

1983

Science Notes - Guinea Pigs

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Recommended Citation

(1983) "Science Notes - Guinea Pigs," *Iowa Science Teachers Journal*: Vol. 20: No. 2, Article 21.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/istj/vol20/iss2/21>

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SCIENCE NOTES

Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs (cavies) have excellent dispositions. They are gentle and rarely bite. Several varieties make good classroom animals. The English (or Bolivian) type has short hair. The Abyssinian type has a short rough coat. The Peruvian guinea pig has shaggy hair which requires brushing each day.

Classroom Habitat

Guinea pigs can be housed outdoors as long as the temperature is between 16° and 30° C (60-86° F). A pen on the grass allows for exercise. An area of at least 400 square inches is required for a pair.

Guinea pigs housed indoors must not be housed in a drafty or damp place. Metal or plastic cages may be purchased. If the cage is more than 35 cm high a lid may not be necessary since guinea pigs are not good climbers. Straw, hay or cedar shavings make excellent bedding. Three to 5 cm of bedding will suffice. Change the bedding every four days; damp bedding is detrimental to their health.

Feeding and Watering

Guinea pigs are vegetarians. Vegetables, fruits or green forage plants must be given each day. Vitamin C must be provided each day to prevent scurvy. Commercial guinea pig pellets may be purchased. An adequate amount of food should be left in the cage at all times.

Large water bottles should be provided as guinea pigs drink as much as 150 ml of water a day. Vitamin C tablets may be added to the water.

Sexing and Breeding

Do not started breeding until a good home for offspring has been assured. Guinea pigs are well developed at birth. They weigh about 100 gm and have open eyes. Males and females should be separated 21 days after birth. The genital opening of guinea pigs is the same distance from the anus in both sexes. However, the male's is rounded and the female's has a longitudinal slit. The gestation period is from 65 to 70 days. An average litter is three, but some contain five or more. Guinea pigs may have a life span of several years.

Adapted from *Kansas Association of Teachers of Science Newsletter*, 1982, Vol. 16(2).