



Guinea Pig Enrichment

Offering your guinea pigs enrichment is important for their health. Here's a guide about what enrichment is, how to provide enrichment for your guinea pigs and food you can use in enrichment.

WHAT IS ENRICHMENT?

Even though guinea pigs live in our homes, they still have traits from their wild ancestors. They do things called natural behaviors, which help them survive in the wild and are activities they enjoy. Enrichment gives guinea pigs chances to use these natural behaviors, which are important for their health and happiness. These behaviors and needs include:

- **Chewing** – A guinea pig's teeth never stop growing, so they always need hay and other things to chew.
- **Foraging** – In the wild, guinea pigs spend time exploring and searching for food.
- **Hiding** – Because guinea pigs are prey animals, finding safe places to hide is important and makes them feel secure.
- **Companionship** – Guinea pigs are social animals who live in groups and need to live with other guinea pigs. For more information, read EHS' [Introducing Guinea Pigs Guide](#).

Enrichment lets them express these natural behaviours, increases their well-being and can be a great way to bond as you watch them have fun.

Remember that guinea pigs are a prey species, so they are naturally alert to possible threats, new objects or a change in their environment, which can frighten them. When giving your guinea pig something new, always monitor how they respond so you can remove the item if they seem frightened, are avoiding it or show signs of stress.

ENRICHMENT IDEAS

- Stuff hay and food inside non-bleached and non-dyed toilet paper rolls, brown paper bags, egg cartons and boxes. This lets them chew and search for hidden food.



- Tubes, hutches or boxes to hide in. Make sure they're big enough for them to fit in and safely exit from. Always remove things like tape or staples from boxes.
- Hang cardboard toilet paper rolls or stuff treats and hay inside the rolls to encourage foraging and movement.
- Food dispensing toys such as balls, tubes or crumpled paper balls stuffed with hay and treats that your guinea pig pushes around can be fun for them.
- Besides hay, your guinea pig might enjoy chewing on cardboard, apple branch sticks or other guinea pig safe materials.
- Provide time outside their enclosure by setting up a playpen with hay, toys, hiding spaces, food and water. Letting your guinea pig play and move around can give them chances to exercise and explore.

THINGS TO AVOID

- Harnesses, exercise balls and wheels. Guinea pig backs are fragile and can be hurt by these. To give your guinea pig exercise time, let them explore a large, safe area instead. Ensure their area is clear of electrical cables or other things they may chew and ingest.
- Easily destroyed plastic. Your guinea pig should not chew and ingest plastic.
- Loofah and foam. Dyes used in loofahs can be bad for guinea pigs, and ingesting loofah can block their stomach.
- Bleached or dyed paper. Some ingredients are toxic to guinea pigs; use plain, untreated paper or paper with soy-based dyes.
- Mineral and salt sticks. Guinea pigs do not need the amount of salt or minerals these give, and too much can lead to health problems.

WHAT CAN GUINEA PIGS EAT?

Knowing about what guinea pigs need in their diet can help you decide what to put in enrichment to complement the pellets they eat.

- Lots of hay and fresh water should **always** be available.
- Fibre is needed for their gut and dental health.
- Young growing guinea pigs need calcium, but too much calcium can cause bladder stones in adults, so food high in calcium should be given sparingly to adults.
- Foods high in sugar can upset their stomach and should be given sparingly.
- Guinea pigs can't make vitamin C, so they need it in their diet.



- Guinea pig pellets usually contain vitamin C, but not enough of it, and the vitamin can lose strength quickly. Giving vitamin C as a tablet or cookie works best because you can be sure your guinea pig gets the right amount. Always check the expiry date on vitamin C products.
- Adding vitamin C drops to water is not advised, since it can make the water taste bad and discourage guinea pigs from drinking.

Hay is the **most important** component of a guinea pig’s diet for a few reasons: It helps maintain their teeth, gives an outlet for chewing and the fibre in hay is important for their digestive health. Alfalfa hay is recommended for young guinea pigs under 6 months old since it is high in calcium and protein. Grass hays, like timothy, oat, brome and/or orchard are recommended for adults.

Food	How Often it can be Given	How Much to Give
Grass hay (timothy, oat, orchard and brome etc.)	Always available	Unlimited
Commercial extruded pellets formulated for guinea pigs (no dried fruit or seeds)	Daily	1 - 2 tbsp
Romaine lettuce, red or green leaf lettuce, butter lettuce, arugula, basil, cilantro, mint, endive, carrot tops and dandelions (untreated)	Daily	½ - 1 cup Give a variety of vegetables, especially leafy greens, so they get multiple nutrients
Bell pepper, cucumber, zucchini and dill weed	2 - 4 times a week	A small amount (1 - 2 tbsp) with their daily leafy greens
Kale, spinach, parsley, Swiss chard, beet greens and parsnip	1 - 2 times a week. These are high in oxalates, which can contribute to bladder stones	A small amount (1 - 2 leaves) with their daily leafy greens
Carrot, blueberry, apple, strawberry, blueberry, pear, melon and banana	1 - 2 times a week in small amounts – these are high in sugar	Small slices or cubes – 1/2 tablespoon total
Iceberg lettuce, avocado, potato, mushroom, rhubarb,	Never – these have little or no nutritional value and can	None



daffodil, garlic, eggplant,
nuts and seeds, onion,
chives and leeks

upset their stomach or are
toxic to guinea pigs

Ask your veterinarian if you're unsure if a food is safe and to determine the best diet for your individual guinea pig.

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