

1988

## 4-H 276 Guinea Pig : Part of the Nebraska 4-H Small Animal and Pet Series

James Marquand

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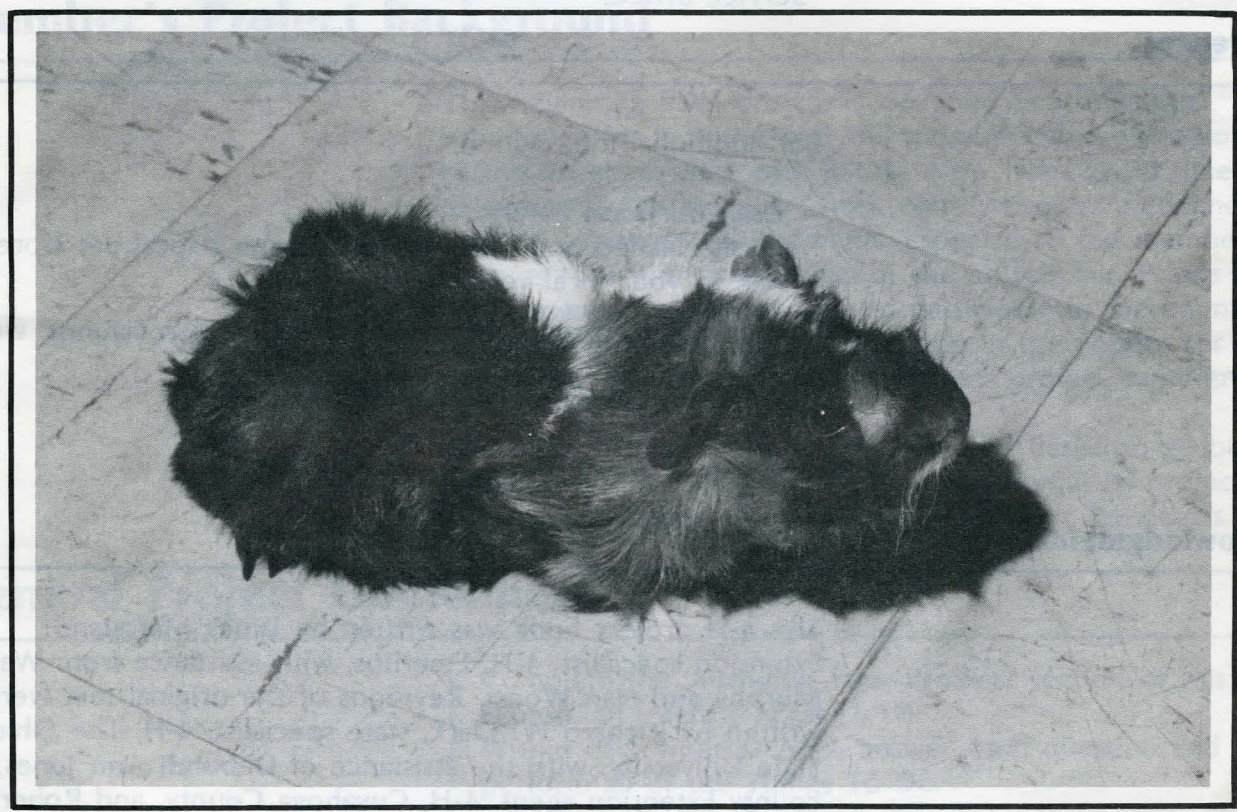
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1988

Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service 4-H 276

# Guinea Pig

*Part of the Nebraska 4-H Small Animal and Pet Series*



Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Leo E. Lucas, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.



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## Memo To Parents

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Membership in 4-H offers your child an opportunity for wholesome companionship with boys and girls in their own age group and valuable increased skills in one or more of the following project areas:

Animal science	Economic education
Plant science	Health and safety
Clothing	Family life
Consumer education	Food and nutrition
Home environment	Engineering
Communication	Conservation
Personal development and leadership	

For information, visit your Cooperative Extension Service office.

## References

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For additional information:

Visit your local library.  
Obtain leaflets and other materials from a local pet store.  
Talk to your local veterinarian.

For more information about Cavy Breeders Associations, write:

American Cavy Breeders' Association, Inc.  
P.O. Box 416  
Herrin, IL 62948

## Acknowledgments

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This 4-H project book was written by James Marquand, Extension specialist, 4-H, Emeritus, with assistance from Wayne Murphy and Nan Woost. Revisions of the original text were written by Richard W. Clark, state specialist, 4-H, The Ohio State University, with the assistance of Deborah Ann Jones, county Extension agent, 4-H, Cuyahoga County, and Robert W. Lahmers, county Extension agent, 4-H, Morgan County.

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## Member's Project Background

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This beginning level project is designed as a one-time experience for 9- to 12-year-old members, and older youth having no experience with guinea pigs. There is no time limit to complete this project. Check county project guidelines (if any) for additional requirements, especially if the member chooses to exhibit the project at the county fair. Please note that a member does not have to participate in the county fair to complete this project. Participating in the county fair is simply one way to enhance a member's project experience.

Members who complete this project and desire to go beyond its scope are encouraged to do a self-determined project (4-H 365) in guinea pigs. Contact your 4-H advisor for details.

## General Project Guidelines

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1. Complete the "Planning Your Project" section of this guide.
2. Explore all Interest Areas (1-11).
3. Within each Interest Area, answer each question and perform all of the Things To Do.
4. Take part in at least two (2) Project Learning Experiences.
5. Become involved in at least two (2) Leadership/Citizenship activities.
6. Write a one-page summary telling what was done and learned through this project.



# Planning Your Project

## Step 1: Interest Areas

Explore all of the Interest Areas listed below. As you begin to explore an Interest Area, place the current date (month/year) next to it.

**I Have Begun  
Doing These  
Activities**

**When I  
Started**

**Interest Areas**

1. Getting Started, p. 5-6

2. History, p. 7-8

3. Breed Selection, p. 9-12

4. Housing and Equipment, p. 13-14

5. Feeding and Watering, p. 15-18

6. Care and Management Tips, p. 19-20

7. Disease and Sanitation, p. 21-22

8. Breeding, p. 23-25

9. Getting Ready for the Show, p. 26-27

10. Record Keeping, p. 28-30

11. What's Next?, p. 31-32

## Step 2: Things To Do and Questions

Within each Interest Area find the section of Things to Do and the list of Questions. Plan to perform all of the things to do and answer all the questions. Have your parent or advisor initial and date what you complete.

### Step 3: Learning Experiences

Take part in at least two (2) of the learning experiences listed below. Plan your involvement in the chart provided. Once you have taken part in an activity, record what you did and when. Learning experiences may be added or changed at any time.

