

Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of

Guinea Pigs



States of
Guernsey

Understanding the Animal Welfare (Guernsey) Ordinance, 2012 - Introduction to the Code

Owning and caring for a guinea pig can be a source of great enjoyment, but you should be aware that guinea pig ownership is a major responsibility and a huge financial investment. On average, guinea pigs live for around 5 - 8 years, but some may live much longer. Consequently, you should think carefully about all factors that will affect your ability to care for a guinea pig and whether a guinea pig is suitable for you. Would you be able to provide for all of their needs? You will need to consider the size of your property, the financial and time implications of having a pet guinea pig, and its exercise needs. Caring for a guinea pig can be expensive and you should consider whether, for instance, you would be able to afford the cost of veterinary treatment or pet health insurance.

Being able to own a pet is not a human right. If you are a tenant, you must ask permission of your landlord before you take on ownership of a guinea pig. Some landlords require enhanced deposits from pet owners to insure against the increased risk of damage to the property by pets.

Even the best laid plans can go wrong, we are all susceptible to the unexpected, be it loss of a job or family member, a personal illness, an expensive bill, a relationship breakdown or even imprisonment. Changes in an owner's circumstances can impact on their ability to meet their pet's welfare needs. While you cannot plan for every eventuality, it is good to have someone who would be able to step in to help. If you are unable to care for your guinea pig at any time, you must make arrangements for another suitable person to look after it on your behalf. Furthermore, if you are the head of the household of a child under the age of 16 years old, you are responsible for any animal that child looks after or owns. If you own or are responsible for a guinea pig and fail to meet its welfare needs or cause it unnecessary suffering, you may be prosecuted under the Animal Welfare (Guernsey) Ordinance, 2012 (the 'Ordinance').

There is no one "perfect" way to care for all guinea pigs because every guinea pig, and every situation, is different, but they all have the same needs. It is up to you to find out what your guinea pig's precise needs are and how to meet them. Under Section 8 of the Ordinance, the



owner or keeper of an animal owes a duty to take such care as, in all circumstances, is reasonable to see that the animal is free –

There is no one “perfect” way to care for all cats because every cat, and every situation, is different, but they all have the same needs. It is up to you to find out what your cat’s precise needs are and how to meet them. Under Section 8 of the Ordinance, the owner or keeper of an animal owes a duty to take such care as, in all circumstances, is reasonable to see that the animal is –



from thirst, hunger and malnutrition, by access to a diet to maintain full health and vigour and free access to water,



from discomfort, by providing an appropriate environment including suitable shelter and a comfortable resting area,



from pain, injury and disease, by prevention or by the provision of timely veterinary diagnosis and treatment,



from fear and distress, by ensuring conditions and treatment to avoid mental suffering, and



to express normal behaviour patterns, by providing sufficient space, environmental enrichment and companionship, whether that be of the animal’s own kind, a compatible species, and especially in the case of dogs, human company.





How to provide a suitable diet for your guinea pig

Diet includes water, and guinea pigs always need access to fresh, clean drinking water to keep them hydrated. Without water to drink, a guinea pig will become distressed and seriously ill, especially during hot weather.

A guinea pig needs constant access to good quality, dust and mould free hay. Diets designed for other animals may not be suitable for guinea pigs, and some foods commonly found in the home, such as avocado, onion, grapes, raisins and chocolate can be harmful or even fatal to guinea pigs.

An individual guinea pig's nutritional needs depends on their age, the type of food, bodyweight and level of activity. Some guinea pigs, such as those that are pregnant, nursing or in poor health will have special dietary needs.

If guinea pigs eat more food than they need, they will become overweight and may suffer. If you underfeed your guinea pigs, they will lose weight and may become ill. Healthy adult guinea pigs should maintain a stable body weight that is neither too thin nor too fat.

Sudden changes in their diet can make your guinea pigs ill. Any dietary changes, including treats, should be made gradually over a period of time.

What you should do:

Provide your guinea pigs with fresh, clean drinking water at all times in a way that they are used to, ideally a gravity fill drinking bottle. Provide several bottles so that all your guinea pigs can drink at the same time. Keep the water

vessel clean and frequently refreshed.

Make sure your guinea pigs eat a balanced diet suitable for their individual needs and maintain a stable weight that is neither over nor underweight for their age, level of activity, sex, breed, and state of health.

