



## BACKGROUND

**SIZE:** XS-XL, from tiny 4-pound tea cup Poodles to 3-foot-tall Irish Wolfhounds

**LIFESPAN:** 8-16 years, depending on breed type, size, genetics & care

**COST PER YEAR:** \$580-\$875, depending on size

**GOOD WITH KIDS?:** Young children may unwittingly mishandle or hurt puppies or small dogs, who are particularly vulnerable to injury. Children ages 6 & up can share simple pet care duties.

**WHERE TO GET A DOG:** Your best option? Adoption! There are great

dogs at shelters and small-animal rescue groups all across the country. Go to [www.aspc.org/adoption/shelters](http://www.aspc.org/adoption/shelters) to find a shelter near you and visit websites like Petfinder.com.

If you are committed to getting a specific breed, contact the local chapter of the breed's rescue group or locate a responsible breeder.

**Note:** Make sure you have all your supplies (see checklist) *before* you bring your dog home.

## FOOD

- Puppies 8 to 12 weeks old need 4 meals a day.
- Feed puppies 3 to 6 months old 3 meals a day.
- Feed puppies 6 months to one year 2 meals a day.
- When your dog reaches his first birthday, one or two meals a day are recommended.
- For some dogs, including larger breeds or those prone to bloat, it's better to feed 2 small meals.
- Feed your adult pooch a commercial brand of dry food that meets nutritional requirements and provides a well-balanced diet. You can mix in water or canned food. Your dog may enjoy small amounts of cottage cheese, cooked egg, fruits and vegetables, but these additions should not total more than 10 percent of his daily intake.
- Feed your dog the amounts recommended by your veterinarian or the manufacturer to avoid obesity, a common problem in dogs today.
- Feed your puppy a commercial brand of puppy food. Limit "people food," because it can cause a variety of problems including very picky eating habits and obesity.
- Fresh water should be available at all times, and be sure to wash food/water dishes frequently.

## BEDDING/HOUSING

- Your dog needs a warm, quiet place to rest, away from all drafts and off the floor. A training crate is ideal. You can buy a dog bed, or make one out of a wooden box. Place a clean blanket or pillow inside the bed. Wash bedding often.
- If your dog will be spending a lot of time outdoors, be sure she has access to fresh water, is protected from drafts and inclement weather (rain), has access to shade in hot weather, and a warm, dry covered shelter when it's cold.

## EXERCISE

- Exercise burns calories and helps avoid boredom, which can lead to destructive behaviors. Supervised fun and games will satisfy your dog's instinctual needs to dig, herd, chew, retrieve and chase.
- Individual exercise needs vary based on breed or breed mix, sex, age and health status. If your dog is a 6- to 18-month adolescent, or if she is

an active breed or mixed-breed from the sporting, herding, hound or terrier groups, her requirements will be relatively high. If your dog is older and has medical problems, a short 10 minute walk may be best. Follow the recommendations of your veterinarian.

## GROOMING

- Help keep your dog clean and reduce shedding with frequent brushing.
- Most dogs don't need to be bathed more than a few times a year. Before bathing, comb or cut out all mats. Thoroughly rinse your coat after shampooing. Be sure to check and trim your dogs nails periodically.

## HANDLING

- To carry a puppy or small dog, place one hand under the dog's chest, with your forearm or other hand supporting the hind legs and rump. Never attempt to lift or grab your puppy or small dog by the forelegs, tail or back of the neck.
- If you have to lift a large dog, lift from the underside, supporting his chest with one arm and his rear end with the other.

## LICENSING & ID

- Follow your community's licensing regulations. Attach the license, along with an up-to-date ID tag, to your dog's collar.
- We recommend permanent ID, such as a microchip, to help secure your dog's return should she become lost. Be sure to update owner registration information as needed.

## BEHAVIOR

- A well-behaved dog is a joy. Teaching your dog the basics (Sit, Stay, Come, Down, Heel, Off and Leave It) will improve your relationship with both your dog and your neighbors.
- If you have a puppy, start teaching her manners as soon as possible! Use bits of food as a lure and reward. Puppies can be enrolled in obedience courses when they have been adequately vaccinated. Contact your local shelter or SPCA for training class recommendations.
- Keep your dog on a leash in public. Be sure your pet will come to you at all times. A disobedient or aggressive dog is not ready to play with others.

FOR EXPERT ADVICE ON COMMON BEHAVIOR ISSUES FROM BARKING TO HOUSING, VISIT THE ASPCA VIRTUAL PET BEHAVIORIST AT [ASPCABEHAVIOR.ORG](http://ASPCABEHAVIOR.ORG)

## HEALTH

- Your dog should see a veterinarian for a full physical examination every year. At this time it can be determined which vaccines and diagnostic tests are necessary. If he is sick or injured, seek help immediately.

## SPAYING AND NEUTERING

- Female dogs should be spayed (the removal of the ovaries and uterus) and males neutered (removal of the testicles). This surgery can be safely done as early as 6 to 8 weeks of age.

CONTINUED

- Spaying before maturity significantly reduces the risk of breast cancer, a serious disease of older female dogs. Spaying also eliminates the risk of an infected uterus, a potentially fatal problem in older dogs that requires surgery and intensive medical care. Neutering males prevents testicular cancer and reduces the occurrence of prostatic enlargement, some hernias and certain types of aggression.

## VACCINATIONS

- Puppies should be vaccinated with a distemper combination vaccine beginning at 6-8 weeks and repeated monthly until they are 16-24 weeks, and then once annually. This vaccine protects against distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus and parainfluenza. A puppy's vaccination program cannot be finished before 4 months of age; some breeds, including Rottweilers, American Staffordshire and pit bull terriers, should be vaccinated until 5 months of age.
- If you have an unvaccinated dog older than 4 or 5 months, he will need a series of 2 vaccinations given 3 to 4 weeks apart, followed by a yearly vaccination.
- Puppy vaccination and socialization should go together. Many veterinarians recommend that new owners take their puppies to socialization classes, beginning at 8 to 9 weeks of age. At this age, they should have received at least their first series of vaccines.
- Rabies vaccination is required by law in most areas. In most cases, the vaccine is given beginning at 3 months of age, one year later and then every 3 years. Since laws vary, contact a local veterinarian for more information.
- Other vaccines for dogs are appropriate in certain situations. Your veterinarian can tell you about them.