#### Sample Learning Experiences

Demonstration	Speech	Project judging
Illustrated talk	Show	Project meeting
Exhibit	Clinic	Field trip
Radio/TV presentation	Tour	Workshop

#### Summary of Learning Experiences

Plan to Take Part In	What You Did	Date
(example) Demonstration	Presented how to care for guinea pig	4/10

### Step 4: Leadership/Citizenship Activities

Check off the activities you wish to do, or plan your own in the space provided. Plan to do at least two (2) activities. Keep track of your progress by dating (month/year) what you



# Planning Your Project

complete. Leadership/citizenship activities may be added or changed at any time.

What I Plan to Do	Completion Date	Leadership/Citizenship Activities
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Take care of someone's guinea pig while they are on vacation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Teach members of my club something about raising guinea pigs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Have a pet store owner or veterinarian visit my club and talk about guinea pigs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Make arrangements for my club to visit a pet store or veterinarian's office.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Help another member with his/her guinea pig project.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Encourage someone to take a guinea pig project.

**Create Your Own or Plan Additional Activities Below:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7. _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8. _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. _____

## Project Completion and Awards

Once you have completed what you have planned, write a one-page report telling what you did and learned. Then have your parent or project advisor review your experiences with you.

# Getting Started on Your Project

## Word List

guinea pig

## Pets

Almost all boys and girls like small animals. The **guinea pig** is a small pet animal. Guinea pigs are not overly smart, yet they are far from dumb, and they learn fast to greet their owner's footsteps with a welcoming whistle.

Guinea pigs are clean. They have no unusually bad odor. If cared for correctly, they will not bite. Guinea pigs like to be petted and handled. By selecting guinea pigs as a 4-H project, you will learn how to feed, water and care for them. You will also have fun and make friends by belonging to a 4-H club.

## Your first 4-H project

If this is your first year in 4-H, remember that 4-H is open to all boys and girls between the ages of 9 and 19. Four-H is the youth program of the Cooperative Extension Service and is organized through the cooperation of the United States Department of Agriculture and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

As a 4-H member, you are expected to attend 4-H meetings, be an active member of your club, give a demonstration about your project, take good care of your project and learn as much about guinea pigs as you can. You also may want to attend 4-H camp.

## Things to Do

- Learn the 4-H Pledge.
- Talk with your advisor about your project.
- Find out where your Extension office is located.
- Meet your Extension agent.
- Read the "Member's Project Guide" at the beginning of this project.

I have completed these Things to Do.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My parent's or advisor's initials.



## Questions

1. What is the name of your 4-H club? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Who is your 4-H advisor? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Who is your Extension agent? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Have you met your Extension agent? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Where is the Extension office located? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you know the 4-H pledge? \_\_\_\_\_

I have answered these Questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My parent's or advisor's initials.

# The History of the Guinea Pig

---

## Word List

cavy  
rodent  
boar  
sow  
Cavia cutleri  
guinea  
show animal

### The "restless cavy"

A guinea pig is a **cavy** with a short, heavy body. Guinea pigs have short legs and no tail. They are relatives of a South American **rodent** that still lives wild in Peru. A male guinea pig is called a **boar**, the female a **sow**. The scientific name of the guinea pig is **Cavia culteri** or, just, "restless cavy."

Although not a real pig, they were called pigs because they grunt and squeal. The South American Indians raised them for meat, which was a much wanted food. Sailors returned to Europe with guinea pigs in the early 1500s. In England, they were sold for a **guinea** (an old English coin no longer made) and became known as guinea pigs.

### Guinea pigs for lab tests

For over 100 years, guinea pigs have been used in laboratory work. They are used for special tests to learn about diseases, medicines and drug effects. Many food companies keep guinea pigs for studying the vitamins in their products. What guinea pig's body needs is much like that of a human being.

No one knows for sure exactly when guinea pigs were first used for scientific purposes. Before 1870, in Europe and the United States, guinea pigs were mainly pets. From 1870 to 1890, many guinea pigs were used by scientists like Louis Pasteur, who studied rabies, and other scientists who studied the causes of diseases and ways to fight them. Today, guinea pigs remain excellent test animals.

### Breeding guinea pigs for show

In the early 1900s, interested people in England began breeding guinea pigs as a show animal. In the United States, guinea pigs became a **show animal** about the same time. Today there are many county, state and national guinea pig shows, usually with a rabbit association.

## Things to Do

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- Go to a library and read about guinea pigs.
- Visit a pet store and look at guinea pigs. See how they are similar and different from other rodents, such as rats and mice.
- Have a pet store owner or your advisor show you how to tell the difference between a boar and a sow.



## Questions

---

I have completed these Things to Do.

\_\_\_\_\_

My parent's or advisor's initials.

## Questions

---

1. Guinea pigs are rodents. True \_\_\_\_ False \_\_\_\_
2. What is the scientific name for the guinea pig? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Guinea pigs originally came from \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_ introduced guinea pigs to Europe in the 1500s
5. List three (3) reasons for raising guinea pigs today.
  1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_

I have answered these Questions.

\_\_\_\_\_

My parent's or advisor's initials.



# Breed Selection

## Word List

breeding stock  
breeds  
American cavy  
Abyssinian cavy  
wiry  
rosettes  
ruff  
back ridge  
mane  
ridge  
Peruvian cavy

### Selecting guinea pigs

The success of any 4-H livestock project depends on selecting a good animal for **breeding stock**. For this reason, it is important to get the best animal you can for your project. Sometimes the cavies available in the local pet shops and discount stores lack the quality needed for a good show animal. Since you cannot always tell such things simply by looking, it is difficult to avoid buying animals with poor breeding backgrounds. However, if you can buy your project animal from a reputable dealer and get a purebred, you are more likely to get a good guinea pig for breeding. When selecting guinea pigs, try to avoid animals from litters that have a family history of the young being born dead. This does happen in guinea pig herds. Also, choose an alert, active cavy with clear, bright eyes and a smooth, shiny coat of hair—indications of good health.

### Raising guinea pigs

You may want to raise and keep your guinea pigs as pets, or you may want to breed them for show or sell them for laboratory testing.

In raising guinea pigs for show, you should know that there are 20 different kinds of each breed and 6 show classes for each kind—a total of 360 show classes. So, it is necessary to begin with good animals. If you are interested in raising guinea pigs for laboratory use, be sure to check with local hospitals and laboratories about the type, age and size of the animals they use. Find out if they will buy animals from you before you begin.

