

# Are You Ready *for a* GUINEA PIG?

*5 Essential Questions for Piggie Parents-to-Be*



Written & Illustrated by Lesley Anderson

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5 essential questions for piggie parents-to-be

## Introduction

Guinea pig owners will often tell you that their lives changed the day they first let guinea pigs into their life, realizing just how sweet, personable and funny guinea pigs are, and they never looked back. Some will even say that guinea pigs found *them*, rather than the other way around. That is definitely what happened to me!

Since guinea pigs are docile creatures whose favorite hobbies include sleeping, eating pellets and, well, *making* pellets, it can be easy to think that a guinea pig would be the perfect inexpensive and low maintenance pet. Many first-time owners are surprised to find out that while guinea pigs are relatively low maintenance in comparison to dogs (they don't have to be taken outside every time they need to 'go', for instance... if that were the case, you would be outside all day long!), they actually require a substantial level of care and aren't an ideal first pet for a young child. This misconception is just one reason that so many guinea pigs find themselves at animal shelters, or worse, let loose to unsuccessfully fend for themselves in the wild.

But thank goodness! You are going to help put a stop to this deadly pattern because you're already taking the first steps toward prepared piggie parenthood by reading this mini-guide!

### **How this Mini-Guide Will Help You**

This mini-guide has been written just for you to help you prepare for piggie parenthood! If you already have guinea pigs, answering these questions will help make sure you're on the right track with your current piggies. Or, if you're an experienced piggie owner...it's a really fun excuse to look at free, cute illustrations of guinea pigs. Everybody wins!

By the time you've read through the following 5 questions, you'll not only have a clear idea of the responsibilities and expenses involved in caring for guinea pigs, but you'll be able to approach the idea of adopting a guinea pig with confidence, and maybe even be able to pass your knowledge along to someone else in your shoes. I know your future piggie (or piggies!) out there will thank you and can't wait to meet you and find a loving home with you!

If you find this guide helpful to you, there are several ways to share at the end, along with contact information if you'd like to offer any feedback or ask any questions. I'll be happy to help you in any way that I can, and as always, **if you have a guinea pig that you think may be sick, be sure to call a knowledgeable veterinarian right away.**

Thank you so much for downloading the Piggie Preliminaries! I really hope you enjoy this guide and that it helps to open the doors to a lifetime of love through guinea pigs for you.

*Peace, Love and Guinea Pigs,*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the end of the word.

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[www.theguineapigguide.com](http://www.theguineapigguide.com)

