

How to Introduce Guinea Pigs

How to Introduce Guinea Pigs: A Friendly Guide

Introducing guinea pigs to each other can be a delightful experience, but it requires some thoughtful planning. These social animals thrive in pairs or groups, so finding them a buddy is essential for their happiness. However, introducing unfamiliar guinea pigs involves a few steps to ensure everyone gets along. Let's dive into the process!

Why Guinea Pigs Need Friends



Guinea pigs are social creatures that naturally prefer company. Keeping them in pairs or small groups allows them to express their instincts and socialize. But when it comes to mixing unfamiliar guinea pigs, you'll need to consider their sex, age, size, and personality to create a successful pairing.

Successful Pairings and Group Dynamics

- **Females Together:** Female guinea pigs tend to get along well in pairs or groups, making them an easy choice for companionship.
- **Male Siblings:** A pair of male guinea pigs can live harmoniously if they are siblings or if they were introduced when they were young. Neutering is highly recommended to help reduce potential conflicts and allow for future introductions if needed.
- **Mixed Pairing:** A neutered male can live peacefully with a group of females. However, it's essential to have just one male in a mixed pairing to avoid fighting. Neutering the male also prevents unwanted pregnancies. Just be sure to wait about four to six weeks after neutering before introducing him to any females, as he may still be fertile during that time.

- **Avoid Male Trios:** It's generally best to steer clear of introducing three male guinea pigs together, as they often struggle to get along.

Important Note

Guinea pigs should never be housed with rabbits. They can't communicate effectively, and there's a high risk that the rabbit could bully the guinea pig.



Steps to Prepare for Introduction

1. **Know Their Sex:** Ensure you know the gender of your guinea pigs. If you're unsure, consult your vet.
2. **Give Them Time to Settle:** Once you bring your guinea pigs home, allow them some time to acclimate before starting introductions.
3. **Check Their Space:** Ensure their hutch or cage is spacious enough. For two guinea pigs, a minimum of 5ft by 2ft (10 square feet) is recommended, but more space is always better!
4. **Scent Swapping:** After they've settled, start swapping their bedding or items. This allows them to get familiar with each other's scent, a crucial step known as scent swapping. Keep an eye out for any negative reactions to the new smells.

5. **Swap Spaces:** If the scent swapping goes well, you can also switch their hutches or exercise runs, allowing each guinea pig to explore the other's



territory.

Introducing Your Guinea Pigs

1. **Mesh Barrier:** If possible, start by housing the guinea pigs side by side with a mesh divider. This allows them to see and communicate without direct contact. You can place one in a run next to the other's hutch or set up two runs alongside each other.

2. **Neutral Meeting Space:** If everything looks positive through the mesh, it's time for a face-to-face meeting. Choose a neutral space—an outdoor run or a spare room works well. If you haven't been able to house them near each other before this, create a barrier in the neutral space that allows them to see and smell one another. Remove it if you notice positive behaviours like "popcorning" (jumping around joyfully) or sniffing and interacting through the barrier.

3. **Safe Hiding Spots:** In the neutral space, provide plenty of hiding spots like open-ended boxes, tunnels, and beds. This ensures that if either guinea pig feels overwhelmed, they have a safe retreat.

4. **Distraction with Treats:** Scatter some food and hay around to keep them distracted and help create positive associations with each other.

5. **Monitor Their Behaviour:** Choose a time when you can sit and observe them. Look for signs of bonding, such as grooming, lying close together, or sharing resources like food and water. Be on the lookout for concerning behaviours like constant teeth chattering, biting, excessive hiding, or chasing. Some of these behaviours may occur initially, but if aggression escalates or either guinea pig shows signs of stress, end the session and try again the next day.

6. **Emergency Board:** It's a good idea to have a solid board handy to separate them if they begin to show aggression.

7. **End on a Positive Note:** If you can, try to end the session positively, or at least ensure that neither guinea pig is left feeling stressed or



scared.

Moving In Together

Once you feel they're ready for the big move:

1. **Prepare Their Space:** Before placing them together, remove any enclosed houses or carriers. Instead, provide open items they can hide behind, such as tubes.

2. **Scatter Food and Water:** Make sure to scatter food around their new space and provide at least two sources of water. This promotes sharing and reduces potential territorial disputes.

3. **Keep Monitoring:** Observe their behaviour closely in the new environment, as it can change their dynamics. If everything seems fine, they're probably ready to start their new life together.

4. **If Concerns Arise:** If you notice concerning behaviour, it's perfectly okay to spend more time observing them in this setup before leaving them alone together.

Final Thoughts

Introducing guinea pigs takes patience and care, but with the right approach, they can become the best of friends. Enjoy watching their personalities unfold as they navigate their new relationship!