### The major breeds

There are three major **breeds** of guinea pigs, the American, the Peruvian and the Abyssinian. All three have a blunt nose, short ears, four toes on the front feet, three toes on the hind feet, and no tail.

### The American cavy

The best known and most widely raised of the three breeds is the **American cavy**, a guinea pig with a short-haired, smooth coat. The American cavy is used widely by laboratories. Choice of color is up to what you like. If you plan to raise guinea pigs for laboratory testing, white is the color used most for experiments.



### The Abyssinian cavy

The body of the **Abyssinian cavy** and its standard weight are like that of the American cavy. The biggest difference is the coat, which is short, harsh, and **wiry** in texture. The rough hair spreads out from a tiny center forming what is called **rosettes**. The rosettes should be very clear and well formed. A good animal should have at least four saddle rosettes—two on the rump, and two on the hips. Double or split rosettes are bad and usually caused by soft hair mixed with the harsh, wiry hair.

Stiff, straight hairs, known as the **ruff** or collar, grow across the shoulders. Stiff, straight hairs across the hindquarter are known as the **back ridge**. The hair from the back of the head to the collar or ruff is called the **mane**. The hair between the collar or ruff and the back ridge is the **ridge**. A better understanding of these names (ruff, back ridge, ridge, rosettes, and mane) can be learned by carefully studying the Abyssinian cavy.

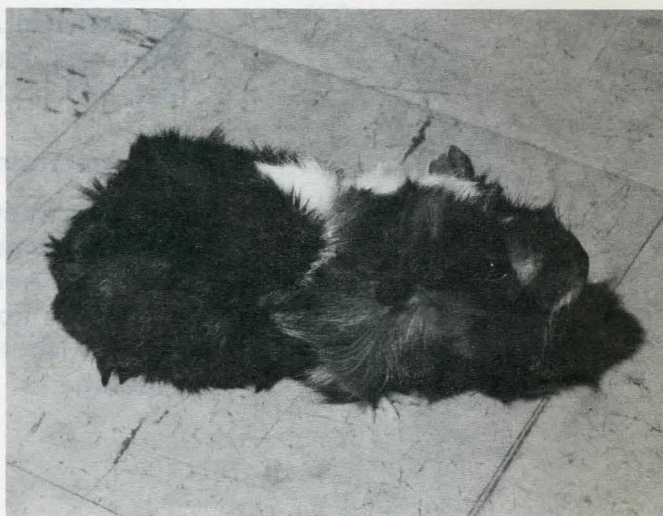
### The Peruvian cavy

As with the Abyssinian cavy, the **Peruvian cavy** has the same general body type and size as the American cavy. Sometimes called the "queen of the cavy world," it has long hair, at least 6 inches and up to 18.

Even from a short distance, it is difficult to tell the front from the back, or whether it is "coming or going," which is just what breeders desire. The coat should be silky, very thick, and as long as possible. Peruvian cavies are used very little for research work.



The American Cavy



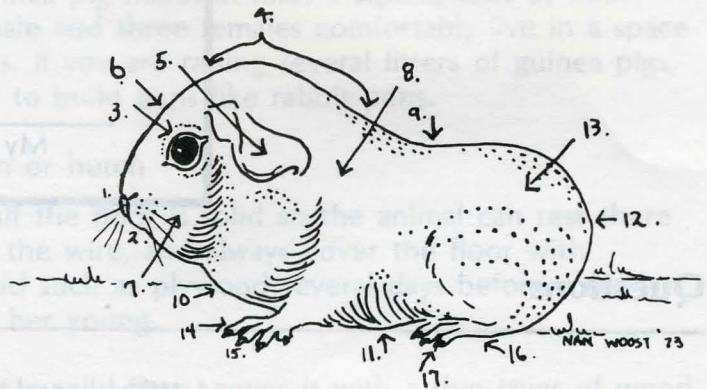
The Abyssinian Cavy



## The special needs of a peruvian

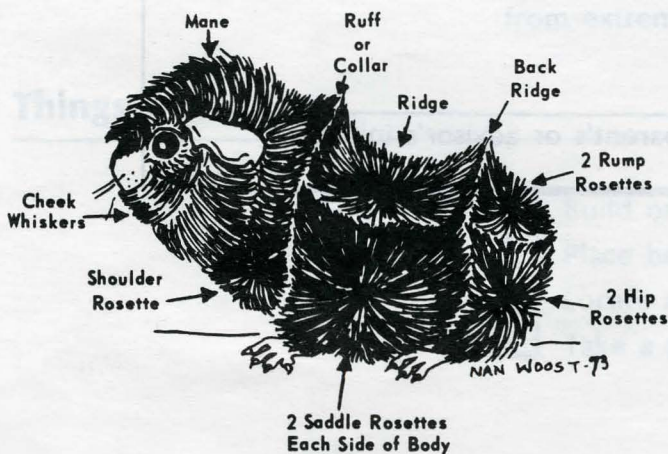
The Peruvian cavy requires more attention than the other breeds of cavy. Their hair must be brushed carefully every day and, when being shown, should be put up in curlers or rollers. Although they require great care, they are a challenge.

The Peruvian cavy is for only those 4-H'ers who have time and willingness to do the proper grooming. Although they are different and present a pleasing appearance when cared for properly, neglect will cause a poor and ugly animal, making the owner look bad.

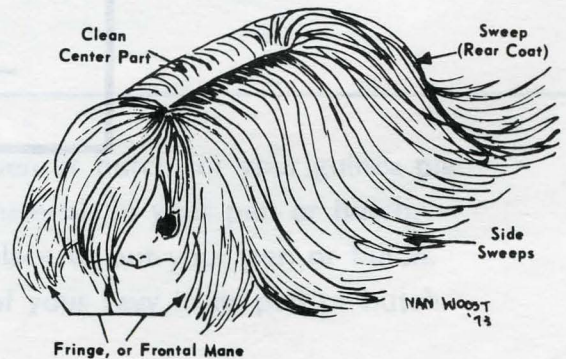


Head	Trunk	Forelegs
1. Nose/Nostrils	8. Shoulder	14. 4 toes
2. Mouth	9. Back	15. Claws
3. Eye	10. Chest	
4. Crown	11. Abdomen	Hind legs
5. Ear	Hind Quarters	16. 3 toes
6. Face	12. Rump	17. Claws
7. Cheek	13. Hip	

## American/Smooth-coat Variety of Cavy



**Abyssinian Cavy**



**The Peruvian Cavy**



## Things To Do

---

- Buy your guinea pig(s) from a reputable dealer.
- Learn the parts of the body of your cavy. Draw a picture of your cavy and label the parts.
- Give a short talk at your club meeting, and tell other members about the breed you selected.