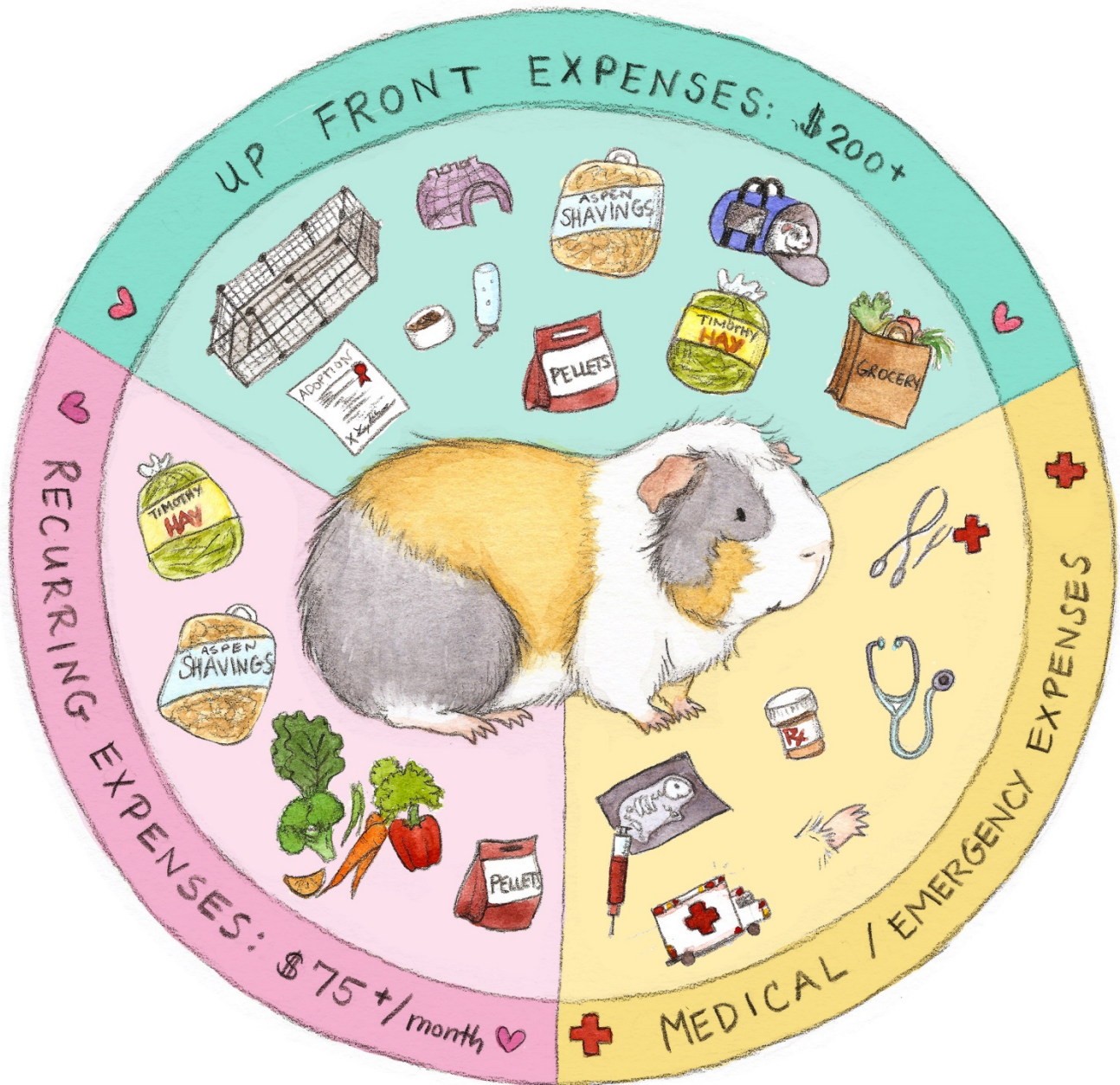
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# Q1

## CAN YOU AFFORD A GUINEA PIG?

Making sure you have room in your wallet as well as your heart





# Question 1: Can You Afford a Guinea Pig?

The adoption fee or pet store price tag on a guinea pig is a fraction of that of a cat or dog, but believe it or not, the ongoing expense of keeping piggies is actually pretty significant! To help you make the most informed decision about whether you're currently in the financial position to have a guinea pig (or several!), or, if you currently have guinea pigs, to help you budget for them, here is a rough estimate of the average expenses involved in guinea pig ownership divided into a few different parts:

- **Up front expenses involved in the adoption and home setup process**
- **Recurring monthly living expenses**
- **Common and less common veterinary expenses**

*The following figures offer a rough estimate. Actual costs will vary depending on where you live and how much you pamper your piggie. When in doubt, assume your expenses will be higher to be absolutely sure you're financially able to provide proper care for your guinea pig.*

**First, let's take a look at some of the items you'll need to purchase when you first adopt your guinea pig:**

## UP FRONT EXPENSES

Adoption fee .....	\$35
Cage (either buying or building) .....	\$75
Water bottle & food dish .....	\$15
Large bag of shavings/bedding .....	\$20
Bag of pellets .....	\$15
Large bag of high quality timothy hay .....	\$15
Hut/'Pigloo'/other hideaway .....	\$15
Small pet carrier for travel and vet visits.....	\$20
Other toys/cage accessories/fresh veggie treats .....	\$10
<b>Total estimated cost of bringing a guinea pig home .....</b>	<b>\$220</b>

This may seem like a lot, but do bear in mind you won't likely be buying this much piggie paraphernalia in one sitting again, and many of these are one-time purchases!

After the initial expense of adoption, getting cage supplies, **food** and toys, your guinea pig will require ongoing purchasing of pellets, fresh vegetables/fruits, hay, and bedding (plus any toys or other items to spoil him/her!). Depending on how you house your guinea pig, you may or may not need to buy shavings or other recycled paper bedding, but for the purposes of these calculations, let's assume you're using a shavings/paper pulp based system.