## TOOTH CARE

- Bad breath is the most common indicator that your dog is in need of a dental check up. Keep your pet's teeth and gums healthy by brushing her teeth once or twice a week. Use dog toothpaste on a child's soft toothbrush or a gauze pad.
- Some dogs are prone to periodontal disease, an infection between the tooth and gum. This serious condition that can result in tooth loss and spread infection to the entire body requires veterinary care.

## FLEAS AND TICKS

- Daily inspections of your dog for fleas and ticks, especially during the warm seasons, are important. Use a flea comb to find and remove fleas.
- There are several methods of flea and tick control. The environment must also be treated. Speak to your veterinarian about these options.

## HEARTWORM

- This parasite lives in the heart and is passed to dogs by mosquitoes. Although many dogs who are infected with heartworms can appear healthy, heartworm disease can be fatal. Your dog should have a blood test for heartworm every spring—this is crucial for detecting infections from the previous year.
- Your veterinarian will develop an effective heartworm prevention plan (including preventive medication) based on your dog's lifestyle and the region of the country you live in.

## MEDICINES AND POISONS

- Never give your dog medication that has not been prescribed by a veterinarian. For example, did you know that one regular-strength ibuprofen tablet can cause stomach ulcers in a 10-pound dog? Keep rat poison and other rodenticides away from your pet.
- For information about potentially toxic substances that can harm your dog, visit [www.aspc.org/pet-care/poison-control](http://www.aspc.org/pet-care/poison-control).

IF YOU THINK THAT YOUR PET MAY HAVE INGESTED A POTENTIALLY POISONOUS SUBSTANCE, CALL THE ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL CENTER AT (888) 426-4435

A \$65 consultation fee may be applied to your credit card

## INTERNAL PARASITES (WORMS)

- Make sure your pet is screened annually for internal parasites! Dogs are commonly exposed to worms and other microscopic parasites (even in urban areas). Some parasites may cause disease in humans so proper screening and treatment are essential for the health of both you and your pooch.
- All puppies should be dewormed by a veterinarian. Most pups, even from healthy mothers in good homes, can carry roundworms or hookworms.
- The key to treatment is correct diagnosis, which is most often obtained by a microscopic examination of your dog's feces by your veterinarian. Your veterinarian can then prescribe the appropriate medication.

## DOG SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Commercial brand of dog food and treats
- ✓ Food dish
- ✓ Water bowl
- ✓ Toys, toys & more toys, including safe chew toys
- ✓ Brush & comb for grooming, including flea comb and nail trimmer
- ✓ Collar with license and ID tag
- ✓ Leash
- ✓ Carrier (for smaller dogs)
- ✓ Training crate
- ✓ Dog bed or box with warm blanket or towel
- ✓ Dog toothbrush

## THE NO-NO LIST

Do not feed your dog:

- ✓ Alcoholic beverages
- ✓ Chocolate
- ✓ Coffee, macadamia nuts
- ✓ Grapes, raisins and avocados
- ✓ Moldy or spoiled food
- ✓ Onions, garlic & chives
- ✓ Poultry bones
- ✓ Salt & salty foods
- ✓ Tomato leaves, stems & unripe fruit
- ✓ Yeast dough
- ✓ Human medications unless prescribed by your veterinarian.



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### BACKGROUND

**SIZE:** 8-11 pounds on average—but larger breeds & breed mixes can weigh 15+

**LIFESPAN:** 13-17 years

**COST PER YEAR:** About \$670

**GOOD WITH KIDS?:** Young children may unwittingly mishandle or hurt kittens, who are particularly vulnerable to injury. Children ages 10 & up are ready for duties like feeding, grooming and litter cleaning.

**WHERE TO GET A CAT:** Your best option? Adoption! There are great cats (purebreds, too!) at shelters and small-animal rescue groups all across the country.

Go to: [www.asPCA.org/adoption/shelters/](http://www.asPCA.org/adoption/shelters/) to find a shelter near you.

**Note:** Make sure you have all your supplies (see checklist) before you bring your cat home.

### FOOD

- Feed kittens 6 to 12 weeks old 4 times a day.
- Feed kittens 3 to 6 months old 3 times a day.
- Feed adult cats one main or 2-3 smaller meals a day.
- Feed your cat a commercial brand of dry food that meets nutritional requirements and provides a well-balanced diet. Kittens should be fed a commercial brand of kitten food. Fresh water should be available at all times, and be sure to wash food/water dishes daily.
- Throw away any uneaten canned food before it spoils.
- Do not give cats cow's milk, as it can cause diarrhea. Treats are yummy for cats, but should not total more than 5% of their daily intake. Most packaged treats contain lots of sugar and fat.
- If your kitten is refusing food or isn't eating enough, try soaking her kitten food in kitten milk replacer or warm water. Gradually mix with her regular food. Monitor your cat's food intake carefully, as obesity is a major health problem in cats today.

### BEDDING/HOUSING

- Your cat should have her own clean, dry place in your home to sleep and rest. Line the bed with a blanket or towel. Be sure to wash the bedding often.
- Please keep your cat indoors. Cats who are allowed outdoors can contract diseases, get ticks or parasites, become lost or get hit by a car, and get into fights with other free-roaming cats and dogs.

### LITTER BOX

- Place your cat's litter box in a quiet, accessible location, such as a bathroom or utility room. Avoid moving the box unless absolutely necessary. Then do so slowly, a few inches a day.
- In a multi-level home, one box per floor is recommended. In a multi-cat home, each cat should have her own box.
- Cats won't use a messy, smelly litter box, so remove solid waste at least once a day. Dump everything, wash with mild detergent and refill at least once a week. Don't use ammonia, deodorants or scents, especially lemon, when cleaning the litter box.

### GROOMING

- Most cats rarely need a bath, but you should brush or comb your pet regularly. This keeps the coat clean, reduces shedding and cuts down on hairballs and matting.
- During your grooming sessions, check for wounds, hair loss and inflammation. Also, look out for ticks and flea dirt, black specks of dried blood left behind by fleas.

### HANDLING

- To pick up your cat, place one hand behind her front legs and another under the hindquarters. Lift gently. Never pick up a cat by the scruff of the neck or the front legs.

### ID

- If your cat occasionally escapes from the house or is routinely allowed outdoors (again, we caution against it!), she must wear a safety collar and an ID tag. A safety collar with an elastic panel or specially designed clasp will allow your cat to break loose if the collar gets caught on something.
- We recommend permanent ID, such as a microchip, to help secure your cat's return should she become lost or accidentally get out of the house.