I have completed these Things to Do.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My parent's or advisor's initials.

## Questions

---

1. What breed did you select? \_\_\_\_\_  
Why? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Describe your cavy. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What breed has long, silky hair? \_\_\_\_\_  
Have you ever seen this breed? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you have a sow or boar? \_\_\_\_\_

I have answered these Questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My parent's or advisor's initials.



# Housing and Equipment

---

## Word List

hutch  
square foot

### Designing a pen or hutch

A pen or **hutch** for a guinea pig does not need to be special because guinea pigs usually do not climb or jump. The guinea pig is not a fighter, though, so design your hutch to protect them from dogs, cats or other animals. Most pens have screen wire or some kind of hardware cloth across the top. The sides also may be made of screen.

If you plan to keep only one guinea pig the first year, a wooden box 24 x 12 x 12 inches, with a wire floor, could be used. Each guinea pig needs at least 1 **square foot** of floor space. One male and three females comfortably live in a space 36 x 24 inches. If you are raising several litters of guinea pigs, you may wish to build pens like rabbit pens.

### Inside the pen or hutch

It is best if half the floor is solid so the animal can rest there instead of on the wire, and always cover the floor with something solid such as plywood several days before a sow gives birth to her young.

When you use a solid floor, cover it with a thin layer of wood shavings, sawdust or straw. This material will absorb moisture. There are different bedding materials for sale that also are very good. Select bedding material that is as dust-free as possible. Dust is bothersome to the lungs of guinea pigs, and it may cause a breathing problem. Clean the pens at least once a week or more if possible. After cleaning the cage, use something to kill odor, such as a disinfectant.

Guinea pigs do not grow well below 65 degrees Fahrenheit, so keep the animals warm during winter. Move outdoor pens into a building during the winter so that the temperature will be above 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Also, protect guinea pigs from extreme heat during the summer.

## Things to Do

---

- Build or buy a pen or hutch for your guinea pig.
- Place bedding materials in your pen or hutch.
- Locate a good place to put your pen or hutch.
- Take a picture of your cavy in its pen or hutch.



I have completed these Things to Do.

\_\_\_\_\_

My parent's or advisor's initials.

## Questions

1. Describe your pen or hutch: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How do you protect your animals against changes in temperature?

\_\_\_\_\_

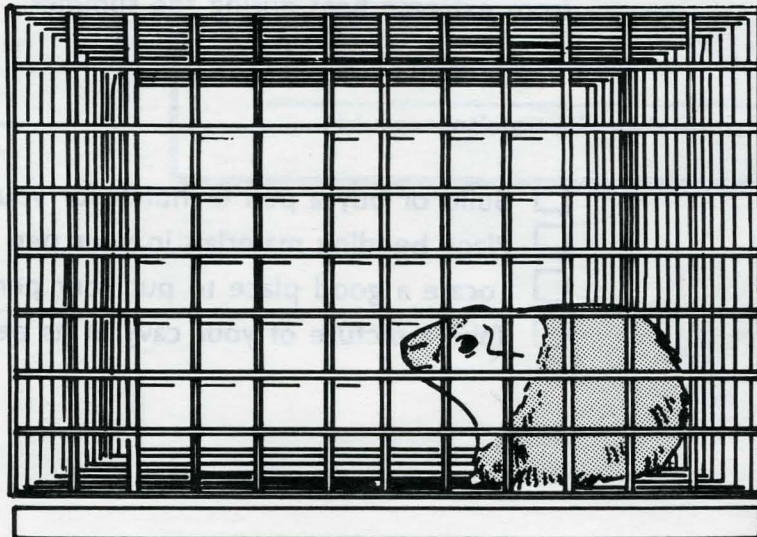
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\_\_\_\_\_

I have answered these Questions.

\_\_\_\_\_

My parent's or advisor's initials.



A Guinea Pig's Hutch



# Feeding and Watering

---

## Word List

vitamin C  
pellets  
crock  
salt spool

### What guinea pigs drink

Should guinea pigs be given water? All living animals need water. A guinea pig that is eating all the greens he wants, will drink very little water. However, always have fresh, clean water for your animal.

### What guinea pigs eat

Guinea pigs need many kinds of food. They like all vegetables and very likely will eat anything you put in front of them, but they do not eat meat. If you are raising guinea pigs, ask your grocer if you may have the extra lettuce leaves that often are thrown away. The following is a list of greens, fruits and vegetables that guinea pigs like to eat:

Alfalfa (green)	Cauliflower
Apples	Clover (green)
Carrots	Celery
Corn (green)	Lawn clippings
Dandelions	Spinach
Lettuce	Tomatoes

### The importance of vitamin C

All of the above contain some **vitamin C**, sometimes called ascorbic acid. Since men, monkeys and guinea pigs are the only animals that do not make their own vitamin C, it must be part of their food because a lack of vitamin C will cause an unhealthy animal. Other animals make vitamin C in their bodies.

Vitamin C is very important to humans, as well as to guinea pigs. Vitamin C helps us grow and build the cement that holds body cells together, like in teeth and bones. It also keeps our blood vessels strong. Vitamin C helps our cuts heal quickly. In fact, vitamin C is at work nearly everywhere in our bodies. Because this vitamin is so important, we need to make a special effort to eat foods rich in vitamin C every day.

### Feeding your guinea pig

You may find your guinea pig prefers certain vegetables, just as you have preferences. When giving a new vegetable, be sure to give only small amounts until your pet becomes used to it. Many of the above foods are used by your family and can be shared with your animal.

Always remove and throw away any green vegetables left at the end of the day. Your guinea pig can become ill from eating rotted vegetables. A small, heavy rabbit feeder can be





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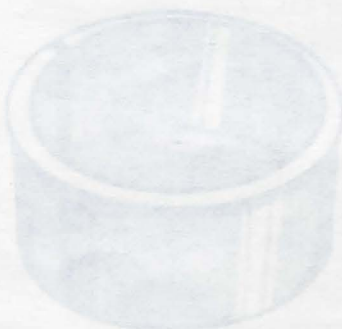
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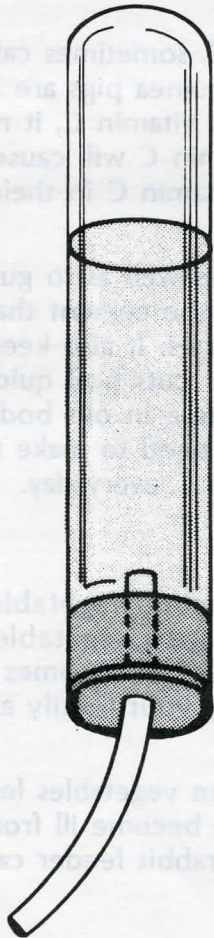


used to feed rabbit **pellets**. Feed should be available at all times. Do not keep too much dry feed in the feeder, especially if your guinea pig develops the habit of sitting in the **crock** and dirtying the food. You may wish to purchase a food cup from a pet or farm store. These can be hung from the cage wall to keep the animal from ruining his food. An adult pig may eat 20 to 30 grams of pellets daily. Store your pellets in a metal box or can to protect them against wild mice, rats or insects.

