

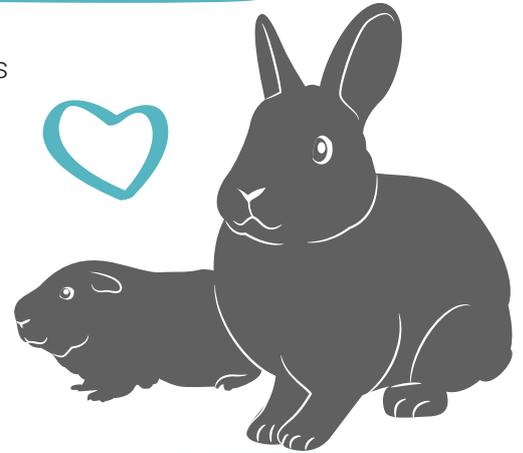
MEETING THE NEEDS OF SMALL PETS (RABBITS AND GUINEA PIGS)

Rabbits and guinea pigs need special care. Giving them what they need helps keep them healthy and happy. Being healthy and happy is good welfare.

THEY HAVE DIFFERENT NEEDS

These animals are different to cats and dogs. This is because they are:

- Prey species that get scared easily.
- Herbivores that need high fibre diets and **constant** access to food.
- Very sensitive to heat and noise.



WHY IT MATTERS?

- **Rabbits and guinea pigs should not live in hutches all the time.** Small spaces stop them from playing and exercising as much as they need to. When hutches are outside, rabbits or guinea pigs can get too hot or too cold. This can be dangerous.
- **Rabbits and guinea pigs hide sickness.** Because they are prey animals, they try not to show when they are sick. We must watch them closely. Get help from a vet quickly if something seems wrong.
- **Rabbits and guinea pigs need friends of their own kind.** They feel sad and lonely when they are kept by themselves.

! Rabbits and guinea pigs should not be kept together – this often leads to injuries!

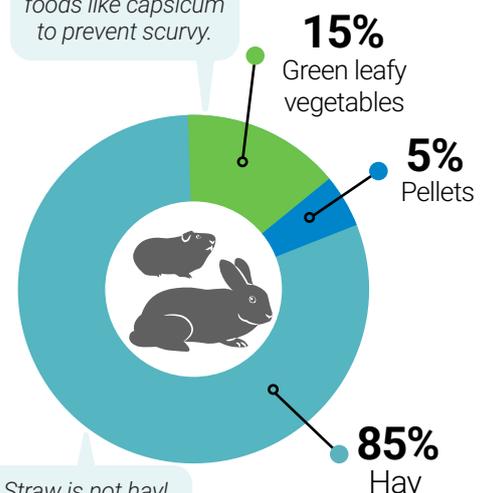
A GOOD DIET IS CRITICAL - WHAT TO FEED YOUR RABBIT OR GUINEA PIG?

Each day, every rabbit or guinea pig needs:

Weight (kg)	Hay	Pellets (cups)	Greens (cups)	Vegetables (tablespoons)
0-1	Unlimited	1/8	1	1
2	Unlimited	1/8	2	2
3	Unlimited	1/4	3	3
4	Unlimited	1/2	4	4
5	Unlimited	1/2	5	5
6+	Unlimited	3/4	1 per kg	1 per kg

Source: What should I feed my rabbits? – RSPCA Knowledgebase

Guinea pigs also need Vitamin C rich foods like capsicum to prevent scurvy.



Straw is not hay!
Straw = bedding
Hay = food

Prey Animals

- They scare easily. They consider that everything could be dangerous to them, even humans!
- Let them hide when they are afraid or unsure.
- Keep away from dogs, cats and ferrets.
- Set up enclosures in quiet areas, away from noise and busy paths.

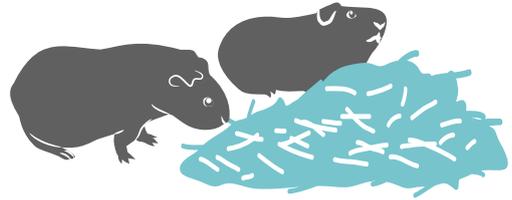


Diet

- Hay = main food and it should always be available.
 - Rabbits: pile same size as body every day.
 - Guinea pigs: pile twice body size every day.

PLUS

- Greens = 15% of diet.
- Pellets = 5%.
- Fruit = treat only.
- Guinea pigs also need Vitamin C rich foods a few times a week (e.g., capsicum).



Water

- Fresh, cool water at all times.
- Provide shallow bowls and drinkers.
- Keep both clean and cool.



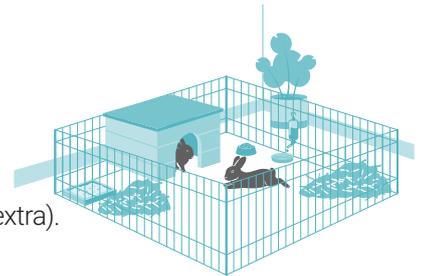
Social Needs

- Need a friend of their own kind.
- Desex before pairing – they breed quickly.
- Don't house rabbits and guinea pigs together.



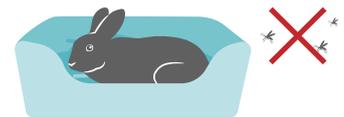
Housing

- Indoor housing is best – it keeps them safe from heat, cold and insects.
- Large enclosure needed (not just a hutch):
 - Rabbits: min. 3m x 1.5m x 1m high.
 - Guinea pigs: min. 2m x 0.5m x 30cm high.
- Provide shelter from weather and hides (one per animal + one extra).
- Give rabbits and guinea pigs choices within their home – different places to sit, hide, explore and play!
- No wire floors – these cause injuries.



Clean, safe home

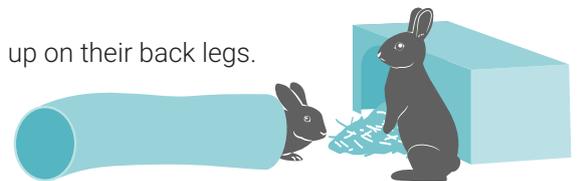
- Provide toileting areas – clean daily.
- Clean enclosure 2 times per week.
- Protect from mosquitoes - they carry deadly diseases.



Exercise and Enrichment

Each day:

- Rabbits need to run, hop, dig and be able to stand up on their back legs.
- Guinea pigs need to play, hide and explore.
- Provide tunnels, boxes and shredded paper.
- Hide food for fun and mental stimulation.



Activity levels

- Most active at dawn and dusk - let them rest during the day.
- It's normal for rabbits and guinea pigs to be awake at night and sleep more during the day.



Weather

- Bring indoors if >28°C.
- Provide good shade and ventilation when it's warm.
- Keep them dry and warm when it's cold.



Handling

- Most dislike being picked up – as prey, they think they will be harmed.
- Sit on the ground and groom them instead.
- Never lift by ears, legs, or scruff.
- Be careful when handling is required. They may struggle or try to escape. Support the spine.
- Never lay on their back ('hypnotising') – this is very stressful.

