



Guinea Pig Helpline Factsheet

Feeding Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs are constant grazers, always eating and always making out they are hungry! The following tips will help to ensure you are feeding a wholesome diet and not under- or over-feeding your little piggies.

- **Forages** – Includes hay, dried grasses and fresh grasses. Hay and/or grass is important to maintain optimal **dental wear** (not just the incisors/front teeth, but the molars too), and to provide the necessary roughage to encourage a **healthy digestive** system. Guinea pigs need access to hay or grass at all times, 24/7; when feeding hay ideally use a “grass hay” such as meadow, timothy, orchard-grass, oat, brome or rye. Herbal hays are also appropriate. Legume hays like alfalfa are best saved for growing piggies (up to 6 months) and pregnant/lactating sows. A mixture of hay types is encouraged to ensure interest is maintained and to stimulate regular hay consumption. Refresh the hay (remove soiled or wet hay, and provide fresh hay) at least 1-2 times every day. There are also **dried grasses**, these are a little like hay but chopped short and heat/freeze dried to lock in the nutrients and taste of grass. If fresh or dried grasses are to be a main part of the forages available, remember:
 - Hay will still be necessary as grass is unlikely to be available 24/7 all year round, and in winter it is too cold to allow guinea pigs to graze outdoors.
 - Growing grass indoors is one option but it is very unlikely that enough can be grown to feed all your guineas round the clock day after day if it is the sole forage offered.
 - When first allowing your guineas to graze on grass/dried grass, feed them **limited** amounts and **restrict** grazing time for the first week or two to allow their tummies time to get used to the richness of the food.
- **Fresh Fruits & Vegetables** – Fresh veg should be given **every day**; even two or three times a day if possible. However it is not a good idea to give them veg randomly throughout the day; stick to a routine to ensure you don't over-feed, as over-feeding fresh fruit and veg can lead to diarrhoea. Don't feed too much fruit either for the same reason – just give small pieces, and stick to mainly vegetables. Herbs and leafy veg can also be counted as veg. Aim for a **minimum of one large handful** of fresh food per pig, per day. Feed at least **three or four** different types of veg every day to provide the necessary variety of important vitamins and minerals, and also the different tastes to keep your guineas interested. Remove all fresh foods after a couple of hours, don't leave them in the cage all day or overnight as many spoil very quickly.
- **Dry Food** – This should generally be given in **limited** amounts, as too much can lead to excessive weight gain, which can impact on the health and movement of piggies. Give no more than one handful per pig, per day. Choose a high-quality plain nugget (pellet) feed to discourage selective feeding, which can lead to an unbalanced diet. Refresh both the bowl and food once daily, and clean food storage containers at least once a month.