

A close-up illustration of a hamster's face. The hamster has orange-brown fur on its cheeks and ears, and white fur on its muzzle and chin. It has large, dark, round eyes. On its head, it wears a headband made of green leaves and white daisies with yellow centers. The hamster's mouth is slightly open, showing a pink tongue. The background is plain white.

Piggy Husbandry and Showmanship 101

By Andrew Markowski

Cages and Equipment



A guinea pig cage should be at least 18"X18" but larger is better especially if you have multiple animals in a cage. They also need a water bottle, food dish, clean bedding or cloth, something to chew on and some kind of wooden, plastic or cloth house. For bedding I use shredded paper and horse pellets, but you can also use fleece. You need to wash the cloth and/or change the bedding on a weekly basis. Be sure to store bedding in a place free from rodents as this can spread disease.

Location and environment

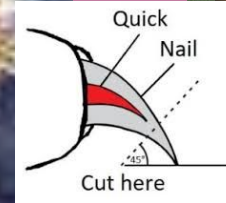


Ideal temperature for a cavy ranges between 65 and 75 degrees. It is important to avoid drafts, so I keep my cages covered in blankets that I can remove when it is warmer. Also, it is good to house them near other cavies and in a central location in your home where you can check their health, watch for changes in eating habits or behavior and visit with them often. They are social and like living in groups, but you can only cage them together if you are breeding or if they are the same sex and are used to each other. Cavies are prey animals and most active in the early morning and evening. I store their food, cloths and supplies near their cages.



Grooming

Your cavy will need regular brushing and nail clipping as part of its grooming routine. I recommend having a brush and flea comb for each animal. Labeling it and keeping it in a separate baggie will prevent the spread of lice and mites among your herd. I also use a lint brush along the body of the animal after brushing to check for infestations of parasites. You will be able to easily see them on the sticky tape. If you treat your animals with 3 drops of Ivermectin (sheep dip) every 5-6 months and groom them every few weeks and keep the cages clean you will avoid this problem. Nails should also be clipped every two weeks. Guinea nails and teeth constantly grow. Use the correct clippers and get another pair of hands to help.



Cage cleaning



Cavies are messy and tend to poop and pee everywhere. They can sometimes be trained to pee in a certain spot, but their bedding and cloths will need weekly cleaning. Use plastic trays whenever possible as they are easy to wash with soap and water. Dry well, then refill the bedding mix and add a clean cuddle or cloth. Be sure to scrub out water bottles and empty out and clean food dishes also.

Bathing and cleaning your cavies

Some piggies can be bathed. (never Teddies or Abbys) I use mild Dawn detergent and warm water and then rinse and blow dry. For ears I use mineral oil and a q-tip to carefully clean the outer area. Check for mites too. Once every 2-3 months is often enough.



All boars need their grease glands cleaned before showing. Older boars also need to have their penis and perineal pouch checked and cleaned. This has to be done at least every two weeks.

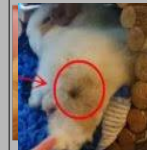
1 CHECK FOR IMPACTION

- ★ Impact interferes with the piggies digestive system, and prevents absorption of the necessary vitamins
- ★ See the impaction health poster for more details



2 CLEAN THE PENIS

- ★ Check & clean the piggy's penis to remove the smegma that builds up
- ★ Hold your piggy on his back resting securely against you
- ★ Push down on both sides of his penis so that the shaft comes out
- ★ Remove any white debris with a moistened tissue or warm water



3 CHECK THE GREASE GLAND

- ★ The dime-sized area located approx half an inch up the anus; it is leathery and often has a greasy feel. Clean it to prevent infection.
- ★ Use a substance like coconut oil to break up the build-up, and wash off

Diet



Guinea pigs need unlimited access to grass hay. The best is an orchard hay mix which has less calcium than timothy hay. Too much calcium can cause stones to form and require vet treatment. They also need good quality pellets which contain Vitamin C or ascorbic acid. Also give them chewable children's vitamin C tablets 3-4 times per week since they cannot make their own and they need 227 mg per day. They need lots of water and also some leafy greens. Finally 1x per week or so they can have a snack such as carrot, cucs or bell pepper.



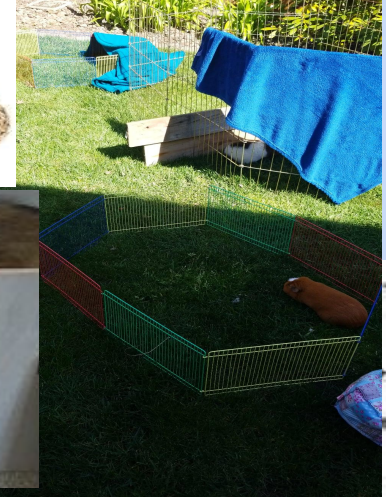
Exercise and Handling



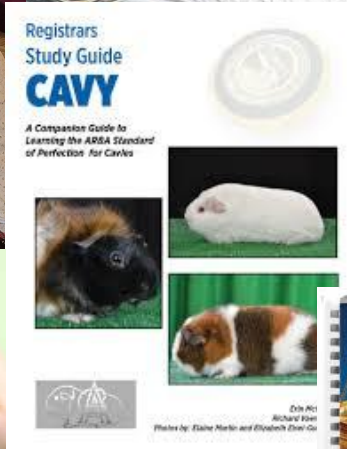
Guinea pigs enjoy human contact. So cuddle them often. They also need to practice being handled for a health check and sitting still on a carpet. You should also practice the carry position and showing the teeth.



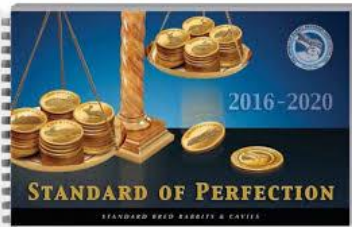
Guinea pigs need to be encouraged to exercise. Outside time and creative toys will help to keep them busy and moving. They will chew the grass.



Preparing to show your cavy



Both you and your cavy need to prep for shows. Your cavy needs to be ready so practice with your carpet square. Make sure your cavy is very comfortable with the health check and getting its teeth shown. You will need a good cavy study guide and the ARBA/ACBA Standard of Perfection. Studying with friends is a great way to prepare. You will also need black slacks, nice shoes and a long sleeved shirt to show in competition.



Get Ready to Show



Make sure your cavy is in good health and plan to pass the health check. Also pack a comfortable cage, a house, food, water and carpet squares. Don't forget your grooming kit. Bring blankets or sheets for comfort and privacy. You can bring frozen water bottles if it is a warm day.

And OFF YOU GO!



I hope you enjoyed this presentation dedicated to all my ag leaders, parents and friends who have helped me learn about cavies over the years. THANK YOU!

Andrew Markowski