Recommended diets for guinea pigs consist of 85% good quality hay, 10% leafy greens and 5% commercial pellets. As they cannot make vitamin C, you must ensure you provide them with vitamin C via fresh vegetables, pellets or a dietary supplement daily.

Read and be guided by the feeding instructions relating to any commercial guinea pig food you buy. Adjust how much of this and any greens are offered depending on the weight of your guinea pigs, but never restrict the amount of hay or grass offered.

Remove any uneaten food and change the amount so that they eat all of it and stay a healthy weight.

Do not change their diet suddenly. Any new foods, or changes, to the diet should be made gradually.

Be aware that any change in the amount that your guinea pig eats or drinks, or a change in food preference may be a sign of ill health and you should consult your vet.

If you are uncertain what to do, you should seek advice on feeding your guinea pig from a vet, veterinary nurse, or other reliable source.



How to provide a suitable environment for your guinea pig

Your guinea pig needs a safe environment and, whether they live inside or outside, they need protection from hazards. Examples of hazards include open windows and balconies, which may be inadequately protected to prevent your guinea pig from falling from them; household and garden chemicals; and poisonous plants.

All Guinea pigs are naturally inquisitive, and a guinea pig may put themselves in danger if they are left to explore unsupervised.

Your guinea pig needs a safe, comfortable place to rest, situated in a dry, draught-free area. Living in a cold or damp place can lead to suffering. If your guinea pig lives outside, they will need protection from adverse weather or other threats.

Guinea pigs must be able to avoid things that scare them. All guinea pigs need a place to hide where they feel safe. If unable to hide and avoid threats, your guinea pig will become stressed which can lead to ill health.

Guinea pigs are most active at dawn, dusk and overnight. Guinea pigs should have permanent access to all areas of their accommodation which allows them to display natural behaviours such as burrowing and digging.

Guinea pigs need a wide variety of enrichment items such as tubes, platforms and lots of bedding such as hay, shredded paper and hemp bedding.



Guinea pigs are a prey species, and their accommodation must be secure enough to protect them from predators, such as dogs, cats, ferrets, and birds of prey. They should be housed so they are unable to see, hear or smell predator species.

What you should do:

Provide your guinea pigs with a comfortable, safe, clean, dry, quiet, and draught-free environment with appropriate ventilation, temperature control and lighting (either natural or artificial) where they can rest undisturbed.

Guinea pigs are vulnerable to extremes of temperature. Their enclosure should therefore be located away from any radiators or other heat sources and protected against cold.

To ensure your guinea pig can thrive, you should offer as much space, choice, and enrichment as possible. Guinea pigs that are unable to perform natural behaviours become stressed, unwell and have a reduced lifespan.

All guinea pigs must have sufficient space to perform all their natural behaviours simultaneously including running, hiding, 'popcorning', and lying down stretched out without touching the sides of their enclosure. They should be able to choose to be apart from each other as well as together.

Living accommodation should be provided with dust-free nesting and bedding material and bedding material should cover the floor of the accommodation. Nesting and bedding material must not have been treated with substances which are hazardous to the health of guinea pigs.

Give them enough warm bedding - this should be safe to eat, such as dust-free hay. Don't use softwood products such as pine, as these

can cause illness, and don't give them nesting materials that separate into thin strands, such as cotton wool or similar 'fluffy' bedding products as they can become tangled in them. The best type is dry, dust-free, absorbent wood shavings supplemented with hay to allow animals to tunnel and hide.

Your guinea pig's accommodation must be cleaned regularly enough to keep it safe and hygienic, but not so often that they are frequently disturbed. Each day spot clean, remove poo, dirty and damp bedding, and any uneaten food. When doing a full clean, always use a pet-safe disinfectant to clean the cage. Take the opportunity to add a few new enrichment items for your guinea pig to explore.

Always put some old (unsoiled) bedding back after a deep clean so that your guinea pigs don't get stressed from losing the scent of the cage. Only let your guinea pigs back in to their home when it is completely dry.

Guinea pigs are easily startled and may injure themselves if they panic. Cages must be positioned so that guinea pigs are not exposed to sudden loud noises. Provide your guinea pigs with a hiding place each which they have constant access to, where they can escape if they feel afraid. Guinea pigs should be housed so they are unable to see, hear or smell predator species.