Other types of bedding and how to know what kind to use are covered more fully in the full version of *The Guinea Pig Guide*.

**Here's just one example of the supplies you might need in an average month:**

### Recurring Expenses (per month)

Safe fruits & veggies .....	\$25
1 bag hay .....	\$15
1 bag shavings.....	\$20
1 bag pellets.....	\$15
<b>Total estimated monthly expenses.....</b>	<b>\$75+</b>

Now it's time to talk about something both piggies and piggie owners don't like to think about – dun dun DUNNNNN....**the vet**. [*cue ensuing screams, ahhh!*]

Guinea pigs usually have one veterinary exam a year, but due to their relatively short lifespans (5-8 years, on average, though some have lived to 10 or more!), you may find you feel more at ease with a check-up more frequently, especially as they get older.

While guinea pigs are generally healthy if properly cared for, they're just like us in that some are just inherently more prone to illness than others. Hopefully you will have a healthy piggie that won't require much medical attention, but just in case you have a sickly peeg, you will have to be prepared to afford proper veterinary attention if your piggie falls ill. This could range from inexpensive prescription medicine to major surgery. Unfortunately it's a risk we all take when we bring our animal companions into our lives.

Also, if you hope to house a male and female together, or if you want to reduce the risk of ovarian cysts in a female guinea pig, spaying/neutering with an experienced exotics veterinarian will be something you will need to consider.

Here are some examples of medical expenses that you may incur throughout the life of your guinea pig:

### Medical Expenses

Annual medical exam.....	\$65
Spaying/Neutering.....	\$150
Nail trim/teeth trim by a vet tech .....	\$12-20
Blood tests .....	\$200+
X-Rays .....	\$100+
Antibiotics and other medicines .....	\$30+
Major Surgery .....	\$1000+

These numbers can seem a bit shocking, but the truth is that guinea pig expenses overall can add up quickly and without really noticing. It's much better to make sure you have enough money to care for a piggie ahead of time as opposed to after you've taken your guinea pig home.

**Whew!** This was a big first question, and you've made it through! The other questions are a bit less intense, but still important. Ready to move forward?

**Let's have a look at the next question.**

# Q2

## ARE YOU ALLOWED TO HAVE A GUINEA PIG?

What happens if your living situation is 'no pets allowed'?





## Question 2: Are You Allowed to Have a Guinea Pig?

Sometimes the desire to have a guinea pig outweighs rational thinking and owners find themselves with a bit of a messy situation on their hands when a landlord, family member, or RA at the college dorm says “either the piggie goes, or you go”!

Since you’re reading this guide, you are likely not the type of person to abandon your piggie because of housing rules (or, if you are a young person living with a guardian, hopefully you have secured or are working on securing permission from those you live with!) But you should be aware of this problem anyway and be prepared if you decide to have an ‘undercover cavy’.

***Okay, I will admit it...***

::deep breath::

...my first guinea pig was a 'student' at my college for part of my junior year, tucked in my dorm room for a month before I could get him home for summer and then into an off-campus apartment senior year. My suitemates and I also had hamsters. It was like a covert rodent smuggling operation in there. As the saying goes, “do as I say, not as I do!” But I had to have a game plan just in case something went wrong.

### **Why “No Pets” and “Pets Welcome” can send mixed messages**

If your landlord has a “no pets” policy in place, sometimes this only refers to cats and dogs and you’d be fine having a guinea pig, so be sure to ask specifically about guinea pigs when exploring a new living space or before adopting a guinea pig into your current home. Conversely, sometimes a ‘pet-friendly’ apartment building strictly refers to cats, or cats and dogs, and doesn’t allow exotic pets like rodents, birds or reptiles. If the policy explicitly does not want any pets, including guinea pigs, be prepared to break your lease and move.

The key lesson here is if you are going to take the risk, you must have a game plan—ideally one that goes beyond bringing your piggie to the shelter or handing it off to your friend who, after two years, is still calling it a hamster and routinely tries to feed it cookies.

