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# Housing

You have three choices when choosing a home for your guinea pig: you can buy a commercially manufactured cage, have one custom built for your pet from a pet or you can build your own. Each guinea pig should have a minimum of two square feet in its cage. This means if you have two guinea pigs, the cage should be a minimum of 4 square feet and so on. Most commercial cages are designed for a single guinea pig.

## Things to Avoid when buying/ building Housing

**Wire Bottom Cages:** Guinea pigs can very easily catch their feet and legs in a mesh bottom and often lose toes and break legs. If you are contemplating a cage with a wire bottom because it is the size you need, you will need to make a solid flooring, either from plastic, metal, or treated wood.

**Glass Aquariums:** DO NOT make good guinea pig habitats. They are difficult to clean, they allow very little air circulation (which means that ammonia levels build up rather quickly), and they retain heat, especially if they are sitting in the sun.

**Multiple Level Cages:** Guinea pigs do not always handle heights well, so if you decide on a cage with multiple levels, make sure that the levels are fairly close together, to prevent serious injuries from falls.

## Where should I put the pen?

Things to keep in mind when finding a place for your cage. They do not do well with colder drafts, and they are very susceptible to heat stroke at temperatures above 80 F, so try to place their cages away from heat vents and direct sunlight, and drafty windows if possible.



Information was provided by our friends at Purdue University [Purdue Veterinary Teaching Hospital](http://Purdue Veterinary Teaching Hospital)

## What about keeping my Guinea Pig outside?

It should be noted that since guinea pigs come from the high plains areas of South America, they have a much better tolerance for cold than they do heat. Guinea Pigs prefer temperatures of around 65 –68 F, however,

### Bedding

After you have decided on a cage, you will need to line the bottom with bedding. Bedding in guinea pig cages serves three purposes: it is the litter box, it serves as a substrate in which the guinea pig may nest and burrow, and it provides a soft surface on which to walk.

**A quality bedding should fit into these important guidelines:** it should not cause your guinea pig health problems, and it should have some odor control. The list below are some evaluations of commonly available beddings, this list is neither complete, nor definitive.

#### Better Options

**Carefresh:** Carefresh is a popular alternative to wood shavings. It is made from wood pulp fibers that are too short to be made into paper. The fibers are processed into what looks like shredded egg cartons. Carefresh's greatest strength is odor control; its paper base inhibits ammonia formation.

**Aspen shavings:** Aspen is a non-aromatic hardwood, and its shavings make a safe bedding. It does not have much odor control, therefore, strict cage cleaning must be practiced to maintain odor control. Strict sanitary practices are healthier for your guinea pig anyway.

**Crown Animal Bedding/Yesterday's News:** These are two paper-based beddings that are compressed pellets (Yesterday's News does offer two densities – hard and soft). These beddings offer excellent odor control, however, they can be a little rough as a sole bedding. Combined with a top-dressing of timothy hay, they can make a very nice bedding.

**Timothy hay:** Timothy hay can make a good bedding for guinea pigs. In addition to being a natural food source, guinea pigs enjoy tunneling through it, making nests in it and just playing with it. Fresh timothy has a pleasant smell, and will absorb some urine. The drawbacks are that it does not control odors, and it will mold when wet. If used as a top-dressing over a more absorbent bedding, such as one of the paper-based beddings



mentioned above, it can be changed every one to two days, while the paper-based bedding may last a week or more between changes. Fresh timothy hay bought direct, is the best. Pre-packaged timothy hay, found in the pet store, is often dried to prevent molding on the shelf. This makes it harder, and less suitable as bedding.

## **Bedding to avoid**

**Cedar shavings:** Cedar should be avoided at all costs. Studies have shown that cedar bedding can cause chronic upper respiratory problems and significant liver changes. Some animals can also be allergic to cedar and develop severe skin rashes and respiratory problems. The same aromatic oils that cover odors and make cedar attractive to small mammal owners are what cause the problems.

**Pine shavings:** Pine shavings are a less aromatic softwood that are often packaged as bedding for small mammals. Similar problems exist as to cedar. The oils that help cover the ammonia odors also can cause problems for the small mammals housed on it. Some people recommend the use of kiln-dried pine shavings as these have only minute amounts of oil, but be aware, your guinea pig has a better developed sense of smell than you do, and has to live in close contact with its bedding almost 24 hours a day. Even small amounts of aromatic oils can become irritating in those circumstances. Pine bedding is definitely better than cedar bedding, and kiln dried is better than regular, but it is probably best avoided if possible.

**Corncob:** Corncob beddings have several drawbacks. Corncob is not very digestible and can form impactions if eaten by the guinea pig, and corncob bedding is very prone to mold growth. Because of these two factors, we do not recommend corncob bedding for guinea pigs.

**Straw:** Straw is unsuitable because it does not absorb urine and the hard stalks can cause eye injuries.

**Cat litter:** Cat litter is not a good choice, because of its indigestibility, the chemicals most cat litters contain to control odors, and its general rough, stony quality. Clumping litter, when wet, can get caught in the coat of a guinea pig and become cement-like. Because guinea pigs are lower to the ground than cats, this is a common occurrence.



## Cage Supplies

**Water Bottle:** A water bottle is recommended over a dish. The water bottle should mount outside the cage and the sipper tube should be made of stainless steel. Many guinea pigs will chew on the tube as they drink and quickly ruin plastic tubes. Water in a dish will quickly become soiled with urine and droppings, or simply be over-turned.

**Food Dish:** Should be heavy, and ideally wider at the bottom than the top, to make it difficult to overturn. It is also a good idea to have a narrower opening so that the guinea pigs do not sit in their bowl while they eat and then foul the food.

**A Hay Rack:** is also a good addition, as it keeps some timothy off of the floor of the cage and provides a cleaner food source.

**For Terrain and Variety,** rocks, bricks, and tubes may be added to the cage. These not only provide surfaces that help wear down claws, but also hiding places and things to help alleviate boredom. Four inch diameter PVC tubing bought at a home building supply store can make great inexpensive guinea pig toy. Elbow and T-joints work especially well. The PVC plastic is hard, durable, and easy to clean. \*All toys should be checked routinely for signs of wear and tear.