### PLAY

- Cats delight in stalking imaginary prey. The best toys are those that can be made to jump and dance around and look alive. Your cat can safely act out her role as a predator by pouncing on toys instead of people's ankles. Please don't use your hands or fingers as play objects with kittens, which could lead to biting and scratching behaviors. Avoid strings and toys with pieces that can break off and lodge in her intestines.

### SCRATCHING

- Your pet needs to scratch! When she scratches, the old outer nail sheath is pulled off and the sharp, smooth claws underneath are exposed. Cutting your cat's nails every 2 to 3 weeks will keep them blunt and less likely to harm you or your furniture.
- Provide your cat with a sturdy scratching post, at least 3 feet high, which will allow her to stretch completely when scratching. It should be stable enough that it won't wobble during use, and covered with rough material such as sisal, burlap or tree bark. Many cats also like scratching pads. A sprinkle of catnip on the post or pad once or twice a month will keep your cat interested.

FOR EXPERT ADVICE ON COMMON BEHAVIOR ISSUES (FROM EXCESSIVE YOWLING TO ELIMINATING OUTSIDE THE LITTER BOX), VISIT THE ASPCA VIRTUAL PET BEHAVIORIST AT [ASPCABEHAVIOR.ORG](http://ASPCABEHAVIOR.ORG)

### HEALTH

- Your cat should see a veterinarian for a full physical examination and fecal check at least once a year. It can be determined at that time if additional vaccinations or diagnostic tests are necessary. If she is sick or injured, seek help immediately.

### SPAYING AND NEUTERING

- Female cats should be spayed (the removal of the ovaries and uterus) and male cats neutered (removal of the testicles). Cats can be spayed and neutered as early as 6-8 weeks of age.

CONTINUED

- Neutering can prevent urine spraying, decrease the urge to escape to look for a mate, and reduce fighting between males. Spaying greatly helps prevent breast cancer, which is often fatal, and serious infection of the uterus.
- Cats can breed up to 3 times per year, so it is vital that your female cat be spayed to prevent unwanted litters.

### VACCINATIONS

- Cats should be vaccinated with a vaccine that protects against panleukopenia, calicivirus and rhinotracheitis. When a kitten is around 6 to 8 weeks of age, a veterinarian can begin to administer a series of vaccines at 3- or 4-week intervals until the kitten reaches 16 weeks of age. If you have an unvaccinated cat older than 4 months, he will need a series of two vaccinations 3-4 weeks apart. Your veterinarian can tell you how often your cat will need to be revaccinated.
- Other vaccines are given depending on a cat's lifestyle and risk factors. These include vaccines for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV), two of the most common causes of disease and death in domestic cats. Your veterinarian can determine what vaccines are best for your cat.
- Because cats can be infected with either FIV or FeLV for months, even years, and show no symptoms, all cats should be tested for these viruses. Keeping your cat indoors and away from cats whose FeLV and FIV status is not known are the best ways to prevent your cat from becoming infected.
- Rabies vaccination is required by law in most areas of the country. In most cases the vaccination is given at 3 months of age, repeated a year later and every 3 years after that. Ask your veterinarian if you are unsure of the laws in your area.

### EAR MITES

- This is a common problem that can be transmitted from cat to cat. If your cat is constantly scratching at his ears or shaking his head, or if you see dark-colored wax or debris in his ears, he may be infested with ear mites. Make an appointment with your veterinarian right away.

### FELINE LOWER URINARY TRACT DISEASE (FLUTD)

- Both males and females can develop urinary tract disease, which is not uncommon in adult cats. Signs of FLUTD include frequent trips to the litter box, blood in the urine and crying out or straining when urinating. Please see your veterinarian immediately if you think your cat has FLUTD.
- If your male cat looks "constipated," he may have a urethral obstruction and can't urinate. Blockage, which is rare in females, can be fatal if not treated quickly.

### FLEAS AND TICKS

- Flea infestation should be taken seriously. These tiny parasites feed off your pet, transmit tapeworms and irritate the skin. Check your cat regularly for fleas and ticks. If your cat is infested, you will also need to treat all pets in the household and get rid of the fleas in your home.
- Make certain that any product you use is safe for use on cats. Cats die every year from improper treatment with flea and tick control products. Your veterinarian can recommend the best flea control program for your pet and home.

### MEDICINES AND POISONS

- Never give your cat medication that has not been prescribed by a veterinarian. Did you know that acetaminophen and aspirin can be FATAL to a cat?! Keep rat poison or other rodenticides away from your cat.

- For information about potentially toxic substances that can harm your cat, visit [www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/](http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/poison-control/)

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### INTERNAL PARASITES (WORMS)

- Cats can be infected with several types of internal parasites and worms. The key to treatment is correct diagnosis, which is obtained by a microscopic examination of your cat's feces by a veterinarian. Your veterinarian can then prescribe the appropriate medication.
- To prevent your cat from getting worms, keep your pet indoors to prevent her from hunting and eating infected prey, avoid exposure to infected cats, rodents, fleas and feces, avoid feeding raw meat and practice good hygiene when cleaning the litter box.

### CAT SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Commercial brand cat food
- ✓ Food dish
- ✓ Water bowl
- ✓ Interactive toys
- ✓ Brush, cat claw clipper
- ✓ Comb
- ✓ Safety cat collar with ID tag
- ✓ Scratching post or scratching pad
- ✓ Litter box
- ✓ Litter
- ✓ Cat carrier
- ✓ Cat bed or box with blanket or towel

### THE NO-NO LIST

Do not feed your cat:

- ✓ Alcoholic beverages
- ✓ Chocolate
- ✓ Coffee
- ✓ Grapes, raisins & avocados
- ✓ Moldy or spoiled food
- ✓ Onions, garlic & chives
- ✓ Poultry bones
- ✓ Salt & salty foods, macadamia nuts
- ✓ Tomato leaves, stems & unripe fruit
- ✓ Yeast dough
- ✓ Human medications unless prescribed by your veterinarian.



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## Fish Care



*Ready to get your feet wet as a first-time fishkeeper? Come on in—the water's fine!*

### Background & Recommended Species

Congratulations, you're going to be a fish parent! While your role may not be as interactive as that of a dog or cat caretaker, there are some important skills—such as tank set-up and maintenance—you'll need to master to ensure a happy, healthy home for your fish.

