

How to Bond With and Care For Your New Guinea Pig

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Congratulations on your new family member(s)!

It's important to give your piggies a couple of days to acclimate to their new environment before you start interacting with them very much. Guinea pigs are prey animals and are very scared in unfamiliar places. Let them become familiar with their new cage and the sounds and smells of your home then they will be ready to start getting used to their new human family.

Introducing Old and New Piggies

If you are bringing home a Guinea pig to be a friend to a piggy that has already been in your home for awhile please follow the steps that are outlined in the [bonding article that is on our website](#). This is CRITICAL to making sure that your piggies have a happy life together. Just putting 2 piggies into a cage together is not giving them the best chance of becoming life long friends. Even if your current piggy was friendly with the new piggy at the rescue you still need to start over with the bonding process once you get home. The only time this may not apply is if one of the piggies is a baby.

Human and Guinea Pig Relationships

Part of the joy of having a Guinea pig is winning over these sweet, gentle animals. Since they are prey animals they can be very frightened of just about everything. However, with time, patience and bonding activities you should see these precious creatures start to come out of their shells. They may go from hiding in a corner for a whole week, to starting to explore their cage, to eventually running up to the side of the cage and begging for treats every time they hear your voice. Each piggy is different and it is a fascinating journey to figure out how best to bond with each one. They are so worth the effort, so please don't give up on them. Eventually you should start to see their adorable, unique personalities shining through. There is something so special about winning their trust.

Here are a few ideas to help you and your piggies bond:

1) Talk to them

Every time you enter the room say hello and talk to them so they become accustomed to your voice.

2) Feed them veggies by hand

This is one of the best ways to bond with your piggy. The way to a piggy's heart is definitely through its stomach.

3) Pick them up daily

Put one hand in front of the piggy and use your other to scoop underneath the piggy. Never pick up the piggy from up above them. They are prey animals and this triggers their instinct that a hawk is trying to catch and eat them. Sometimes it is easiest to corral them in a corner of the cage to scoop them out. Some Guinea pigs are drama queens and may scream bloody murder when you try to pick them up. Ignore this and don't give up on them. Once you are holding them they will usually calm down.

Hold them securely making sure to support their delicate, rounded spines. Most piggies enjoy gentle petting on top of their heads, around their cheeks and under their chins. Most piggies do NOT like being petted on their rear ends. If you hear a grumbling sound it may mean they don't like the way you are petting them. At least for the first few months give them something to eat while you are holding them. You can feed them their veggies during this time or something healthy like an Oxbow Vitamin C tablet.

4) Don't let them run away when you put them back in the cage.

Another way to tame your piggy is to gently hold onto them as you put them back in the cage. Let their feet touch the floor of the cage, but don't release them until they are completely calm. They may struggle a lot, but don't give up. If you do this a few times a day they will quickly get used to the routine and will get more used to your touch. There are helpful videos that show this technique on the LA Guinea Pig Rescue and the Guinea Pig Slave Rescue on Youtube.

5) Follow a routine

When you feed and clean the cage around the same time each day your piggies will quickly learn the schedule. Knowing what to expect makes them feel more comfortable.

Health & Safety

Keep the room temperature between 65 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Guinea pigs are especially sensitive to heat and can succumb to heat stroke if left in a hot place for too long.

Avoid candles, incense and fragrance sprays in the room where your piggy lives. Guinea pigs have very delicate respiratory systems.

When cleaning out your cage a mix of 50%water/50% vinegar works well and is piggy safe.

Guinea pigs are experts at hiding health problems. After all as prey animals they never want to appear weak to possible predators. Weigh your piggies once a week and keep a record of their weight. It's ok if their weight varies by an ounce or two, but if you see a decline of 3 or more ounces your piggy might be ill. At that point switch to daily weighing. If the piggy drops 4 or more ounces it may be time for a vet visit. It's also a good idea to have a packet of critical care on hand in case the piggy ever stops eating. This is powdered food that can be mixed with water or pedialyte. It can be purchased from Amazon or Chewy.

Piggy nails need to be trimmed about once a month. You can put a brick in front of their water bottle or kitchen area to help keep front claws worn down.

Every 4-6 weeks it's a good idea to apply ivermectin drops behind your Guinea pig's ears to prevent mites. For Guinea pigs that weigh 1 pound only put one drop behind one ear. For piggies that weigh 2 or more pounds put one drop behind each ear. Young piggies that weigh under 1 pound do not get treated.

Here is a list of recommended medical supplies to have on hand:

Critical Care	Miconazole Shampoo	Kitchen scale
Small Nail clippers	Liquid Vitamin C	Baby Gas Drops
Bene-Bac Probiotic	Pedialyte	Epsom salts (unscented)
Ivermectin	Curved tip syringes (for feeding Critical Care, Vitamin C, etc.)	

Food

Guinea pigs need 1 cup of veggies per day, 1/8 cup of high quality Guinea pig pellets (without any seeds or colored bits) per day and unlimited access to hay and filtered water. Hay should make up 70-80% of their diet, so be sure not to overfeed veggies, pellets and especially treats.

Vitamin C is critical to Guinea pigs since they are prone to scurvy. 1/8 of a bell pepper daily can take care of their vitamin C needs.

In regards to treats, stick to healthy brands similar to Oxbow, Small Pet Select or Natural Cavy. Avoid any treats with seeds, nuts and yogurt - these ingredients are not healthy for Guinea pigs.

Guinea pigs love almost any kind of lettuce. All of them are fine to feed daily with the exception of iceberg which should never be fed. It can give them diarrhea and has little nutritional value. Cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage can cause bloat which can be deadly. Avoid giving your piggies very much fruit or sugary veggies like carrots. Since sugar is not good for piggies these should only be used as infrequent treats. Please reference our fruit and veggie list to see which veggies are safe for piggies and how frequently they can be fed.

Fun things to do with your piggies:

Here are some activities you can do with your piggies after they have had some time to settle in and seem to be pretty comfortable in their new home:

1) Floor time

It's great to create a safe space in your house where your piggy can run around and explore a larger space during a break from their cage. Sometimes if you sit on the floor with them they might crawl up on your lap...especially if you have some veggies.

2) Piggy paws on your hand

Put one flat hand in the cage a couple of inches from the floor. In your other hand hold a bunch of lettuce a few inches above your flattened hand. The piggies will figure out that they need to put their front paws on your flat hand to reach the veggies. It's a great way to build trust.

3) Piggy tamales

Get creative with your veggie meals sometimes. It's fun to wrap their nightly allotment of veggies in a corn husk to make a Guinea pig tamale. It's even more fun to watch the piggies tear into them. This is a wonderful activity to do with kids. You can also make lettuce wraps with veggie fillings...the possibilities are endless.

Love

Enjoy your new furry friends. The more love you give them the more you will see their adorable personalities shine through and hear lots of happy wheeks.