

SO YOU WANT TO ADOPT/BUY A GUINEA PIG.

Please look at this questionnaire and answer each question honestly before running out to buy a guinea pig.

HAVE YOU DONE YOUR HOMEWORK?

YES / NO

No pet should be acquired until you have thoroughly researched their needs, and can guarantee you are able to provide for them.

ARE YOU ABLE TO PROVIDE THE CORRECT HOUSING, WHICH MEANS THE RIGHT TYPE OF CAGE AND THE RIGHT SIZE?

YES / NO

Guinea pigs do best if housed inside the home with their human family. For two guinea pigs, you need a secure cage with at least 0.7 sq.m. floor area (that is, 1.2m x 60cm). Cages **MUST** have solid floors (not wire floors, not open floors), and must have soft bedding underfoot for absorbency and comfort. If you **MUST** house outdoors, cages **MUST** be predator-proof and out of inclement weather, so they should be housed under cover, up next to the house so that they are seen every day. Whether indoors or outdoors, they still require the same floor space, and this should be on one level **NOT** split over two levels.

Lawn-style hutches that are open to the ground are **NOT** a suitable way to house guinea pigs permanently and should only be used for supervised grass time in nice weather. (Please refer to our Good Cages / Bad Cages flyer)

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THEIR COMFORT?

YES / NO

Guinea pigs need soft, absorbant bedding to stay healthy and happy.

You can use a thick layer of kiln-dried, dust-extracted pine shavings topped with hay. Or you can use an absorbant layer (old towels, paper kitty litter, Carefresh paper) under layers of polar fleece or Vetbed.

Cages will need daily spot cleaning and weekly full cleans.

Bedroom areas need to be stuffed with hay and/or given hideys or snuggle sacks to keep them warm in winter. And good ventilation with cooling over summer – ice packs or air conditioning to help prevent heat stress and death.

ARE YOU WILLING TO BUY/KEEP MORE THAN ONE GUINEA PIG?

YES/ NO

Guinea pigs are social animals and naturally live in groups – they are not solitary– and they should always be kept with at least one other same sex or desexed guinea pig. Anyone selling or rehoming guinea pigs to live as single animals cannot be considered a responsible shelter/breeder/seller.

ARE YOU WILLING TO ACCEPT THAT GUINEA PIG UPKEEP IS ULTIMATELY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ADULTS IN THE HOUSEHOLD, NOT CHILDREN?

YES / NO

Children should never be the primary carers for guinea pigs. These animals have special requirements which would be difficult to entrust to young children. Children, too, are likely lose interest in their pets within weeks/months of piggies entering your home. Adults must accept full responsibility for the care of the guinea pigs before bringing them into your home. If the adults are not interested, then do not get guinea pigs, no matter how much the children plead with you. These are living creatures, not play things, not disposable pets, not starter pets for children.

ARE YOU WILLING TO COMMIT TO LOOKING AFTER YOUR GUINEA PIGS LONG-TERM? WILL THE PRIMARY PIGGY CARER KNOW WHERE THEY WILL BE IN THE NEXT 2 YEARS? 5 YEARS? 10 YEARS? YES / NO

Will they be: IN THE SAME LOCATION / AT UNIVERSITY / LEAVING HOME? MOVING OVERSEAS or INTERSTATE / TOO OLD TO CARE?

Guinea pigs live 5-8 years but, if well cared for, will often live longer. These animals deserve a forever home. If you foresee any major changes in your lives that may disrupt the guinea pigs, please reconsider owning any in the first place. Like any pet, such as cats or dogs, guinea pigs become bonded to their loving human family. Removing them from this environment can be unfair. However, circumstances in life CAN be unpredictable, so not all future plans can be foreseen. **If you do find yourself in the position where you cannot keep your piggies, then please return them to the shelter that you adopted from.** If you purchased from a breeder, ask them to take the pigs back. Or you can surrender to a reputable shelter who will find a perfect home for your pets.

DO YOU KNOW, AND CAN PROVIDE, AN APPROPRIATE DIET FOR GUINEA PIGS? YES / NO

Guinea pigs **MUST HAVE** unlimited amounts of fresh grass/meadow/pasture hay – this makes up 80-85% of their daily diet. Hay should be green and smell fresh/sweet, and **NEVER** smell dusty/musty.

They also need fresh dark leafy green vegetables, capsicum and grass, making up 10% of their daily diet (about 1 cup chopped veg daily). They need this to give the Vitamin C, just like humans need Vitamin C.