### Cost

To get set up, a 20-gallon tank, filters and air pump, stand, light & cover, gravel, plants, fish and food will cost you about \$200 to \$250. Feeding costs are very low—about \$15-\$20 annually—but there will be some electricity used to run the light and filtration system.

### Coldwater Fish

Because they're easiest to care for, fish who live in cold water are recommended for first-timers. You will not need a heater in your tank, as you would with tropical fish, but you will need to ensure water quality with a powerful filtration system.

The most popular coldwater species by far are goldfish. And did you know there are more than 100 different breeds? Here are a few types for you to consider:

**Common goldfish**—These sturdy orange-red fish can grow up to eight inches long and live 10 to 20 years, if properly cared for.

**Comet**—This breed is a bit slimmer in the body, and has longer tail fins.

**Shubunkin**—This fish looks like a comet, and also boasts colorful splotches in a variety of hues from blue and brown to black and orange.

**Fantail**—This goldfish has a rounded body and two tail fins.

**Veiltail**—This dramatic-looking goldfish has long, flowing fins.

**Bubble-eyes**—This interesting breed has bulging water sacs under each eye.

Please note that rare and exotic forms of goldfish require special care and conditions; an experienced aquarist can tell you exactly what they need.

Other options for a coldwater tank include the hardy weather loach, a bronze or brown bottom feeder about three to four inches long. When first introduced to the tank, this fish may spend his time hiding, but will come out at all hours once he's settled in.

Buenos Aires and bloodfin tetras can also live in coldwater tanks. If you plan to keep plants in your tank, note that Buenos Aires tetras will probably eat them. Pearl danios and giant danios will also do well in a coldwater tank, but keep in mind that danios are fast swimmers and will need as much room as possible—at least a 20-gallon tank, preferably a 30-gallon.

## Housing

**Tank:** Familiar with the image of a single goldfish in a bowl? That's a great example of exactly how fish **SHOULDN'T** be kept. The ASPCA recommends a 20-gallon-aquarium for beginners. You may be tempted to get a 10-gallon tank, but please keep in mind that it will be easier to maintain healthy water conditions with a larger tank—and your fish will appreciate it, too. The experts at your aquarium store can help you select fish who will get along with each other and can thrive in a coldwater tank.

**Location:** Set the tank on sturdy table, stand, or counter, in a place that is convenient to a sink or water source. Do not put the tank in direct sunlight—this makes it harder to control the water temperature and may cause excessive algae growth. Deciding on the perfect spot is a big decision—a 20-gallon aquarium filled with water and gravel weighs more than 200 pounds, so you won't be able to move it once it is set up. And please note: Your fish should not be subjected to rapid and/or wide temperature swings, so take care to keep the tank out of direct, hot sun and away from heating and cooling vents.

**Décor:** Fish may not care if their gravel is color-coordinated, but they'll greatly appreciate a "hiding" place to chill out. You can use a clean, cracked upside-down flowerpot or arrange aquarium rocks into a cave; there's also a variety of tank décor available at the pet supply store. Plastic plants provide great camouflage, too

## Step-by-Step Setup

You will need to purchase your equipment, set up your tank and get it running for several days to a week, allowing the water to “ripen,” before you add fish.

Once you've decided on a location, rinse the gravel with clean water and put it in the tank; you will need 1 pound of gravel per gallon of water. If you plan to add plants, note that too-fine gravel may pack too tightly to allow roots to grow and spread.

Next, set up the filtration system, and add rocks, wood and other tank decorations. Your aquarium will need one or more filters to maintain water quality. Without proper filtration, fish waste can poison the water—and your pets.

The most common types of filters are: - Box Filters, which are filled with activated charcoal and a special fiber. Often placed in the corner or an inside wall of the tank, they are only effective for tanks up to about 10 gallons;

- Undergravel Filters, which are flat plastic platforms placed on the bottom of the aquarium and covered with gravel. These are good for 20-gallon aquariums with adequate water flow. Waste trapped in gravel nourishes any plants you may have. On the minus side, cleaning requires complete breakdown of the tank; and

- Outside Filters, which usually hang on the side or back of the tank. They are highly efficient and easy to clean, but you must make sure you've bought the proper filter for the size of your aquarium; this information is usually printed on the outside of the box.>

Next, fill your tank with clean tap water. You can also buy a chemical neutralizer at a pet supply store to add to the water. Most fish do best in water that has a near neutral pH level around 7—neither acidic nor alkaline. Test your water with a kit from the pet supply store. Some fish require water that's more or less acidic, so please ask the aquarium store staff about the particular needs of any fish you plan to add to your tank.

You will also need to provide a light source for your fish. This is best accomplished with a combination aquarium cover/light fixture, which will also limit excessive water evaporation and prevent anything from falling into the tank—or your fish from jumping out. We recommend a fluorescent fixture to provide full-spectrum lighting, show off the colors of your fish and support plant growth. The light should usually be on a schedule of 12 hours on, 12 hours off.

## Introducing Your Fish to Their New Home

Start your tank with 3 to 4 small- or 1 to 2 medium-sized fish. They'll be in sturdy plastic bags when you buy them. Simply float these bags in the tank for 15 to 30 minutes, so that the temperature of the water in the bag is the same as the temperature of the tank.

Carefully open the bags and let your fish swim out on their own. If you want to add more fish and if your tank can support it, add a couple of fish every week until the tank is complete.

## Diet

There are very good commercial fish foods available. Dried flakes provide a balanced diet, and fresh foods such as live brine shrimp, bloodworms and tubifex worms provide variety.

Number one rule when it comes to fish nutrition: DO NOT OVERFEED! Excess food will fall to the bottom of the tank and spoil, reducing the water quality. It is best to feed several small meals daily, just enough so the fish eat everything before it falls to the bottom.

And here's a quick and cheap (actually, free!) snack for your pets: Scrape off any algae growing on the front glass of the tank so your fish are clearly visible, but let it grow on one end or in a corner. Your fish will enjoy nibbling on the bits of algae growing there.

### General Care & Maintenance

**Daily:** In addition to turning on and off lights and feeding, you will need to monitor the water temperature. Coldwater tanks do not require a heater, but you will want to ensure that the temperature remains relatively constant. An inexpensive liquid crystal thermometer that attaches to the outside of tank will work great. FYI, goldfish can thrive at water temperatures between 50 and 78 degrees Fahrenheit.

