missouri insectivore diet because it's nutritionally sound and we feed it across the board to the rest of our insectivores. We slightly moisten it and add a mixture of vegetables. Most importantly, you want to provide insects, whether that's live or dried or freeze-dried or frozen. Hedgehogs are considered insectivores. They're also omnivores, they eat a wide variety in the wild, but insects are pretty key to their nutritional health. Many domestic hedgehogs can be picky eaters and it can be a struggle for their owners to find the right balance of nutrients for them. The key is to provide a wide variety of foods; that's gonna give you a happy, healthy hedgehog. Groucho loves his mealworms.



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Hedgehogs are solitary animals, so you don't need to provide a buddy. And sometimes, housing more than one in the same space can cause distress or even injury if a spine gets in an eye. Bathing is important. It should be done with warm water and a toothbrush. Be sure that he doesn't get too cold after while he naturally dries. Also, nail trimming needs to be done regularly. It can be difficult, so be prepared for that. Be patient with them, and persevere.

Some hedgehogs enjoy human interaction... some don't. Getting to know the personality of your hedgehog or any animal is the fun and exciting part of getting to share your life with them.

So here's the hard part. I would not consider these guys a good pet, unless you're prepared. They're very difficult to feed, they're difficult to maintain, they're expensive with a short life span, they're difficult to cuddle... they're nocturnal, and they're really not that social. With all those difficulties, it leads to a lot of humans getting bored, losing interest, or neglecting them. So my advice is, if you're considering a hedgehog as a pet, ***please research and know what to expect.*** They really are amazing animals.

Thank you guys for joining me and Groucho on this adventure learning all about hedgehogs! If you're like to go on an adventure every week, subscribe, or you can follow me on Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, links are below!

(Outro)

Welcome back to Animal Wonders! It is officially winter

Fun fact! Hedgehogs can carry leprosy, tuberculosis, and shed salmonella! Aren't they the cutest?

He's poky, man. Get it? GET IT? No? There's no shame in that.