Guinea pigs, like humans, will change in their likes and dislikes of foods. Some will eat all greens, if available, and very few pellets. Others will eat some green foods, some pellets, and drink water. You will need to experiment to see what your animal prefers.

#### Salt spoons

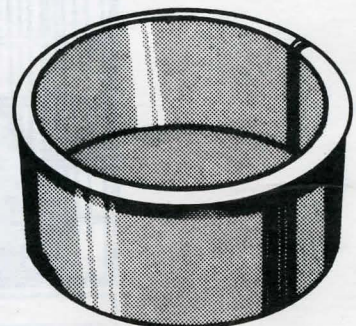
It is also important to keep a **salt spool**, like that used for rabbits, in your animal cage. These can be bought at a pet or feed store. The spool should be hung so that your guinea pig can reach the salt easily. Salt, like water, is always needed by animals.



Water Bottle



Salt Spool



Crock



## Things to Do

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- Feed your guinea pig different types of food that contain vitamin C. See which foods your pet likes the best.
- Have your parent or advisor help you find a book that lists foods that have large amounts of vitamin C. Which of these foods do you eat?
- Buy a food cup, water feeder and salt spool for your cavy's cage.
- If you have more than one guinea pig, see if they like the same foods. Do you like the same foods as other people in your family?

I have completed these Things to Do.

\_\_\_\_\_   
 My parent's or advisor's initials.

## Questions

---

1. What do you feed your animal? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  2. What vitamin is provided by green foods? \_\_\_\_\_
  3. What vegetable does your guinea pig like best? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What is your favorite vegetable? \_\_\_\_\_  
Is this favorite vegetable a good source of vitamin C?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Why do we need vitamin C in our diet? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  5. What foods or beverages rich in vitamin C do you eat or drink that you do not feed your guinea pig?  
\_\_\_\_\_



6. Make a list of good and fair food sources of vitamin C for boys and girls.

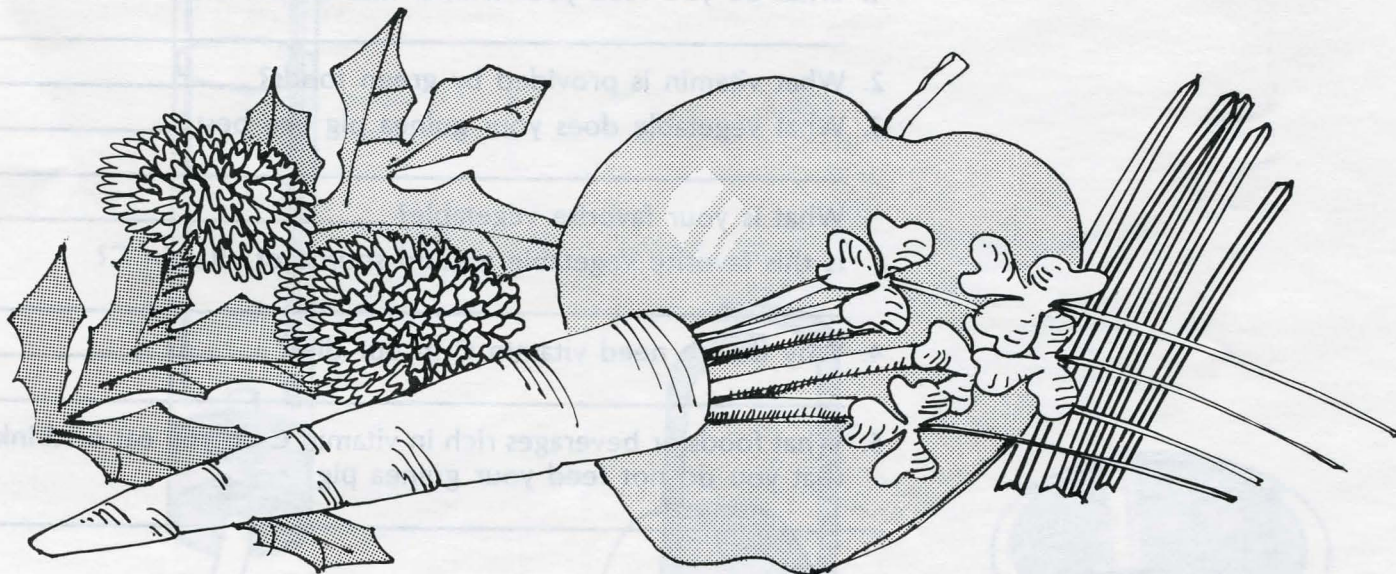
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I have answered these Questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My parent's or advisor's initials.



Food that guinea pigs like to eat.



# Care and Management Tips

**Word List**  
forefinger

## Handling

Although your animal may be small and need very little room in which to live, you need to give him care and attention to keep him healthy and happy. When your animal is very small, he often can fit into the palm of your hand. When picking up the animal, it is well to hold the animal with your thumb and **forefinger** just behind the head and in front of the front legs. Your remaining fingers can hold gently—but firmly—behind the front legs and around the rib cage. Then, as the animal is lifted from the floor of the cage, place your other hand under the rump of the pig to give support so that it will be comfortable. Guinea pigs do not often scratch, but they become very excited when being handled, if they are not properly supported. When feeding your guinea pig, talk to him. Pet him as much as possible.

## Transporting

At the fair and 4-H meetings, carry your animals in a small box. Many times your friends will want to handle your animals. You may wish to show them the proper way of picking up and carrying guinea pigs. Always treat small animals with kindness, and move slowly around them so they do not become nervous.

## Weather

As mentioned earlier, temperatures for guinea pigs must be above 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Therefore, plan to keep them warm and away from drafts in the winter. Bright sun shining directly on a guinea pig's coat can cause a dull and washed-out appearance, so keep your animal in a cool, shady place during the summer.

## Things to Do

- Take your guinea pig to a 4-H meeting. Show the other members how to handle and hold your guinea pig.
- Take some guinea pig food to the 4-H meeting and let the members feed the guinea pig.

