

Chinchillas

About Your Chinchilla

Chinchillas are gentle, bright pets that when well cared for, live 12 to 20 years. They rarely bite or act aggressively. They are social creatures and should be kept in pairs. Solitary chinchillas typically become listless and lethargic.

Chinchillas are nocturnal. Because of that, they do not typically make good pets for children who want pets they can play with during the day. In fact, chinchillas are very susceptible to stress. They must be protected from noise and activity during the day.

Chinchillas need branches to climb on and enjoy having several places to sit, each at a different height. They do not need a nesting box, but most will use one if it is provided. They should be kept out of direct, full sun, drafts, and the busiest areas of the house.

Chinchillas need to “bathe” themselves in a roomy tray of special chinchilla sand in order to keep their coats clean. The sand is expensive, so it works best to move the container in and out of the cage each day to keep it from becoming soiled.

The ARL spays or neuters all chinchillas before they are adopted.

Chinchillas need the following basic care:

- Fresh water in glass bottles. Plastic bottles aren't strong enough for the chinchilla's sharp teeth.
- Wood blocks/toys to chew on. These items should be rotated regularly to alleviate boredom. Chew toys are a necessity.
- Daily supply of fresh hay for proper digestion. It works well to place the hay inside a cardboard tube or box.
- Fresh chinchilla (pellet) food and water daily. Chinchillas have entirely different nutritional requirements than rabbits and guinea pigs. Rodent/rabbit foods are NOT suitable.
- Check teeth regularly to ensure normal length and position.
- DO NOT give chinchillas fruits or vegetables. Unlike rabbits and guinea pigs, it can make chinchillas sick.
- Quality veterinary care.
- They must not be allowed to chew on plastic.
- High heat and humidity can be fatal.
- Their house needs to be large. Vertical space is good.
- Regularly check eyes, nose, ears, teeth, nails, weight, and droppings.

Well socialized chinchillas are easily picked up using both hands to support their body. They should not be picked up by their tails.

A tame, comfortable chinchilla is curious; exploring, sniffing and hopping. A frightened chinchilla will cower in the corner of its cage. When a chinchilla stands on its hind legs it is a sign of increased alertness; it may sense danger or simply be curious.

Chinchillas will “test bite” almost all new objects they encounter for edibility. So, a finger stuck in a cage will likely get an exploratory bite. This has nothing to do with being vicious, but can be unpleasant for humans.

Vocally, baby chinchillas “chatter,” adult chinchillas have a defensive “bark,” a “warning whistle,” and soft, high grunts for their regular communications.