**Weekly:** Every week or two, remove several gallons of water from the tank and replace it with clean, pre-aged water. This will help remove chemicals that build up in the aquarium and that are not eliminated by evaporation or filtration. We also recommend that you test the water quality with a kit from the pet supply store weekly, and scrape any algae that has built up.

**Monthly:** Clean the filter or replace the charcoal and filter pads monthly. And if you have plants, it's time to prune them.

And one final precaution! Goldfish are beautiful, but they also tend to be messy, with very hearty appetites. This translates into a high output of ammonia, so you'll need to be very careful about maintaining water quality. That involves frequent water changes, high-capacity filtration and regular water tests. Ask your aquarist for more information.

### Fish Supplies List

- 20-gallon tank
- Gravel
- Rocks, wood and other tank decorations
- Filter
- Food
- Algae scraper
- Net
- Water testing kit
- Water conditioner
- Aquarium cover/light fixture (we recommend fluorescent)
- Thermometer
- Optional: Plants, stand

**Source URL:** <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/small-pet-care/fish-care>





Published on ASPCA (<http://www.asPCA.org>)

[Home](#) > General Bird Care

## General Bird Care



*Congratulations on your new pet! Your sensitive, intelligent companion will introduce you to a world of cheerful song and brilliant plumage.*

### Background and recommended species

ASPCA experts recommend several species for first-time companion bird caretakers. They have very different personalities, so you'll have to do a little research to find the bird that best fits your family's lifestyle.

**Zebra finches** are big on color and low on maintenance. These small, hardy birds are relatively inexpensive and have an average lifespan of seven to ten years. They are not as social with their human caretakers as other species are—so if you're looking for a bird to be your good buddy, they may not be right for you. Finches do need company of their own kind, however, so you must keep at least a pair.

- Did someone say cheerful and chirpy? Meet the **canary**, a super singer with similar care requirements to the finch. And like finches, canaries do not enjoy human handling. However, most canaries don't like to share the same cage—but one bird kept alone as a pet will be quite content with care and attention from you.

- If interaction's a big attraction, consider **budgies** and **cockatiels**. Budgies, commonly though erroneously known as parakeets, are the most popular avian species kept as pets—and with good reason. This gentle friend will enjoy perching on your shoulder, and can be taught to mimic words and household noises. Great first birds for children! At 11 to 14 inches long, cockatiels are about twice the size of budgies and have an average

lifespan of 12 to 15 years. They're smart, love to be doted on by their human families, and often are willing talkers.

### Cost

When you first get your bird, you'll need to spend about \$75 for a cage. Food runs about \$75 a year, plus \$30 annually for toys and treats.

The ASPCA recommends that you get your bird from a responsible breeder or, better yet, adopt one from a shelter or avian rescue group. Call your local shelter and search on sites such as [Petfinder.com](http://Petfinder.com) <sup>[1]</sup> and [Avian Rescue online](http://AvianRescue.com) <sup>[2]</sup> for birds in need of loving homes.

### Housing

Always buy the largest, most well-constructed cage you can afford. No matter the species, your bird will need a cage that's large enough for her to stretch her wings and fly short distances. A typical cage for small birds should be about 25 inches tall and 25 inches from front to back. To prevent escape or injury, the bars on the cage should only be .4 inches apart—a little larger than the tips of your fingers. Note that canaries and finches prefer a cage that's wider than it is taller, while parakeets and cockatiels like tall cages with horizontal bars they can climb. And don't forget perches, please! You'll need to install several, at varying heights—and do make sure that one is level with the food dishes.

Line the bottom of the cage with plain paper or paper bags cut to size. Newspaper is fine, as long as it's been printed with non-toxic, soy-based inks. You'll need to change the paper daily.

Where should you set up your bird's new home? Location is everything. Place the cage in a warm, bright part of the house, close to where the action is but away from all drafts and direct sunlight, and off the floor. Avoid setting up the cage in or near the kitchen at all costs. Birds are extremely sensitive to fumes, and those from self-cleaning ovens and Teflon-coated cookware, if overheated, can be fatal.

### Diet

Although seed has been the traditional staple of a bird's diet, most experts recommend pelleted food as the way to go. Seed mixes provide variety, but they do not always provide optimum nutrition, and are definitely on the messy side. We recommend a high-quality pelleted food that's formulated for your bird's species.

Be sure to offer fresh veggies and fruits to your bird every day. Dark, leafy greens are packed with vitamins, and many birds also enjoy carrots and broccoli. Common fruity faves are apples, pears, melon and kiwi. Take care to remove any uneaten food after a couple of hours, and please do not give your bird avocado, cherry pits, rhubarb or apple seeds.

Fresh, cold water should be available at all times. Change it at least once a day, preferably twice.

### Exercise and Toys

If your cockatiel or budgie has been properly tamed and trained, she'll need at least an hour of exercise out of the cage in a safe, enclosed room every day. She may just want to hang out on your shoulder, or enjoy the time to explore. Be sure to always secure the room first by shutting all windows and doors, and cover any windows or mirrors so your bird cannot accidentally fly into them.

Even though finches and canaries do not take to handling and do not need time out every day, they will appreciate a revolving selection of toys—as do cockatiels and budgies. Small birds may enjoy ladders, swings and mirrors with bells, and wooden chew toys are great for keeping beaks trimmed. Check out what's available at the pet supply store, and just make sure that the toys you select are safe and appropriate for your bird's size and species. They should be labeled accordingly, but don't hesitate to ask if you are unsure.

### General Care

A thorough cleaning of your pet's cage is required once weekly. Remove and wash the cage tray and perches, and wash the area around the cage. Make sure all toys are clean and damage-free, without loose or broken parts that could hurt your pet. Once a month, you'll need to clean the entire cage with a disinfectant solution. Rinse well, and dry everything before returning your bird to his cage.

If you have a budgie or cockatiel, you can begin to hand tame your bird after the first few weeks of getting acquainted. First, open the cage door and insert your hand; talk softly and reassuringly to your pet as you offer him a little treat, such as a piece of air-popped popcorn or a sunflower seed. Be patient, this may take a few sessions! Once your bird trusts you enough to take food from your hand, you can pass a perch or thin stick into the cage and gently press it against your pet; with time, he should hop up onto the stick. After that, you can work to get your bird to step from the stick onto your finger.