Guinea pigs should also have a small amount of quality high-fibre pellet food (about 2 tablespoons per guinea pig per day)– Oxbow, Burges Excel and Vetafarm are the **ONLY** quality pellets available in Australia – all other products (pellets and mixes) are poor quality and the nutritional value is inconsistent and often dangerously unhealthy. Your local reputable rescue shelter may make a quality mix, which will be the exception – these **NOT** contain molasses, lots of Lucerne, or seeds. Do not feed rabbit pellets as these may contain dangerous antibiotics or coccidiostats.

WILL YOU HAVE TIME TO INTERACT WITH YOUR GUINEA PIGS EACH DAY? YES / NO

Lack of interaction can make them antisocial, making your pets less enjoyable and therefore at risk of being overlooked. It will make them more difficult to handle when you need to, and it also makes it more difficult for you to notice the early signs of illness. As guinea pigs hide illness, you **MUST** act promptly at first signs of illness or it may be too late to save their lives.

DO YOU HAVE THE SPACE AND TIME FOR YOUR GUINEA PIGS TO EXERCISE/PLAY? YES / NO

This is especially important if they live in a smaller cage. You should provide your guinea pigs with at least an hour of play/exercise time in a safe area (outside their cage) each day.

CAN YOU AFFORD TO KEEP THEM? YES / NO

Guinea pigs are not cheap starter pets for children. In fact, they are not cheap pets. Costs to set up your new pets – cage, bedding hideys/toys, adoption fees – are the cheapest part of owning these pets. Weekly food and bedding costs can be around \$20-\$50 per guinea pig each week. If they fall ill, or need regular health checks, they must see an exotics vet that is trained in guinea pig medicine. A simple consultation can be up to \$90, and any surgeries are generally much more expensive than the same surgeries for cats and dogs. They can be prone to ovarian cysts, abscesses, tummy upsets, upper respiratory infections, mite infestations, fungal infections, dental issues, to name a few. And veterinary treatment for these is urgent and potentially expensive.

DO YOU HAVE OTHER PETS THAT MIGHT CAUSE ISSUES WITH THE GUINEA PIGS?**YES / NO**

Guinea pigs must never be housed with rabbits due to the risk of injury caused by biting, kicking or mounting by the rabbits. Rabbits can also be carriers of life-threatening Bordatella or Pasteurella which can kill guinea pigs even though they don't harm rabbits.

Dogs can carry Bordatella too, as well as dogs being natural predators. Cats and dogs should be kept well away from guinea pigs to avoid the risk of injury, and also reduce the fear for guinea pigs being around predatorial species.

Guinea pigs must also be kept away from poultry and birds due to health risks, and should NEVER be housed in or around bird cages.

HAVE YOU CHECKED THAT NEITHER YOU NOR YOUR FAMILY ARE ALLERGIC TO GUINEA PIGS?**YES / NO**

Allergies to guinea pigs and/or hay is very common. It would be valuable to take all family members to a local rescue shelter to interact with guinea pigs before bringing them into your home, then risking an allergic reaction.

DO YOU HAVE SOMEONE WHO WILL LOOK AFTER YOUR GUINEA PIGS WHILE YOU'RE ON HOLIDAY?**YES / NO**

Many rescue shelters either board their adopted animals or can refer you to someone who is a responsible boarding facility. Leaving your pets in the care of the next door neighbour or friends who will only check on the pigs once a day may not be the best choice, especially in summer or winter when climatic conditions may require extra attention to ensure the piggies safety and well being.

DO YOU KNOW THE LOCATION AND PHONE NUMBER OF YOUR LOCAL PIGGY-SAVVY VET? COULD YOU SAFELY TRANSPORT A SICK GUINEA PIG TO THE VET IN AN EMERGENCY?**YES / NO**

A guinea pig vet has specialized training in these fragile animals. Most vets are not even aware of the few safe (and many unsafe) antibiotics that are available for guinea pigs. Check that your vet is cavy savvy. In Melbourne, we strongly recommend the following vets:

Dr Brendan Carmel – Warranwood Veterinary Clinic

Dr Lizzie Goldstraw – Warranwood Veterinary Clinic, and CARE in Collingwood

Dr Belinda Oppenheimer – Warranwood Veterinary Clinic, and CARE in Collingwood

Dr Tristan Rich – Lort Smith Animal Hospital

For transporting, you will need a secure transport box or carrier, and also be able to drive or take public transport to a qualified vet in the event of an emergency.