

African Pygmy Hedgehog

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

As well as being able to roll into a tight spiny ball when frightened, African Pygmy Hedgehogs, *Atelerix albiventris*, are also bundles of personality, loyalty, and activity. They can be trained to use a litter box, are virtually odor free, and will happily spend the day riding around in your breast pocket. It's no wonder they are gaining popularity as a great, family-orientated small pet.

INTERESTING FACTS

Characteristics: Hedgehogs can run over 6 feet per second when needed. They are nocturnal. While exercising, foraging, and cleaning, they emit a huffing or snuffling sound. Average life span is 4 to 6 years.

Appearance: Adults of both sexes weigh an average of 1 pound and measure between 6 to 9 inches in length. Their belly and face is covered in soft fur. Their backs are full of quills - which are modified, hollow hairs. These spines vary in density and measure between 1/2" and 1" in length. Normal coloring is a white or cream colored belly, face, and quills with black or brown quill banding (known as salt-and-pepper, or agouti, variety). Other common color variations include snowflake (75-100% white quills) and cinnamon (cream quills with light or reddish brown banding). Breeding has also created panda, mocha, cream, smoke point, albino, and pinto (spotted) varieties.

#1 Preventable Health Problem: Hedgehogs are susceptible to tooth and gum disease, vitamin and mineral excess, or deficiencies from an improper diet.

Preferences: Hedgehogs prefer to live alone; however, they can form strong bonds

with the right human friend. They relish controlled periods of light and darkness. They like warm (75° to 80°F) temperatures and low humidity. Temperatures below 45°F are potentially deadly for pet hedgehogs.

Best Features: Strong muscles that act as a drawstring to pull a hedgehog's skin tight around his sides and down over his feet and head when frightened. These complex muscles can also individually move each spine. A confident, happy, well cared for hedgehog, however, seldom rolls into a ball.

Housing: [Cages](#) at least 36" w x 24" l x 15" h are preferred, with a [cozy, dark sleeping spot](#). Any well maintained, soft, absorbent recycled paper or aspen shaving [bedding](#) is suitable. They should have adequate and stimulating solid floor [exercise wheels](#), tunnels, mazes, and [interactive toys](#).

Diet: Classified as insectivores (bug-eaters), hedgehogs are opportunistic feeders that will eat almost anything they find. In the wild, where they are very active, they are known to eat 1/3 of their body weight in food each night. Pet hedgehogs, though, have less access to exercise, so obesity can be a common problem. Hard, pellet, [hedgehog-specific food](#) is best, supplemented with small amounts of moist food and fresh fruits and vegetables. Adequate, clean water is also essential.