I have completed these Things to Do.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My parent's or advisor's initials.



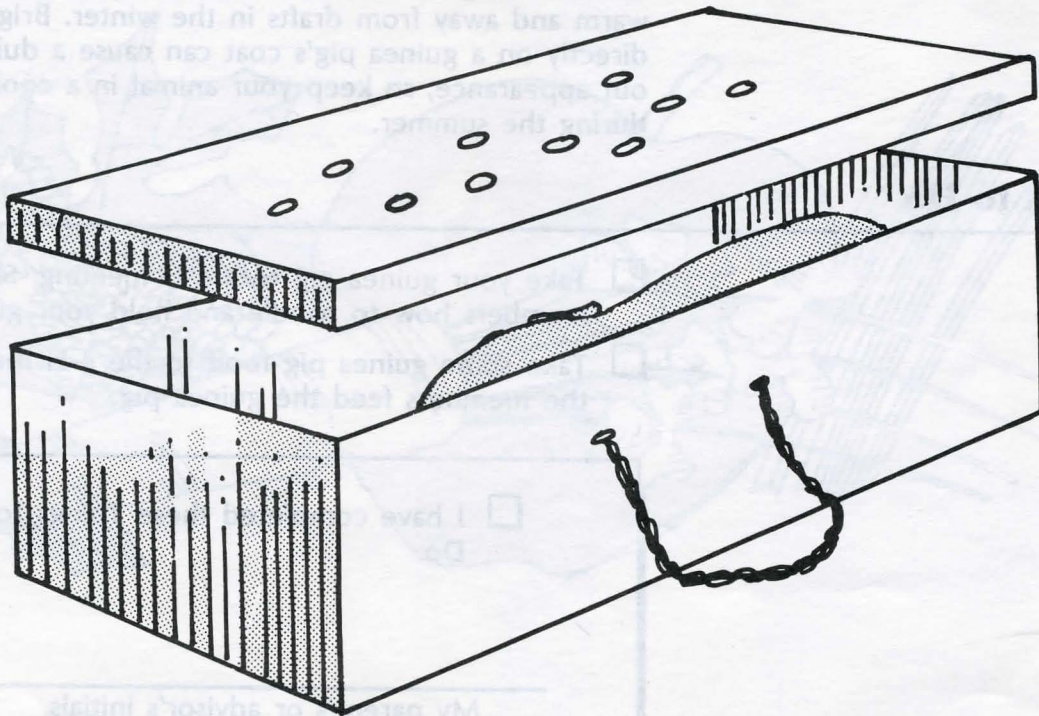
## Questions

1. How should you pick up your guinea pig? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Where should you keep your guinea pig in hot weather?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I have answered these Questions.

\_\_\_\_\_   
My parent's or advisor's initials.



Transport your guinea pig in a sturdy container like the one above made from a box. If you need a lid, remember to punch air holes, and do not leave the guinea pig in the closed box for long periods of time.



# Disease and Sanitation

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## Word List

symptoms  
disease  
parathyroid  
veterinarian  
parasites

### A guinea pig's health

Guinea pigs are healthy animals. When they are properly housed and fed, they remain healthy. Their homes should be well-lighted, and a way to keep air fresh, but free from drafts, is very important. The usual causes for sickness are sudden drafts, a change in temperature, dampness or any injury (such as a broken tooth). When a guinea pig is sick, it will have one of the following problems. These problems are called **symptoms**.

Sitting perfectly still and hunched

A ruffled, unneat coat

Loss of appetite and quick weight loss

Loose and watery droppings

**Remember:** Guinea pigs can easily catch a **disease** called **parathyroid**. Steps should be taken to keep wild mice and rats from getting into the guinea pig's cage and feed, since mice and rats may carry or spread parathyroid germs. If you notice your guinea pig is sick, keep him away from other animals. You may wish to take him to your local **veterinarian** for treatment.

If your pig is outside during the summer, he may pick up lice, mites, fleas, or ticks from other animals. These are called **parasites**. If you notice your guinea pig is scratching a lot, carefully check him for these parasites. Parasites can be removed easily by dusting or rubbing on a special powder for fleas, ticks or other parasites. You can purchase this from your drug, feed or pet store. Read the label to see which parasites the powder will kill. It is best to use powder that is made for cats, rather than for dogs.

Here are ten rules to follow:

1. Clean cage and equipment at least once a week.
2. Disinfect (clean to kill germs) cage and equipment.
3. Keep the area around the pen clean and neat.
4. Feed your pig a balanced diet of dry and green foods.
5. Remove all uneaten green foods.
6. Keep clean, fresh water for animals.
7. Provide enough light and fresh air.
8. Keep other pets and rodents away.
9. Do not handle pregnant females too much and keep boars away.
10. Always check for parasites such as lice and fleas. If you find some, treat your pet soon.

## Things to Do

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- Learn more about guinea pig diseases. See if your pet



Questions

store owner or veterinarian has booklets on disease prevention.

- Develop and maintain a "first aid" box. Include materials to disinfect and clean the cage. Also include powders to control parasites.
- Draw pictures of fleas, lice, ticks and mites. Learn how to identify each of these.

I have completed these Things to Do.

\_\_\_\_\_

My parent's or advisor's initials.

**Questions**

1. How often do you clean and disinfect your animal's pen and equipment?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Did you have any disease problems this year? If so, what were they?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. How would you treat your animal if you found fleas on him?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. List 5 rules to prevent disease:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

I have answered these Questions.

\_\_\_\_\_

My parent's or advisor's initials.



# Breeding

## Word List

litters  
gestation  
weaned

The common belief that guinea pigs have many young is not true. **Litters** average from one to four, and two are usual. Sometimes, five or six are born, but this is not often. The mother guinea pig has only two teats for nursing the young, but she usually has enough milk for her litter, regardless of litter size. However, you may wish to place a small dish of bread and milk in the pen for the mother during the first ten days after birth. Feed only the amount that she will eat. Do not allow the milk to sour and always clean the dishes well before each feeding.

Six litters is the most any sow can produce in one year. It is not recommended that you breed the animal this often because it drains the life of the sow and the weak litters that result. Four to five litters a year are recommended. After a sow is 2 to 3 years old, she usually will not have any more litters. A boar will be potent (able to reproduce), as a rule, until he is 4 years old.

The guinea pig's period of **gestation**, or length of time of pregnancy, is between 63 and 72 days. The average is 68 days. The sow will usually mate within a few hours after bearing a litter. If not then, she will not mate until she has **weaned** her young. A young sow's first litter is usually born somewhat weaker than her later litters. Often a higher number of a sow's first litter die.