If you are going away, make sure your guinea pigs are only ever left with a competent person who can meet their welfare needs.

If you are going away and not taking your cat, make sure they are only ever left with someone who can meet their welfare needs.



How to ensure your guinea pig is fit and healthy

Guinea pigs feel pain however, as prey animals, they may not show outward signs of suffering or being in pain. Any changes in the way a guinea pig behaves can be an early sign that they may be ill or in pain.

They may:

- stop or reduce eating and lose weight,
- drink water excessively, less, or not at all,
- become withdrawn and unwilling to exercise or play,
- cry when approached or touched,
- show uncharacteristic fear or aggression when approached,
- try to hide.

They may also show specific signs of ill health such as:

- discharges from the eyes, ears, or nose,
- excessive salivation, vomiting,
- difficulties passing urine, diarrhoea, or constipation,
- coughing or wheezing,
- excessively scratching and developing skin sores,
- hair loss
- limping or swellings.

This list is for guidance only and is not exhaustive.

Guinea pigs are vulnerable to a range of infectious diseases, parasites, and other illnesses. Your vet can advise on ways to protect your guinea pig's health and welfare including vaccination, parasite treatment and neutering.

Dental problems are common in pet guinea pigs and include overgrown teeth, spurs, tooth root abscesses, and broken teeth. Only a vet should correct overgrown or misaligned teeth.

Overgrown nails are a common problem in guinea pigs and can cause pain and much more serious problems if the nails then grow into the pads.

Guinea pigs produce two types of droppings - hard, dry pellets and softer, moist pellets which they eat directly from their bottoms. Consumption of these droppings are essential to their health.

Guinea pigs' benefit from regular grooming. Long-haired guinea pigs, or those with specialised coats may require specialised grooming to avoid a matted coat.

Placing guinea pigs on their back invokes a fear response that causes extreme stress.

If you decide to breed your guinea pig, your vet can advise on the risks of inherited conditions and exaggerated features that could affect the welfare of the pups. Caring for pups is difficult and time-consuming, and the pups are your responsibility, with the same needs as any guinea pig under the Ordinance.

A guinea pig which can be easily identified (e.g.



by microchip) is more likely to be reunited with its owner if injured or lost. This will ensure they receive prompt veterinary treatment needed if injured. It is important to ensure the contact details held by any database are kept up to date.

What you should do:

Take sensible precautions to keep your guinea pig safe from injury, fear, and distress, including prevention of access to poisonous food, plants, chemicals, medicines, electrical cables, and any other hazards. You should always consult your vet if you are concerned that your guinea pig has eaten or come into contact with anything that could be harmful.

Get to know what is normal for your guinea pig. Monitor your guinea pig daily and watch out for changes in behaviour or signs of injury, disease, or illness. Make sure someone else does this if you are away.

Ask your vet how often your guinea pig needs a health check, and about the things you can do to protect your guinea pig's health. You should follow the advice you are given.

If you recognise signs and symptoms of disease or suspect that your guinea pig is in pain, ill or injured; contact a vet promptly and follow

veterinary advice regarding their treatment. If at any time you have concerns about the health or welfare of your guinea pig, you should seek advice from a vet or registered veterinary nurse.

You need to familiarise yourself with the size and amount of hard, dry pellets that your guinea pigs produce daily and note any change to the size or consistency of these. Any uneaten moist droppings in their environment or stuck to them is an indication that there is a health or dietary problem. Veterinary advice should be sought in either event.

Check your guinea pigs coat regularly and groom and bath your guinea pig, as necessary, to maintain healthy coat and skin. Check your guinea pigs nails regularly. Seek advice if you are not confident trimming your guinea pig's nails.

Guinea pigs should be checked over at least daily, twice daily in warmer weather, for any signs of flystrike - maggots. Flystrike can quickly be fatal, so it is important that you contact your vet immediately as your guinea pig needs to be seen urgently. Make sure someone else carries out the above daily checks if you are away.

Seek the advice of your vet if you are considering having your guinea pig neutered. They will be

able to advise you about the best age and time to have this done.

Seek the advice of your vet before breeding your guinea pig and take all reasonable steps to ensure that you will be able to provide the care required during pregnancy, as well as finding suitable homes for the pups before your guinea pig is bred.

