

Essex County Rabbit & Cavy Breeders

Present

Basic Cavy Care

General- Cavies are gentle, vocal pets that enjoy human contact. Another name that is sometimes used for cavy is guinea pig. Guinea pig is a slang term and really has nothing to do with cavy, guinea or pigs. A male is known as a boar. A female is known as a sow.

- **Life Expectancy:** 4 to 7 years.
- **Adult Weight:** 1 to 4 pounds.
- **Teeth:** All teeth (incisors and molars) continually grow throughout life. If the teeth do not "mesh" properly (malocclusion), they can overgrow, leading to difficulty eating.
- **Diet:** Cavies cannot produce their own Vitamin C. It must be provided in their diet for survival. A diet of cavy pellets and fresh vegetables should be provided to avoid the risk of scurvy. Rabbit pellets do not contain Vitamin C and contain ingredients that are healthy for a rabbit but can cause a cavy to become ill. Approximately 90 days after manufacture the Vitamin C in pellets will break down. Do not purchase more pellets than your cavy can eat in that amount of time.
Timothy hay should be fed daily. This can be picked up at most pet stores or a local farmer. Timothy hay helps to wear down the teeth and prevents some common digestive problems. Breeders recommend vegetables and fruits: kale, parsley, spinach, green peppers, mustard greens, collard greens, tomatoes, carrots, grapes and apples.
Lettuce and celery have no nutritional value and should not be served.
- **Handling:** Always use two hands when picking up your cavy. Be sure one hand supports the rump and hind legs. A nervous cavy may jump from your grasp; a common cause of broken legs and backs. The more you handle the cavy the friendlier it will become. To avoid "accidents", place a towel on your lap when holding the cavy. If the cavy sits happily on your lap for any length of time then becomes vocal and restless, put it back into the cage. There's a good chance that the cavy has to "relieve" itself at that time.
- **Housing:** A cavy should have a minimum area of 3,000 square centimeters (approximately 2 feet by 2 feet). More space is needed for a pair. The enclosure should be made of plastic or metal with a solid floor and the bedding should be white wood shavings (not sawdust or cedar shavings). Change the wood shavings regularly to keep the cage clean, dry, and healthy. Make your habitat larger if you have room. Place interesting items such as small cardboard or wooden boxes or tubes for your cavy to dart into. Keep your cavy in a dry area protected from cold drafts and direct sunlight. Cavies cannot tolerate excessive heat. Cavies prefer living in temperatures in the same range as people do (18-25°C, 65-75°F).

Cavies require exercise and will happily romp around a room that has been cleared of hazards such as electric cords, cats or dogs, and poisonous plants.

When the cavy roams a room, take notice of the area picked as the designated pee spot.

Place a newspaper in that spot and the cavy will usually return to the same area to pee.

Jellybeans (the other bathroom activity) are usually random and unpredictable.

Grooming / Nail Trimming: Bathing a cavy is usually not necessary as long as the cage is kept clean. Baths can be given to the cavy. Line a sink with a towel or rag and bathe your cavy in a sink half full of lukewarm water. Use a mild shampoo, rinse thoroughly, and dry with a towel. A hair dryer set to a warm setting can also be used. Make sure the cavy is completely dry before putting it back into the cage. Nails need to be trimmed about every six weeks or as necessary. Consult a vet or knowledgeable person for instructions if hesitant. Care must be taken to avoid cutting the blood vessel in the center of the nail. In good light, this vessel is clearly visible. If accidentally severed, use a product called "Quick-Stop" (available at pet stores) to stop the bleeding.

Things to Avoid-

- Do not use cages with a wire or mesh floor. The cavy's feet can slip through the mesh. The wire floors are the common cause of broken legs and a painful condition known as "Bumblefoot".
- Cavies are usually hearty and healthy animals. Avoid housing the cavy in a drafty area or cool damp place in the house. Drafts and dampness cause respiratory problems and can lead to a viral or bacterial infection.

Behavior -

Popcorning: A quick jump straight up in the air, followed by running around. Sometimes this behavior may look like a nervous condition, usually it signifies happiness.

Strutting: When a cavy stretches itself out and walks around the cage very slowly and deliberately, usually while grumbling. This signifies dominance over the pig that is not strutting.

Chattering: Teeth clacking. A noise made when he is about to be caught, when he is expecting to be fed and then isn't, or a warning to other cavies signifying the possibility of a fight.

Motorboating: Low rumbling sound that means many things: mating noise, dominance noise, a noise made when a cavy meets another cavy for the first time or the cavy heard something odd.

Purring: When a cavy is happy, it gives this deep throaty rumble.

Singing: A chirp like sound rarely heard may be a fear response or the cavy is in distress.

Wheek: A generally agreed upon term used to describe the cavy's most common sound. Other terms include "Wheep", "Wheet". Wheeks almost never occur singularly.

Yelling: The really loud holler that indicates the refrigerator door has been opened and the cavy wants some snacks.