You can help keep your pet's plumage looking perfect with a bath as often as he likes it. Put a shallow dish at the bottom of the cage and see what happens. You'll probably want to schedule bath time just before you plan to change the paper, however.

### Veterinary Care

To keep your bird in good condition, ASPCA experts recommend an annual visit to the veterinarian. Weight loss or gain, often an indicator of illness, will be checked, and any necessary tests can help the vet monitor your pet's health.

Please don't wait to schedule an appointment if you think your pet is sick. A bird who is not feeling well may fluff out his feathers or sit quietly on the floor of his cage with his eyes closed. Other symptoms that something's not right with your pet include a change in the consistency, frequency or color of droppings, sneezing, coughing, blocked nostrils, labored breathing and a crusty beak or eyes.

### Bird Supply Checklist

- Well-constructed cage, at least 25 inches tall, wide and deep, with several perches
- High-quality pelleted food

- Species-appropriate safe toys (lots of 'em!)
- Plain paper or "non-toxic" newspaper for cage bottom.

**Source URL:** <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/small-pet-care/general-bird-care>

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.petfinder.com/>

[2] <http://www.avianrescue.org/>



## BACKGROUND

**SIZE:** 2 to 20+ pounds, depending on breed

**LIFESPAN:** 7 to 10+ years

**COST PER YEAR:** \$730

**GOOD WITH KIDS?:** Because rabbits are physically delicate and require specialized veterinary care, they are not appropriate for families with young children.

**FUN FACT:** Rabbits can be trained to use a litterbox and will come when called—yours may even play tag with you!

**WHERE TO GET A RABBIT:** There are many rabbits available for adoption at shelters and small-animal rescue groups. Call your local shelter and visit websites like [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com) and [www.rabbit.org](http://www.rabbit.org).

## FOOD

- The most important component of your rabbit's diet is grass hay, such as timothy, which keeps the intestinal tract healthy. Unlimited hay should always be available.
- You may wish to supplement with good-quality rabbit pellets (18% fiber). Until your pet is fully grown at around 6 months, he can have unlimited pellets; after that, limit pellets to 1/8-1/4 cup per 6 pounds of bunny. Frail, older bunnies may need more to keep weight up; ask your veterinarian.
- Feed your pet fresh, leafy greens daily, such as dark lettuces, collard greens, turnip greens and carrot tops. We suggest a minimum of 2 cups per 6 pounds of rabbit.
- Clean, fresh water, dispensed in a bottle or sturdy bowl, should be available 24/7.

## CAGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Where's the only place for your rabbit's cage? **INDOORS!** Rabbits are highly social, and do best when they have plenty of interaction with family members. Outdoors, they face the threat of attacks from other animals and inclement weather.
- Rabbits should not be housed with other rabbits unless all are spayed/neutered and have been carefully introduced on neutral territory.
- The minimum recommended cage length for one rabbit is 3 to 4 feet, but bigger is always better!
- We recommend a solid-bottom metal cage, large dog crate or puppy exercise pen. Wire-bottom cages can ulcerate a rabbit's feet. If you do use a wire cage, cover the bottom with wood, towels or carpeting.

## BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

- Rabbits are prey animals and timid by nature, so be patient if your pet seems shy at first. Hand-feeding treats is a nice way to get acquainted.
- Pick up your rabbit by supporting his forequarters with one hand and his hindquarters with the other. Handle with care—an accidental drop can result in broken legs and back!
- **NEVER** pick up a rabbit by the ears or scruff—this can cause very serious injury.

## LITTER TRAINING

- Clean by nature, most rabbits will choose one corner of the cage as a bathroom. As soon as your rabbit's choice is clear, put a newspaper-lined litter box in that corner; cover the bottom with hay or pelleted litter.
- Never use pine or cedar shavings as litter, as the fumes can make your pet sick. Clay cat litter can cause respiratory or gastrointestinal problems.

## EXERCISE & TOYS

- Your rabbit needs exercise out of his cage in a safe area—indoors or outdoors—for several hours **EVERY** day. Your pet is designed for running & jumping!
- Rabbit-proof an indoor area by covering all electrical wires, phone, computer and TV cables, and anything else your rabbit is likely to chew, such as houseplants.
- Outdoor play areas should be fully enclosed by a fence. Never leave your pet unsupervised outdoors—even for a few minutes. Rabbits can quickly dig under fences.
- Your pet needs toys to satisfy his natural urges to dig and chew. Safe chew toys include cardboard boxes, an old telephone directory and commercially made chew sticks. Your bunny would love a digging box, such as a cardboard box filled halfway with soil or shredded paper.

## DAILY CARE

- Rabbits can be messy, so clean your pet's cage once or twice weekly. Put your pet in a safe room or alternate cage when you sweep out the cage and scrub it with warm, soapy water.
- Change your rabbit's litter box daily.
- Brush your pet regularly with a soft brush to remove excess hair.

## SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Bring your bunny to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly veterinarian visit if you think your pet is sick! If your rabbit stops eating or moving his bowels for 6 hours or longer, or has watery diarrhea, seek help immediately. Other signs that something isn't right include runny nose & eyes, dark red urine, lethargy and fur loss.
- Rabbits should be spayed or neutered by a veterinarian experienced with rabbit surgeries. This prevents unwanted litters, spraying in males and uterine cancer in females. Visit [www.rabbit.org](http://www.rabbit.org) for a list of veterinarians.

IF YOU THINK THAT YOUR PET MAY HAVE INGESTED A POTENTIALLY POISONOUS SUBSTANCE, CALL THE ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL CENTER AT (888) 426-4435

A \$65 consultation fee may be applied to your credit card

## RABBIT SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Solid-bottom cage or large dog crate
- ✓ Carrier
- ✓ Litter box with hay or pelleted litter
- ✓ Grass hay and hay rack
- ✓ Good-quality rabbit pellets
- ✓ Sturdy ceramic or metal food bowl
- ✓ Ceramic water bowl or water bottle that attaches to cage
- ✓ Grooming brush
- ✓ Digging box and safe chew toys



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## BACKGROUND

**LENGTH:** Syrian hamsters, 6 inches; dwarf hamsters, 2-3 inches

**LIFESPAN:** 1½ to 2 years

**COST PER YEAR:** \$300

**GOOD WITH KIDS?:** Because of their nocturnal nature and tendency to nip, not appropriate for families with small children; kids over 6 should be supervised by an adult when handling.