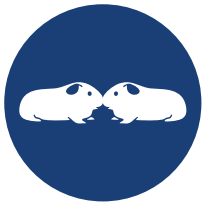
Wherever possible, all interactions with guinea pigs should take place at ground level. If it is necessary to pick up a guinea pig, only an adult or responsible older child should do this.

Guinea pigs should be handled appropriately and not placed on their backs or picked up by the scruff of their neck. Two hands must be used to support larger or adult guinea pigs.

Use positive reinforcement training to help your guinea pig willingly participate in home husbandry, grooming and vet visits. Seek advice from a qualified trainer who can help you teach cooperative care and management techniques away.

Guinea pig teeth should be regularly checked to ensure they are not overgrown or misaligned. Never attempt to treat or trim your guinea pig's teeth at home, only a vet should correct these problems.





How to provide the right companionship for your guinea pig

Guinea pigs are sociable animals that need, and enjoy, the companionship of at least one other friendly guinea pigs. Consequently, many guinea pigs do not like being alone and may suffer if left without company or enrichment.

Guinea pigs usually get on well with other guinea pigs when they have been neutered and properly introduced. Other species, such as rabbits, are not suitable companions for guinea pigs.

Guinea pigs that have been incorrectly introduced to other guinea pigs, or have been housed with an incompatible guinea pig, may be afraid and develop behavioural issues resulting from these experiences. These guinea pigs may be harder to successfully introduce to a new companion guinea pig, however, efforts should still be made to do so.

Guinea pigs get to know the people with whom they regularly interact and can trust. They can become confused and distressed if the behaviour of people is inconsistent and unpredictable. Provide your guinea pig with regular opportunities to interact with friendly people. Ensure those handling your guinea pig do so gently and do not frighten them or pick them up by their scruff.

It is never acceptable to frighten a guinea pig, cause pain, injure or encourage them to behave aggressively by teasing or tormenting them.

What you should do

Guinea pigs should be kept with at least one other compatible guinea pig. Good combinations include a neutered male and one or more females, two females or neutered brothers, if they've been reared together.

Guinea pigs should be introduced gradually on neutral territory, paying attention to the behaviour of both individual guinea pigs at all times. If chasing, fighting or mounting behaviour occurs regularly, talk to your vet who may be able to refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist.

Guinea pigs should be provided with the biggest area possible that allows them to be



near, and apart from, their companions and express natural behaviours such as sprawling, stretching out, 'popcorning' and climbing.

Provide sufficient resources for all guinea pigs e.g. toys, bedding, toilet areas and hiding places and give them enough space so they can get away from one another if they want to.

You should ensure that guinea pigs in your care have opportunities to positively interact with people every day. Guinea pigs must have space when meeting people so they can choose to move away if they become overwhelmed. Do not restrain them and insist they are petted, as this can create a fear response.

Be consistent, kind, and gentle in the way you, your family, and friends, react to your

guinea pigs. Never leave your guinea pigs unsupervised with another animal or person who may harm or frighten them, such as young children who may unintentionally do this.

When you are away, make sure your guinea pig is properly cared for by a responsible person. When someone else is looking after your guinea pig they also have a legal responsibility to ensure its welfare, and you should ensure that they understand its needs and any special requirements that it may have.

If your guinea pig shows signs of fear or aggression, calmly remove them from the situation and seek advice from a vet, veterinary nurse, or ethical trainer or behaviourist.





How to

provide your guinea pig's behavioural needs

How a guinea pig behaves is individual and depends on their age, breed or type, breeding, rearing and past experiences. Guinea pigs are active, playful, sociable animals and need to live with another guinea pig.

Guinea pigs are intelligent animals and can suffer from boredom and loneliness. If your guinea pigs are not mentally and physically stimulated, they will suffer and engage in stress behaviours e.g. such as chewing their bars or nipping.

Aggressive displays or changes in behaviour, including hiding or dietary changes, may indicate that something is wrong with the guinea pig's physical and mental health.

Guinea pigs experience a range of emotions including happiness, anxiety, fearfulness, and anger. How they behave and their body language can help you understand what they are feeling and whether they are physically and mentally fit and healthy.

Guinea pigs' natural behaviours include digging, foraging, hiding, running and standing up on their hind limbs. They must be able to perform all these behaviours in their enclosure.

