

An only guinea pig is a lonely guinea

Guinea pigs are no loners - it's in their nature to live together in small communal groups. Such lively little animals actually pine when kept on their own. Groups of three up to ten animals are ideal. Here are some further pieces of advice on community living from the experts at the specialist retail chain Maxi Zoo.

PET POINTERS



with Tony Cross

Right from the start, you should design cages and enclosures so that several guinea pigs can have ample space – an important prerequisite for peaceful cooperation. It's best if the animals get used to each other when they are still small and move into their home together. If you want to integrate a new guinea pig into a long established group, that can also work well.

The first encounter should take place under your watchful eye. Only interfere - even when it's hard not to - if there is a massive quarrel. For harmony to ensue, it's very important that the animals first sort out their pecking order. Then they'll whimper and bicker and that can even look like serious fighting. After the initial commotion however, the guinea pigs will start developing relationships with each other. That simply needs time. Of course, it can happen that individual group members just aren't compatible with each other in the longer term. If they are still fighting fiercely after about two weeks, you should try to find a place for one of the animals in another group.

Tricks for familiarising newcomers

Clean the enclosure thoroughly before a new arrival moves in and spoil your guinea pigs with roots or fresh, fragrant hay. Remember: food envy destroys the harmony in the guinea pig hutch. That's why it's important in the beginning that sufficient food is

accessible to all of them - also in different places throughout the living area. Keep tabs on whether the newcomer is being allowed into the sleeping quarters. If this is not happening, provide another den. There is the danger of freezing at night in the open without any protection - especially for guinea pigs being kept outside. Conflicts mainly

arise when guinea pigs have too little space in the hutch as communal snuggling and sleeping is not typical for their species. Sometimes it's simpler to familiarise two newcomers at the same time then the whole kerfuffle won't be concentrated on just one animal.

What works...

Old & young: although this combination seldom leads to aggression, it's still not the ideal combination for either side. The young animal needs a playfellow, the "old-timer" wants a bit of peace and quiet. Better two young animals and two older animals as a group of four!

Male & female: with this combination, the male should in any case be neutered to prevent unwanted offspring. In the wild a clan consists of one boar with several sows and pups.

Male & male: Conflict of course occurs between un-neutered males mainly over one issue: the favours of a female. An all-male community of boars can function extremely well, above all if you're keeping several young males from the same litter.

Female & female: Cohabiting females also have their pecking order which has to be fought over first. But they can live harmoniously as partners thereafter.

