

## FEEDING YOUR GUINEA PIG

### Guinea pigs eat hay and grass!

These species are from South America and have evolved to eat grasses and forage for fibrous food. They are hind gut fermenters which means their guts require a constant supply of fibre to remain motile and healthy. Guinea pigs have even evolved continually growing teeth which require hays and grasses (which act like sand paper) to wear them down. Pelleted foods may be considered hard but not compared to grasses! For guinea pigs to remain healthy they should always have access to hay or fresh (not mown) grass. Like humans, they are also unable to make their own vitamin C so require this in their diet.

### What should I feed my guinea pig?

- **Good-quality hay or grass** should make up the majority (at least 80%) of the diet. There are a huge variety of hays available these days so if you are finding your guinea pig picky, then trying a different type may be necessary. Do not feed alfalfa (lucerne) hays as these are high in calcium and could predispose your guinea pig to stones in the kidneys or bladder. Try to restrict the amount of oaten hay to an occasional treat as these are high in calories and can lead to obesity. Meadow, rye and timothy hays are great as an everyday feed.
- Commercial pelleted foods can be fed in small quantities to make up 5-10% of the diet. Muesli mixes should never be fed as they cause dental problems, gut problems and other diseases. Overfeeding commercial foods can lead to obesity and dental disease. Guinea pig pelleted foods usually also have vitamin C added into them although this degrades over time.
- **Vegetables, weeds and herbs** should make up the remainder of the diet (10-15%), see below for a list of safe foods to offer. Ensure that you are confident in identification if you are picking wild plants. Variety is the key to keeping them healthy, and you should avoid overfeeding foods high in calcium, this includes – parsley, spinach, kale and basil.
- Fruits and vegetables such as carrots should only be fed as an occasional treat in very small quantities due to their high sugar content



- **Vitamin C** - most guinea pigs do not require vitamin C supplements as they obtain it from pelleted food and fresh vegetables. However unwell, pregnant or lactating guinea pigs have a higher requirement so may need supplementing. Occasionally guinea pigs may also not eat fresh greens and vegetables and may also require supplementation. If you wish to supplement, then it is best to use a tablet form crushed and sprinkled over food. Vitamin C is highly unstable in water and destroyed by sunlight, it also binds to metals in the environment (such as the tips of drinking bottles), for this reason it is unadvisable to use drops in the water bottle.

**The following are a list of plants safe for your guinea pig to eat:**

- Beetroot (care with leafy tops as high levels of oxalic acid)
- Bell peppers (all colours)
- Broccoli (and its leaves, including purple sprouting varieties)
- Brussel sprouts
- Cabbage (all varieties)
- Carrots (and tops)
- Cauliflower (and the leaves)
- Celery (and its leaves)
- Chard (all types)
- Chicory
- Courgette
- Cucumber
- Fennel
- Green beans
- Kale (all varieties)
- Kohl rabi
- Mangetout
- Pak choi
- Parsnip
- Peas (including the leaves and pods)
- Radish (plant and tops)
- Rocket
- Romaine lettuce (other varieties but not Iceberg)
- Spinach
- Spring Greens
- Swede
- Sweetcorn and babycorn (leaves and plants also but feed sparingly)
- Tomato (all types but do not feed the plant/leaves as this is poisonous!)
- Watercress

**Herbs:**

- Basil
- Coriander
- Dill
- Mint
- Parsley
- Oregano
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Thyme



**Wild Garden Herbs/Weeds/Flowers:**

- Apple and pear tree leaves and branches
- Avens
- Blackberry plant
- Burnet
- Calendula
- Camomile
- Chickweed
- Cleavers (sticky plant)
- Clover (leaves and flowers)
- Coltsfoot
- Common comfrey
- Cow parsley
- Cow parsnip
- Crosswort
- Dandelion
- Groundsel
- Hawk bit
- Knapweed
- Knot grass
- Mallow
- Milk thistle
- Nasturtium (leaves and flowers)
- Nettle
- Nipplewort
- Plantain
- Shepherd's purse
- Sow Thistle
- Wild carrot
- Wild strawberry
- Yarrow

**Fruits (fed as treats once or twice a week):**

- Apple
- Banana (including skin)
- Blackberry (and plant)
- Blueberry
- Cherry
- Grape (all types)
- Kiwi
- Mango
- Melon (all varieties)
- Orange
- Passion fruit
- Peach
- Pear
- Plum
- Raspberry (and plant)
- Strawberry (and plant)

Please note that nuts and seeds should not be fed as they are high in fats and sugars.

**Poisonous garden and wild plants:**

Arum, anemone, autumn crocus, buttercup, bluebell, belladonna (deadly nightshade), black nightshade, bryony, bindweed, celandine, corn cockle, dock, dog mercury, elder, foxglove, figwort, flags, fools parsley, hemlock, ivy, henbane, poppies, oak, scarlet pimpernel, spurge family, toad flax, travellers joy, aconite, beech, aficionados, box, Christmas rose, daffodil, columbine, gypsophila, hyacinth, laburnum, larkspurs, lily of the valley, lobelia, love in a mist, narcissus, potato, rhubarb, tomato plant (fruit can be eaten), privet, tulip, snowdrop, scarlet runner, yew.