What you should do:

Make sure your guinea pigs receive enough mental, social and physical stimulation to satisfy their individual behavioural needs.

Provide your guinea pigs with safe enrichment items and regular opportunities to interact with

friendly people.

Make sure your guinea pigs have permanent access to their exercise area so they can stay fit, happy and healthy.

Guinea pigs are crepuscular, meaning they are most active at dawn, dusk and overnight. Keep feeding times, cage cleaning and interactions to these times when your guinea pig is most active.

Ensure your guinea pigs are able to rest undisturbed when they want to. Don't house them in areas that have lots of activity during the day.

Guinea pigs need access to safe and secure hiding/resting places that they can access at all times. There should be one hiding place per guinea pig and one spare. These should all have more than one entrance/exit to prevent guinea pigs from being trapped inside or prevented from entering.

Make sure your guinea pigs can reach all the things they need (e.g. bedding, food, water, toilet areas, toys) without having to get too close to things, people or other animals that may scare them. For multiple guinea pigs in an enclosure, they should be provided with one of everything each.

Never shout at or punish your guinea pigs. They will not understand and will just become more nervous or scared. You should only use positive reward-based training.

Early life experiences can affect how guinea

pigs behave. Guinea pigs should be very slowly and gently handled when they are young and allowed to experience other everyday noises and stimuli that they will likely face when older. Build their trust by letting them come to you. injured and you should seek advice from a vet.

Understanding guinea pig behaviour

It is important to observe body language in context. Almost all behaviours, when observed on their own, could mean a number of different things in different contexts.

You should know the behaviour of your guinea pig when it is fit and healthy and be able to recognise and understand the signs your guinea pig, and others, use when they are worried, distressed, frightened or feeling unwell.

Here are some signs to look out for that may show your guinea pig is happy:distressed, frightened or feeling unwell.



Behaviours that may show your guinea pig is happy:

- Showing affection, such as licking
- Making purring, chutting, squeaks, or whistle noises
- Being playful and energetic
- Popcorning

Behaviours which may be associated with stress include:

- Making distress vocalisations (unusual to them)
- Hiding to avoid being touched or feeling vulnerable
- Excessive cleaning or chewing of their feet, flanks and fur
- Changes to their feeding or toileting habits
- Over-drinking or not drinking.
- Reluctance to move or a change in movement, or
- Repetitive movements, such as racing back and forth, jumping up
- Displaying more aggressive communication such as biting
- An absence of behaviour normal for the individual

If their behaviour changes or becomes a problem they could be distressed, bored, ill or injured and you should seek advice from a vet or other suitably qualified guinea pig care specialist.



How to **Safely transport your guinea pig**

A guinea pig needs a safe and secure place within a vehicle that is large enough for it to stand, stretch and turn around comfortably.

The vehicle must maintain a comfortable temperature in the space where the guinea pig is kept.

Never leave an animal in a vehicle in direct strong sunshine or high temperatures. The temperature inside a car in full sun on a hot day can quickly rise to double the temperature outside, leading rapidly to distress for any animal in the vehicle. Overheating, distress, and suffering is likely when the temperature goes above 25oC for more than a few minutes.

What you should do

Provide a secure carrier, for your guinea pig that is large enough for them to comfortably stand up, turn around and stretch.

Don't transport your guinea pig in a way that it could come to harm, e.g. whilst unrestrained in a vehicle with the windows wide open.

Do not leave your guinea pig unattended in situations, or for periods of time that are likely to cause them distress or render them unsafe



This Code of Recommendation applies to all guinea pigs.

The purpose of the Code is to provide practical guidance to help you to comply with the provisions set out under Section 8 of the Animal Welfare (Guernsey) Ordinance 2012 ([weblink to the Ordinance](#)). It does not tell you precisely how to care for your guinea pig, but it does summarise important things you should know and what to do when making decisions about how best to care for your guinea pig.

A failure to comply with the Code of Recommendations may be relied upon in court as tending to establish liability for failing to meet the duty of care.

If you are unsure about anything to do with the care and welfare of your guinea pig, you should always seek advice from an expert such as a veterinary surgeon or “other suitably qualified” specialists. These are people who hold the qualifications and experience to provide expert advice on guinea pig welfare and behaviour.