The young usually are lively and can run about freely almost at once. They are born fully haired, with their eyes open, and with teeth. After the young are 1 day old, they can be handled and petted with care. After the first few days, they will begin to nibble at the food you give them, and, soon, they will care for themselves.

The weight of the newborn guinea pig will depend upon the number of animals per litter, but they usually weigh from 90 to 120 grams each. There are 454 grams in a pound. These babies weigh about 1/4 pound, or 4 ounces.

It is a good idea to wean the young when they are 3 weeks old. At the same time, the males should be separated from the females because they can breed at a very early age. The female should not be bred until she is 3 to 5 months old. This time allows the young sow to become fully ready. The female should be bred by the time she is 6 months old or the chances of mating are not as good.

Always put the boar into the sow's cage. Leave him there for 3 weeks. The sow will have her "heat period" every 14 to 15 days. Once an animal has been bred, other matings are not as difficult. When the female becomes full grown without having



a litter, the pelvic girdle, the bony arch supporting the skeleton of the hind limbs of vertebrates, may have closed so that birth of the baby is difficult.

People who raise guinea pigs to make money suggest keeping one boar with ten or less sows. The boar and sows can be kept together as a family. However, most people separate the sows and keep them in a quiet place before they give birth. Do not handle or play with your sow during the last two weeks of pregnancy because she can be hurt easily. Some mothers become upset when babies are born and leave their young or sometimes even kill them. When two or more sows are left together, they both will nurse the young. Since the young nurse about three weeks, this should not be overlooked in cases where several sows and litters are kept together. This is one cause for poor health and high death rates in young pigs.

Choose big animals for the future breeding herd, but pick them from large litters rather than small ones. Large animals in small litters may be big because they get extra milk, instead of a good background.

The young boars can stay together until they are full grown. After they are separated they should never be together again, for a fight will occur, and they can hurt each other easily.

## Things to Do

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- Raise a litter of guinea pigs. If you cannot raise a litter, help someone else raise a litter.
- Keep good records on a breeding chart (found on p. of your project manual).
- Read about genetics in a library book.
- Find out where you can sell or give away the young cavies.

I have completed these Things to Do.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My parent's or advisor's initials.



## Questions

1. What do you call your guinea pigs? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Did you raise a litter this year? \_\_\_\_\_  
If so, how many guinea pigs were in the litter? \_\_\_\_\_
3. The gestation period for guinea pigs is about \_\_\_\_\_ days.
4. Describe your young animals. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What do you plan to do with your young guinea pigs?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I have answered these Questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My parent's or advisor's initials.



# Preparing for the Show

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## Word List

requirements  
exhibitor  
lukewarm water  
wheat germ  
linseed oil  
cod liver oil

If you have chosen your guinea pig carefully and have given him proper feed and care, you will enjoy showing your animal.

Check with your 4-H advisor on the **requirements** for cavyies at your county fair. Some fairs have open classes for rabbits and cavyies. If you want to enter, check with a local cavy **exhibitor** for tips in showing and the requirements. Most open classes request that the animal be purebred.

For 4-H, it will be necessary for you to know about your animals. The judge may ask you how old your guinea pig is and whether it is a sow or boar. You may also be asked to name three breeds of guinea pigs. The judge will also look at your animal to see if it is clean and if the hair has been brushed.

Some breeders wash their guinea pigs. They use mild soap and **lukewarm water**. This is not always necessary. If you have kept the pen clean and brushed your animal often, you may not have to wash your guinea pig.

## Brushing

Grooming or brushing the animals should start as soon as they are chosen to be show animals. A small table is a good grooming place. Cover the table with a heavy cloth, such as a burlap sack. Place the animal on the table and brush its coat. The best method is to take the palm of your hand and rub the animal's back from his nose to his hindquarters. If there is a lot of loose hair, dampen your hand with water as you brush him. It is not necessary to brush the guinea pig as much at the start of the preparation period as it is towards the end. Handling and brushing will cause the guinea pig to become more tame and give him a good, smooth, shiny coat. During the brushing process, teach the guinea pig to sit to display his good points to best advantage.

Some exhibitors like to feed their animals 1/2 teaspoon of **wheat germ, linseed oil** or **cod liver oil** in their daily food. They believe the oil adds to the shine and body of the coat.

## Things to Do

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- Make a small grooming table for your guinea pig.
- Practice brushing your guinea pig.
- Show your guinea pig at a club meeting, county show or fair.



- Try washing your guinea pig with soap and lukewarm water.
- Visit a guinea pig show and watch the judging. Learn what the judge is looking for when viewing a guinea pig.

I have completed these Things to Do.

\_\_\_\_\_   
 My parent's or advisor's initials.

### Questions

1. When is your fair? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What do you plan to exhibit? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How often did you brush your animal? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Describe how you prepared your animal for the show. \_\_\_\_\_

I have answered these Questions.

\_\_\_\_\_   
 My parent's or advisor's initials.

Expenses	Income	Date, Kind Sold or Used and Amount



# Record Keeping

## Word List

expenses  
income

### Your expenses

Keeping accurate records is very important in raising guinea pigs. The records will help you understand the total cost of raising your guinea pig(s) this past year. Do not be concerned if your **expenses** are larger than your **income**. This is normal until you start to sell young guinea pigs.

You may not be interested in raising guinea pigs to sell, but learning to keep good records will be helpful to you in making decisions about your project. The records will help you decide on keeping or quitting the project. They will also help you decide if you want more animals.

It is best to write the information on the record as soon as possible after you make a purchase or sale.

### Income and expense record

Record all items you bought and sold that you used in your project on the chart below. For items such as equipment owned by someone else and used in your project, charge a fair rental price. If you need additional space, copy or draw more charts on paper.

Date	Kind Sold or Used and Amount	Income	Expenses
Totals			

### Breeding record

Record all your guinea pig breeding. Record the details of each breeding: (1) the name of the boar, (2) the name of the sow, (3) the date of birth, (4) the number in the litter (and the number of deaths), (5) the number of guinea pigs from the



## What's Next?

litter that you sold, and (6) the number you kept. If you need additional space, copy or draw more charts on paper.

Sow	Boar	Date Born	Number of Young			Sold		Kept
			Boars	Sows	Deaths	Boars	Sows	

## Things to Do

- Keep good records on the charts above.
- Compare your records to the records of other members raising guinea pigs. See if they are different from yours.

I have completed these Things to Do.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My parent's or advisor's initials.