**FUN FACT:** Watch your hamster stuff his face (literally!) and then empty out his pouch for late-night snacking.

**WHERE TO GET A HAMSTER:** There are many pet hamsters available for adoption at animal shelters and small-animal rescue groups. Call your local shelter and visit websites like [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com) for hamsters in need of loving homes.

## FOOD

- A high-quality rodent chow (also called rat blocks) should be available to your pet at all times. Supplement this with hamster mix, made up of pellets, grains, seeds and dried veggies.
- Fresh, clean water should be available 24/7. A water bottle with a drinking tube that attaches to the cage is the best way to go.
- Offer small, bite-sized bits of fresh veggies and fruits (every 2-3 days).
  - >> **Recommended:** spinach, lettuce, carrots, apples
  - >> **Avoid:** chocolate, candy, junk food, onions, uncooked beans
- Your hamster may enjoy bits of sugarless cereals and whole wheat bread as a treat.

## CAGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Syrian hamsters, also known as golden or teddy bear hamsters, **MUST** be kept alone. One Syrian hamster per cage—no exceptions! Dwarf species like to live in pairs. Do not house male and female dwarf hamsters together, as hamsters breed quickly—and often—with large litters.
- Keep your Syrian hamster in a solid-bottom wire cage or aquarium with a wire mesh top (10 gallon minimum). Try to get the biggest cage you can afford—your pet will appreciate the extra space. Dwarf hamsters can be kept in a cage made for mice.
- Set up the cage indoors, away from drafts and direct sunlight, and away from other pets such as dogs and cats.
- Line cage with at least 2 inches of bedding (see Supply Checklist for recommendations). Don't use cedar or pine chips, as the fumes can be harmful. Provide paper towels or tissue so your pets can make nests.
- Your pet needs a cave for sleeping, such as a flowerpot or box.

## BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

- Hamsters are nocturnal by nature, so it's normal for them to play and eat at night. They tend to nip if awakened during the day, so take care not to bother your pet while he's sleeping.
- Once your hamster is hand-tamed, allow him outside of the cage for a supervised period of time every day. Keep him in one room or screened-off area that's been secured so he can't escape or get lost. Hamsters don't have good eyesight, so take care that he doesn't fall or otherwise hurt himself. And remove all electrical cords from the area, please!

## EXERCISE & TOYS

- Hamsters are big on exercise, so make sure yours has a wheel for running. Your pet will love tunneling through tubes, which can be home-made (empty cardboard tubes from paper towels and toilet paper) or bought from a pet supply store.
- Give your hamster appropriate chew toys to help wear down his teeth, which grow continuously.
  - >> **Recommended:** unpainted, untreated wood or twig, hard dog biscuits

## DAILY CARE

- Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale/uneaten food daily. Clean and refill the water bottle every day.
- Clean cage completely once a week by replacing dirty bedding and scrubbing down the cage with warm, soapy water.

## SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Bring your hamster to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly appointment if you think your pet is sick—seek help immediately. Common signs that something isn't right include dull-looking eyes, overgrown teeth, matted fur, weight loss, shaking, runny nose and diarrhea.
- Hamsters are susceptible to respiratory problems, including bacterial pneumonia, which they can catch from humans.

IF YOU THINK THAT YOUR PET MAY HAVE INGESTED A POTENTIALLY POISONOUS SUBSTANCE, CALL THE ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL CENTER AT (888) 426-4435

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## HAMSTER SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Solid-bottom wire cage or aquarium (10-gallon minimum) with mesh top
- ✓ Rodent chow (rat blocks) and hamster mix
- ✓ Timothy hay, aspen shavings, processed corn cob or pelleted bedding
- ✓ Small boxes or flower pots
- ✓ Exercise wheel
- ✓ Cardboard tubes (recycle from paper towel and toilet paper rolls)
- ✓ Attachable water bottle with drinking tube
- ✓ Unpainted, untreated piece of wood or twig, hard dog biscuit or safe chew toy



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## BACKGROUND

**LENGTH:** 4 inches, not including tail

**LIFESPAN:** 3-5 years

**COST PER YEAR:** \$300

**GOOD WITH KIDS?:** Great for families with children 5 & up, but young caretakers should be supervised by an adult.

**FUN FACT:** These desert dwellers don't urinate that much, so they produce less odor than other pet rodents.

**WHERE TO GET A GERBIL:** There are many pet gerbils available for adoption at animal shelters and small-animal rescue groups. Call your local shelter and visit websites like [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com) for gerbils in need of loving homes.

## FOOD

- Gerbil mix, made up of pellets, grains, seeds and dried veggies, should be available to your pets at all times. Some gerbils tend to pick out the tasty, high-fat sunflower seeds first, so you may wish to pick them out and feed them to your pets as treats. You may also feed gerbils a high-quality rodent chow (called rat blocks).
- Fresh, clean water should be available to your gerbils 24/7. A water bottle with a drinking tube that attaches to the cage is the best way to go.
- Offer small, bite-sized bits of fresh veggies (daily) and fruits (every other day).
  - >> **Recommended:** peas, broccoli, carrots, apples, bananas
  - >> **Avoid:** chocolate, candy, junk food, onions, uncooked beans
- Your gerbils may enjoy small bits of sugarless breakfast cereals and whole wheat bread as a treat.

## CAGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Gerbils are social, so it's a good idea to get at least two. If possible, try to get gerbils from the same litter. Don't keep males and females together, as they will breed.
- Keep your gerbils in a wire cage or aquarium with a wire mesh top (10 gallon minimum for 2 gerbils). Try to get the biggest cage you can afford—your pets will appreciate the extra space.
- Keep the cage indoors, away from drafts and extreme temperatures, in an environment maintained at 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Keep the cage indoors, away from drafts and direct sunlight.
- Line the cage with at least 2 inches of bedding (see Supply Checklist for recommendations). Do not use cedar or pine chips, which contain oils that are dangerous to gerbils. Provide shredded paper towels or tissue paper so your pets can make nests.
- Your gerbils will need a cave for sleeping and resting, such as a small flower pot or box. A smooth, clean stone or rock makes a great lookout point for your curious pets.

## BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

- Gerbils are friendly by nature and rarely bite, but you'll need to get your pets used to you—and used to being handled. Start by feeding them small treats. When they're comfortable with that, scoop them into your hand. Never pick up a gerbil by the tail, as this can cause injury.
- Once your gerbils are hand-tamed, allow them outside of their cage for a supervised period of time every day. Keep them in one room or screened-

off area that's been secured so they can't escape or get lost. Gerbils don't have good eyesight, so take extra care that they don't fall or otherwise hurt themselves. And remove all electrical cords from the area, please!

## EXERCISE & TOYS

- Gerbils LOVE to play! Provide your pets with plenty of extra bedding, hay or shredded paper towels for digging, and PVC pipes and cardboard tubes from paper towel and toilet paper rolls for tunneling. Your pets like toys, too, but avoid anything made of soft plastic—it will almost certainly be chewed to bits!
- Give your pets appropriate chew toys to help wear down their teeth, which grow continuously.
  - >> **Recommended:** unpainted, untreated wood or twig, hard dog biscuits

## DAILY CARE

- Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale/uneaten food daily. Clean and refill the water bottle every day.
- Clean cage completely once a week by replacing dirty bedding and scrubbing down the cage with warm, soapy water.

## SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Bring your gerbils to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly appointment if you think one of your pets is sick—seek help immediately. Common signs that something isn't right include sneezing, lethargy, diarrhea and difficulty breathing.
- Gerbils are susceptible to external parasites such as fleas and lice. If you think your pets are infested, consult a veterinarian.

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## GERBIL SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- ✓ 10-gallon aquarium (minimum for 2 gerbils) with wire cover or wire cage
- ✓ Gerbil mix or rodent chow (rat blocks)
- ✓ Aspen or hardwood shavings or processed corn cob bedding
- ✓ Hay, extra shavings or shredded paper towels for digging
- ✓ Small boxes or flower pots
- ✓ Exercise wheel (solid, no rungs)
- ✓ Cardboard tubes (recycle from paper towel and toilet paper rolls) or PVC tubes
- ✓ Attachable water bottle with drinking tube
- ✓ Unpainted, untreated piece of wood or twig, hard dog biscuit or safe chew toy



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## BACKGROUND

**ALSO KNOWN AS:** Cavy

**WEIGHT:** Up to 2 pounds

**LIFESPAN:** 5-7 years

**COST PER YEAR:** \$635

**GOOD WITH KIDS?:** Great pet for older children who've mastered proper handling techniques.

**FUN FACT:** A happy guinea pig will jump straight up in the air—this is called popcorning!

**WHERE TO GET A GUINEA PIG:** There are many guinea pigs available for adoption at animal shelters and small-animal rescue groups. Call your local shelter and visit websites like [www.petfinder.com](http://www.petfinder.com) for guinea pigs in need of loving homes.

## FOOD

- Guinea pig pellets are the basis of your pet's diet. An average guinea pig will eat about 1/8 cup daily. Timothy hay-based pellets are recommended for adults, and avoid those made with nuts, seeds, dried fruits and corn products.
- Grass hay and fresh, clean water should be available to your pet at ALL times.
- Offer small, bite-sized amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables daily; half a handful of veggies and a slice of fruit per pig is plenty.
  - >> **Recommended:** green leafy vegetables, green peppers, peas, apple, blueberries, oranges and grapes.
  - >> **Avoid:** iceberg lettuce, potatoes, cabbage, broccoli, anything that's old or spoiled.
- Guinea pigs cannot manufacture vitamin C, so make sure your pet gets enough of this essential nutrient. A quarter of orange will meet the requirements; other high-C foods include kale and strawberries.

## CAGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Guinea pigs are social animals who prefer to live in small groups. Two or more females will become great friends. If you want two males, it's best to choose two babies from the same litter. Since guinea pigs multiply rapidly, keeping males and females together is not recommended.
- Provide a minimum of four square feet of cage space per guinea pig—but please try to get as large a cage as possible. Make sure it's a solid-bottom cage with a wire cover—no glass aquariums, which don't provide adequate ventilation.
- Keep the cage indoors, away from drafts and extreme temperatures, in an environment maintained at 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Line the bottom of the cage with bedding (see Supply Checklist for recommendations). Do not use cedar or pine chips, which contain oils that can be dangerous to your pet.
- Your pig will need a cave for sleeping and resting, such as medium-sized flower pot or covered sleeping box, readily available at pet supply stores.

## BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

- Guinea pigs are known for their expressive vocalizations. They'll whistle and grunt when they're excited, and squeak with delight when their favorite humans enter the room.
- Guinea pigs rarely bite, but they can nip if mishandled or fear a threatening animal. It's important to get your pet used to you—and used to being

handled. Start by feeding her small treats in her cage. When she's comfortable with that, carefully pick her up, one hand supporting her bottom, the other over her back.

## EXERCISE & TOYS

- Once your pet is hand-tamed, let her play in a small room or enclosed area for additional daily exercise. Carefully check the room for any openings from which she could escape. You'll need to supervise at all times, because guinea pigs will chew on anything in their paths—including electrical wires.
- Your pet will also enjoy playing in her cage. Provide cardboard tubes, empty oatmeal containers and/or coffee cans with smoothed edges for hide-and-seek, and bricks or rocks for climbing.
- Provide your pet with appropriate chew toys to help wear down her teeth, which grow continuously.
  - >> **Recommended:** branches and twigs from trees that have not been sprayed with pesticides, small pieces of unpainted, untreated wood.

## DAILY CARE

- Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale food from the cage daily.
- Scrub the cage with warm water and mild soap weekly; let dry before adding fresh bedding.
- Brush your pet regularly to keep the coat clean and remove tangles or loose hair; long-haired guinea pigs should be brushed daily to prevent knots.

## SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Bring your guinea pig to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly appointment if you think your pet is sick—seek help immediately. Common signs that something isn't right include sneezing, crusty eyes, dirty ears, severe diarrhea, hair loss, weight loss, change in behavior and bloody or gritty urine.

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## GUINEA PIG SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Solid-bottom cage with wire cover or plastic bottom "tub" cage
- ✓ Guinea pig pellets
- ✓ Cage bedding (aspen or hardwood shavings, timothy hay or processed paper products)
- ✓ Small, heavy food dish
- ✓ Grass hay
- ✓ Bricks, rocks, cardboard boxes, plastic pipes & other safe toys
- ✓ Medium flower pot or covered sleeping box
- ✓ Brush and comb
- ✓ Attachable water bottle with drinking tube
- ✓ Unpainted, untreated piece of wood or safe chew toy



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