

The Guinea Pig - all you need to know

The guinea pig: it neither looks like a pig, nor does it belong to the pig family. It is a rodent and presumably only has this name because of the squealing noises it makes. For decades it has been very popular with Europeans as a cute and sociable pet.

Experts from the specialist retail chain, Maxi Zoo explain what characterises this popular pet.

The original home of the guinea pig lies far from the continent of Europe; it originates from South America, where it inhabits both mountainous regions and flat terrain. These furry mammals have existed for several million years. They have a purely vegetarian diet of Vitamin C-rich grasses and herbs and are both sociable and keen on breeding. In their natural habitat, several females share one male and together with their offspring they form a herd. Even as far back as ancient times people bred them as domesticated animals, either to be eaten or sacrificed to the gods. The wild form of our domestic guinea pig is the Tschudi guinea pig from the Chilean Andes. Seafarers and conquerors brought these small rodents to Europe in the 16th century by sea. In their new home these trusting, docile creatures soon won people's hearts.

There are a few attributes, which are very typical of domestic guinea pigs. In contrast to other types of small animal, they generally do not bite and thus are suitable

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companions for children. They just love eating and nibbling. Activity is spread across several periods during the day and at dawn and dusk. The most stress-free environment in which they can live is when they have members of the same species around them, with whom they can communicate in their own sound language. Baby guinea pigs are born complete with fur, open eyes and teeth.

Many an owner has also been amazed at how rapidly his or her apparently

same-sex guinea pigs have bred. A primary instinct still essentially characterises the guinea pig today; they are animals with an instinct to take flight and, at any sign of danger, run away swiftly to reach safety.

As they cannot really defend themselves, they sometimes fend off danger by pretending to be dead. At home when in cages, opportunities to flee are however limited, which is the reason why these easily scared animals can readily break out in a panic. Therefore they require sufficient space, free range and places to hide.

Come in to Maxi Zoo, Cork can come be introduced to our store pet Guinea pigs – "Hide" and "Seek".

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DO NOT KEEP THEM ON THEIR OWN!

Unfortunately there are far too many instances of guinea pigs being kept alone in cages. These are animals born with a very strong herd instinct and they will suffer from extreme stress if kept alone. Similarly inappropriate is keeping guinea pigs together with rabbits – the guinea pigs will suffer from behavioural disorders.

The best and most appropriate way of keeping guinea pigs is in small herds consisting of one (preferably neutered) male and two or more females. However two females of the same age can in most cases also get along, as can male siblings from the same litter- so long as they can neither see, smell nor hear any females.



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