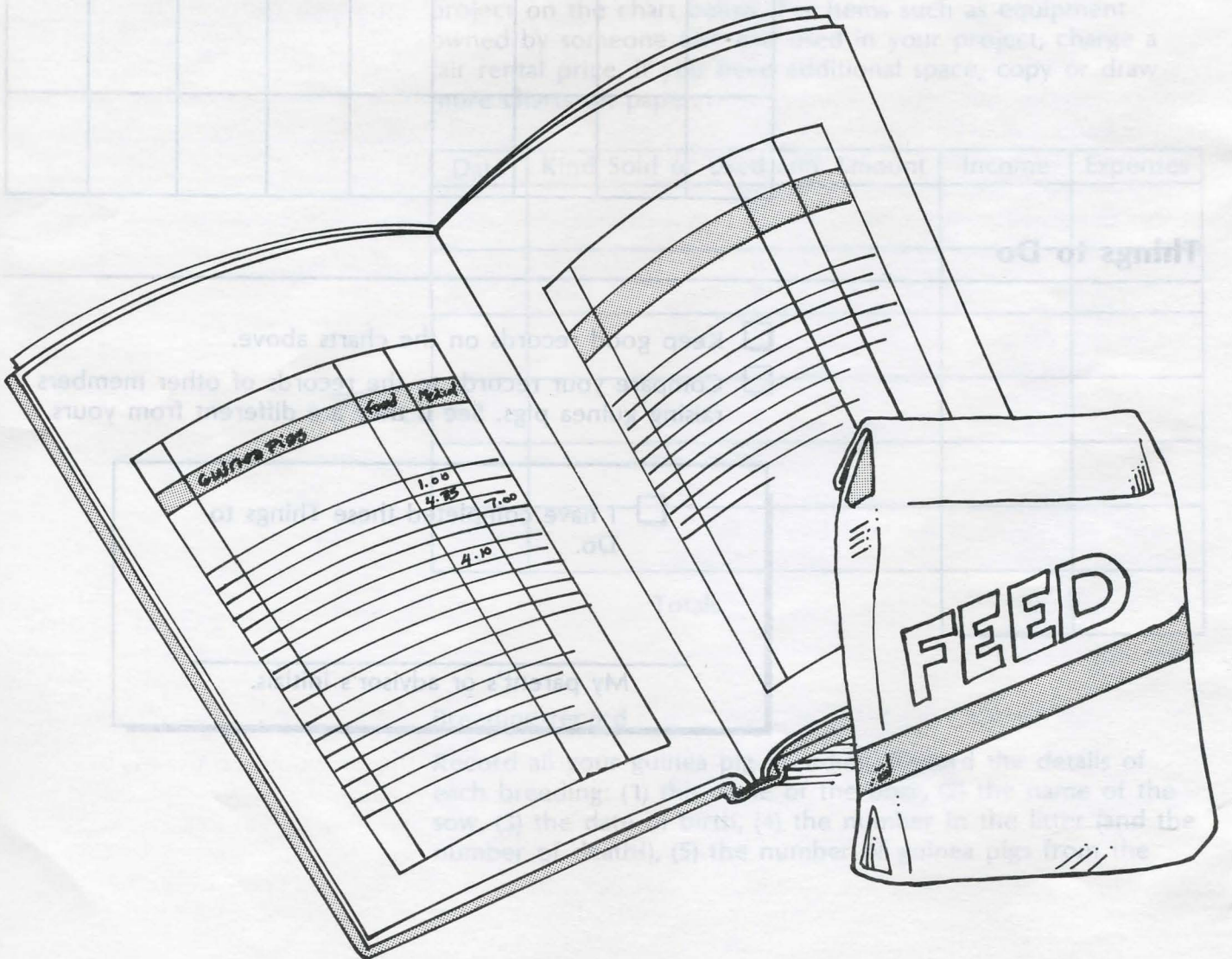


## Questions

1. What was your biggest expense? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Did you make any money the first year? \_\_\_\_\_  
If not, why? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many young were born this year? \_\_\_\_\_  
How many did you sell or give away? \_\_\_\_\_

I have answered these Questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
My parent's or advisor's initials.



Keep your records neat and organized by using a record book.



# What's Next?

## Word List

laboratories  
nutrition  
genetics

You have found that caring for guinea pigs is easy and that they are very likeable. Some guinea pigs, with proper care, live to be 7 to 10 years old.

It is important that you not raise more animals than you can sell as pets to your friends or to **laboratories**. You will find that too many guinea pigs can eat pounds of food, so it will soon become expensive to feed more animals than you can sell. Never turn your extra animals loose to make it for themselves. This is very cruel to small animals. They soon die in cold weather.

### What to do next year

If you did not do "Breeding" and "Preparing For The Show" this year, consider taking this project again another year and finishing these activities.

If you would like to do something different, there are more than 150 different 4-H projects in which you can enroll. For example, one project might be *The Normal Animal, Unit 1*, a project that can be related to your guinea pig project. In this project, you will observe the behavior of your animal, record the heartbeat, the breathing rate, and many other things. Other projects include hamsters, pocket pets, photography and gardening.

You may prefer to create your own project ("self-determined"). You could use some of your guinea pigs for a **nutrition** (feeding) experiment or to learn more about breeding a guinea pig for perfect color.

### Nutrition ideas

You may set up experiments by feeding different foods to your animals and report on the results. There are many experiments that you might try. Often your science teacher at school or your Extension agent can help. They could suggest books that will give you other ideas for experiments.

### Breeding

The study of breeding is called **genetics**. It is very challenging. For example, suppose that you would like to breed an animal as nearly perfect as possible. Color, shape and size are important factors in achieving this. It would be useless to produce an animal perfect in color and size, but not perfect in shape. To avoid this, keep breeding operations balanced. This means that if you have a female that is perfect in color and size, but not perfect in shape, mate her with a male that has good shape. If one sex lacks something, try to make up for it in the opposite sex.



Careers

Someday you will be interested in getting a job. Did you know there are many jobs related to guinea pigs and other small animals? Think about it. Here is a list to get you started:

- Pet store owner
- Animal feed salesclerk
- Veterinarian
- Laboratory scientist

Can you think of other possible careers? List them below.

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Consider taking a trip to talk to someone who works with animals. Find out what type of things they do when they are at work.

Past and future

By enrolling in 4-H you gained the opportunity of learning about and caring for your pet. There are many more opportunities for you.

Talk it over with your 4-H advisor and with your parents to help you decide what you want to enroll in next. Also, don't forget the many activities in 4-H such as camps, tours and special events, including demonstrations, safety talks and much more.



## **Project Summary**

In the space below, write a one-page summary telling what you did and learned by taking this project.