



HELPFUL HINTS TO CARE FOR YOUR RABBIT AND GUINEA PIG

Congratulations on the purchase of your new rabbit or guinea pig. Following are a few hints to help you care for your new rabbit or guinea pig. If, after reading these hints, you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Jerry for advice and help.



Guinea pigs are more closely related to rodents than rabbits but the care is so similar to rabbit care that we have combined them in this help sheet. Rabbits live an average 5 - 10 years while guinea pigs live 4 - 8 years.

HOUSING AND SHELTER:

Outdoor – Both guinea pigs and rabbits, generally need a very hardy structure called a hutch, with two areas: One area for sleeping and protection from the elements and one area for play. Position the hutch off the ground (ie. on bricks, or a verandah), out of direct sunlight and with plenty of ventilation. Rabbits and guinea pigs are more sensitive to heat than cold. Also, make sure the hutch has sufficient shelter. **The rabbit hutch:** This should be about 1.5 to 2m in length and high enough for the rabbit to stand upright. The base should be solid or wire to stop them from burrowing out. A wire base will need to be disinfected regularly and have hay or straw covering it so as not to hurt the rabbit's feet.

Mosquito proof your rabbit hutch: Your rabbit should be kept in a mosquito proof area if you live in an area where Myxomatosis is present (check with your vet to see if an area is near you). Myxomatosis is extremely contagious and there is no vaccination or treatment. **The guinea pig hutch:** This should be a minimum of 70sq cm per guinea pig. The base should be solid. Never use wire on the floor as they can catch their legs and break them easily. In the sleeping area lay shredded newspaper or soft hay. Do not lay straw for guinea pigs as the stalks can cause injury. Provide some lightweight material in the play area for the guinea pigs to burrow under.

Indoor - Rabbits need a secure cage, with a litter tray, to keep them safe at night or when you are not present. Wood or paper based litter is more suitable for rabbits as they can be trained to use the tray. Guinea pigs need a small indoor hutch to keep them safe overnight.

A range of hutches are available at Kirrawee Pic-a-Pet.

CHEWING:

Rabbits and guinea pigs will chew anything around your house including carpet, furniture, shoes, ANYTHING. Serious hazards include electrical wires and poisonous plants.

Rabbit and guinea pig teeth grow continuously so they need to chew to wear them down so that the teeth meet up with each other properly. Always provide gnawing toys, logs or sticks.

FRIENDS OR ALONE:

Never put two un-desexed males together as they will fight. Females tolerate each other. Rabbits and guinea pigs love the company of their own kind. Rabbits can also live happily with birds and well behaved dogs. Never leave a cat alone with your rabbit or guinea pig. It is best not to have rabbits and guinea pigs in the same hutch as rabbits can pass bad bacteria to guinea pigs.

HANDLING:

Never hold a rabbit by its ears. Your rabbit should be held firmly under the chest and support the back legs and rump. This is extremely important as rabbits can kick out and break their backs. Hold a guinea pig with 2 hands, supporting the chest with one hand and the back end with the other

FEEDING: Rabbit and Guinea Pig Mix is available at Kirrawee Pic-a-Pet. It should not comprise the whole diet but it does give most nutrients etc. that the Guinea Pig and Rabbit needs. Hay grass and Oaten should also be added as a food source. 3 types of vegetables from the following list should be supplied daily: **broccoli, carrots, cucumber, brussel sprouts, capsicum, dandelion greens and parsley.**

Rabbits should not be fed *cabbage, cauliflower, raw beans and rhubarb.*

Guinea pigs should not be fed *celery, spinach, raw beans, rhubarb and beetroot.*

Lettuce is non-toxic but often causes diarrhoea in both species.

Both species can be fed fresh grass. Rabbits under 6 months old should not be fed much grass as it causes stomach upsets.

Fruit such as bananas, oranges, apples, raspberries strawberries and strawberries should also be fed on a daily basis - this is extremely important for guinea pigs. Feed only small amounts of fruit to rabbits as it can cause diarrhoea. Vitamin C is very important in guinea pigs, as they cannot produce their own. They **MUST** have daily fruit and vegetables, A Vitamin C supplement can be added to their drinking water. **FRESH WATER DAILY MUST BE READILY AVAILABLE** in a special non-drip bottle with stainless steel nozzle. Wet bedding may cause moist dermatitis and coccidiosis.

EXERCISE:

A strong fenced enclosure can be built around the hutch to provide an area for Rabbits and guinea pigs can run around on grass on a daily basis as long as they are supervised and are in a strong, fenced enclosure.

VACCINATIONS:

Rabbits **SHOULD** be vaccinated against the calici virus, which causes a severe respiratory disease. There is no cure and death is almost definite. They must be vaccinated yearly but if your rabbit is under 12 weeks of age, a booster s required every 4 weeks. Ask your vet about the calici virus. Check with your vet as to any vaccinations for guinea pigs.

DESEXING:

Male **AND** female rabbits should be desexed. Un-desexed female rabbits are highly susceptible to endometrial cancer. Neutering males will eliminate aggression. Males and females live well together if both are desexed.

KEEP YOUR RABBIT OR GUINEA PIG WELL FED, CLEAN AND COMFORTABLE. GIVE IT EXERCISE AND ATTENTION AND YOU WILL HAVE A HAPPY, HEALTHY AND FIT RABBIT OR GUINEA PIG.