

Guinea Pig

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

With the large variety of available breeds, color combinations, and playful personalities, it is no wonder that our 11-year-old customer and cavy-enthusiast, Margaret Rehr points out that guinea pigs are one of the most popular children's pets in the nation. In fact, guinea pigs are more like humans than most people realize - neither we nor our *Cavia porcellus* pets are able to manufacture our own Vitamin C; therefore, dietary supplementation of this water soluble vitamin is necessary for optimum health.

INTERESTING FACTS

Characteristics: Naturally social and living in large groups in the wild, guinea pigs need involved owners who provide them with a variety of [toys and exercise opportunities](#). Cavies would prefer a companion, though most will do well alone if kept active. The average adult female (sow) grows to 1-1/2 to 2 lbs, while the average male (boar) grows to 2 to 2-1/2 lbs. Like other rodents, their teeth grow throughout their lifetime, which averages anywhere between 4 to 8 years.

Appearance: There are 13 recognized breeds of cavies with varying fur coat lengths in a variety of solid, mixed, and banded colors. Most of these 13 breeds are variations of each other - Abyssinian, American, Peruvian, Silkie, and Teddy each have a Satin variety, which means the two breeds look similar though a Satin has a more glossy sheen and softer coat. Other breeds include Coronet, Texel, and White Crested.

#1 Preventable Health Problem: Prevent Vitamin C deficiency with a specially formulated pellet [diet](#) that includes a daily, fresh supply of [grass hay](#) and a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Housing: Some recommend that one cavy needs at least 3 square feet of [cage](#) space, but bigger is always better. Furnish a [hiding place](#) and [toys](#) for your guinea pig's health and happiness. Guinea pigs also need a lot of chewable, hard substances to keep their teeth worn down. A solid base in the cage along with suitable nontoxic [bedding](#) are also a must to protect both your cavy and her tender feet.