

Preparing for Your Home Check Guinea Pig Guidelines

**Bobtails Rabbit &
Guinea Pig Rescue**

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We are pleased you are considering adopting rescued pets from Bobtails Rescue. We want them, and you, to have a happy life together. As a rescue, we have a responsibility to ensure that the rescued animals in our care go to the best lifetime homes they deserve, which is why we always carry out a home check. Please remember it isn't an "exam" or "test" but is an opportunity to get things right for your pets from the start and we at the rescue and our home checkers team are here to help and advise you along the way and answer any questions you may have.

Every one of our recommendations are set for good reasons and are to comply with RSPCA, Cavy Trust or Rabbit Welfare Association guidelines, usually backed up by veterinary and welfare research.

All of our home checkers are unpaid volunteers who freely give up their valuable spare time to helping our rescued animals find the very best homes. Please ensure you are ready for your home check ie: have the bolts or security fixings actually fitted, rather than "here in the bag, we'll fit them this afternoon!" or "we've just got to finish meshing the roof etc." As that will mean a wasted journey and our home checkers will have to pay another visit, we are always happy to give advice and answer any questions to get things right before your home check.

Once you have reserved your new pets here at the rescue, please do your best to be ready to adopt them as soon as possible so that we can take in the next unfortunate animals that are always on the waiting list to come in.

- Minimum** acceptable hutch sizes for 2 guinea pigs is 4' (120cm) x 18" (46cm) x 18" (46cm). With daily access to a large secure run area no less than 4' (120cm) x 3' (90cm) x 18" (46cm). Bigger is much better! Guineaas need to be able to lie down together in their bedding area. Indoor guineaas can also be housed in an indoor cage, minimum size 3'3" (100cm) x 20" (50cm). Even though indoors, it is safer to provide a secure top to the living accommodation, particularly if there are other pets living in or visiting the household.
- For the safety of your animals. If your Guinea Pigs are left to run free in the garden you will fail a home check. Foxes can and do appear when we least expect it, even if you've not seen one in your garden before. We never take the risk!**
- Hexagonal "chicken wire" is **not** an acceptable fencing material for enclosing your guineaas. It is not fox proof and can be bitten through. Use a heavier gauge mesh and make sure it is secured with U-shaped nails at areas needing strength eg at the corners and along each side. These should be used **in addition** to any wood staples. This is to prevent a predator from pulling the mesh away from the frame.
- Make sure there are **easy to use bolts** on your hutch and run. "Twist" catches are not predator proof and are too easily left open. It's no good having the bolts on there if you and your family won't use them because they aren't well fitting or are difficult to do up as the wood expands and contracts with the seasons! So, choose larger ones that are easy to slide into place for all the family and make sure these are maintained every few months. Please ensure you have a combination padlock fitted if you have young children or children visiting your home who may want to stroke/fuss your guinea pigs, they may not shut the door securely!
- If your guinea pigs run is to be movable around the garden, think about ensuring that, nothing can dig into it and that the run is weighted or fixed down so that it cannot be tipped or pushed over by a dog/cat/fox. Make sure your guineaas always have somewhere to hide too by providing an igloo or upturned box. Please do not lay mesh that will be in contact with the animals' feet across the bottom of the run. This will make their feet very sore.
- If your guinea pigs garden run is to be static in one place, you can mesh the bottom of the run but you must lay turf over the top of it so that the mesh won't give them sore feet. The roots will grow through the wire mesh so it can be watered as normal. The turf is easily replaced if it is eaten roots 'n' all by your piggies and the grass becomes sparse.
- All garden exercise areas require a secure meshed top (not plastic or fabric).

With thanks to our sponsor



- ✓ www.scratchandnewton.co.uk make waterproof and insulation covers for hutches and runs so that your furries can make full use of their space regardless of the weather. They can even make custom-made ones if your run is not one of their standard sizes. You can make your own of course but you will need to show your home checker you have considered weather proofing for all seasons so even if your home check is in the summer, you will need to have your winter-proofing methods available for your checker to see. Guinea pigs cannot cope with extremes of temperature.
- ✓ www.snugglesafe.co.uk makes microwavable heat pads which are safe for use as they cannot be chewed. The special gel inside the pad gives off heat slowly over 12 hours keeping your little ones snug and warm on colder winter days and nights. Well worth having on hand in case they are ever unwell.
- ✓ Assemble any toys/litter trays/bowls etc before your home check so that your checker can see them and check they are suitable. Ask for a list of toy ideas at the rescue.
- ✓ Sawdust or wood shavings are **not** appropriate bedding for guinea pigs. They are dusty and very drying and long-term exposure can leave your guinea vulnerable to lung problems and skin disorders. A pulped paper product like Megazorb www.megazorb.co.uk or Carefresh by Supreme Science makes a much better alternative. Or, you can just use newspaper and fresh hay.
- ✓ **Good quality hay** is key to your guinea pigs dietary health, poor quality hays often contain mites and fungal spores, which can lead to skin and lung problems. Good quality hay will be green and have slight moisture (not dampness) to it, which means it is a little soft and pliable to the touch. It should be free of dust and smell sweet and fresh, like mown grass. Poor quality hay will be yellowing, thin, brittle strands, which feels either very dry or damp. It will smell a little like dry earth or may even smell a little mouldy. Avoid this, your animals will not want to eat it and it is more than likely riddled with hay mites and fungal spores.
- ✓ Make sure you have found a suitable local vet **who takes a special interest in guinea pigs**. Many vets have virtually no training in guinea pig care or may have a practice, which sees very large numbers of cats and dogs and very few small animals. Guinea pigs are much specialised animals and many practises categorise them as “exotics”. You will need to find a vet who can worm your guinea pig for you six monthly. Have a look at www.bunnymail.co.uk on the vet’s pages for details of vets other owners can recommend.
- ✓ You will want to have a look at www.gorgeousguineas.co.uk for information about caring for your guinea’s skin.
- ✓ If you are considering **pet insurance** check the policy carefully to ensure the cover is “lifetime”. This means that if your guinea pig were to be unlucky enough to get a long-term illness like diabetes for example, their medication and care would be covered from diagnosis and for their rest of their lives. Some policies try to get round this by excluding any conditions you have claimed for in the previous year when you renew your policy, check the internet for the best deals.
- ✓ You will need to think ahead about holiday care for your guinea pigs and budget for them over the cost of your holiday. Please remember it is very unwise to leave your animals in the care of a friend/family member/neighbour who does not know anything about your pet or who cannot visit more than once a day. Often, it is quite subtle changes in behaviour which will alert you to your pet being unwell and someone inexperienced with your animals may miss a vital chance to get them treated. Why not use a guinea pig boarding facility, ask us for details.

In addition, we can offer limited boarding facilities here at Bobtails

When you are all ready for your home check and you are sure you have covered all the items on the check list enclosed, please contact our Home Checking Co-ordinator at bobtailsrescue@aol.com or 020 8393 2016 to arrange a time and date for your check. You may collect your new family members as soon as it is convenient after you have passed your check.

**If you have any other questions of concerns,
please call Bobtails Rescue on 020 8393 2016
or email bobtailsrescue@aol.com.**