To prevent these sticky situations from happening, shelters will often call your landlord to verify that you’re allowed to have a guinea pig before allowing you to adopt one. So for your own sake and the sake of your piggies, make sure you have permission from whoever is in charge of your housing situation (be it a parent, landlord or RA) ahead of time!

# Q3

## DO YOU HAVE TIME FOR A GUINEA PIG?

Assessing your lifestyle preferences for cavy compatibility



## Question 3: Do You Have Time for a Guinea Pig?

While it's true that guinea pigs don't actively demand the level of constant supervision that a dog might, they do require a lot of love and attention and are prone to loneliness and boredom if they're left in isolation for a long period of time.

When piggies get too lonely or bored, they can develop undesirable behaviors like barbering – biting at their fur or the fur of a cage mate and creating little short patches of hair, and can tend toward overeating and not getting enough exercise.

If you have a 9-5 day job, it can be tricky to make sure that you provide your guinea pig with enough social stimulation and comfort so he or she doesn't become bored, listless, stressed and depressed. Guinea pigs learn who you are by your scent, the sound of your voice, even your footsteps, and find comfort in the routine sounds of their environment (the fridge opening will likely send them into a symphony of excited squeaks, for example), and even though they're small, their owners often tell when their piggies have missed them and become lonely in their absence.

### **One Piggie or More? How to Prevent Loneliness and Boredom**

Since guinea pigs are social by nature, many guinea pig owners opt to house at least two piggies together (there is much more information on this delicate bonding process in the full version of *The Guinea Pig Guide*, so if you are considering more than one piggie, which is generally recommended, it'd be super helpful to read that section before you adopt!). This can be a great option for you if you are often away all day, as your piggies can keep each other occupied and provide social interaction. Some piggies bond so closely they're inseparable and will snuggle up together which just elevates the cuteness to an unspeakable level.

If you have a headstrong piggie who likes to be the only child and won't tolerate another pig, or if you are only able to afford and care for one pig right now, just be sure to set aside some quality time each day to feed your piggie some healthy treats, talk to and hold him or her, and even let your piggie loose for some (safe and chaperoned) floor time!



# Q4

## DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO PROPER VETERINARY CARE?

Helping your guinea pig thrive and giving yourself peace of mind





## Question 4: Do You Have Access to Proper Veterinary Care?

Not all veterinary offices treat guinea pigs. Guinea pigs are in a category of animals known as exotic pets (ooh la la!), and while some veterinary offices cater specifically to exotic pets, which makes it very convenient, most don't. Rather than feeling discouraged by this, I like to think of it as a VIP status! Since the people that specialize in exotics are fewer and far between, when you find one you know they must love piggies or they wouldn't have studied them!

Before you begin the adoption process for your guinea pig, scout around for a local veterinary office that treats exotic animals. If you're unable to find an office that specializes in exotics overall, you may be able to find a traditional veterinary practice that has an exotics specialist available, or that routinely treats guinea pigs but doesn't directly advertise itself as an exotic care center. The best way to do this is to call several places and ask a few questions to help determine if they'll be a good choice for you and your guinea pig.

To make sure you're able to find the right vet for you, there is a section of the full guide dedicated to finding a guinea pig vet and knowing what questions to ask to find someone you're comfortable with who has enough experience treating cavies.

### **One more question and then you're on your way to being a prepared piggie parent!**

Look how much progress you've made so far! You've determined if you can afford a guinea pig, you've made sure you're allowed to have one and developed a plan in case your living situation changes, you've discovered how to make sure your piggie stays stimulated and happy, and you've squared away a trustworthy veterinarian. You're almost there! Read on for the final question...

# Q5

## DO YOU KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF A GUINEA PIG?

Maximizing your time together throughout your guinea pig's life



## Question 5: Do You Know How to Take Care of a Guinea Pig?

Perhaps the most important question of all is whether, once you have your sweet little guinea pig home with you, you know how to properly care for it long-term.

Guinea pigs aren't for everyone, but if you're like most piggie lovers, you'll find that you fall in love so quickly with them that it makes everything worth it. The key is to not let the cuteness of the idea of having a guinea pig outweigh the investment of time and energy in educating yourself about their care. Knowledge is perhaps the biggest gift that you can give yourself and your guinea pig during your time together as 'cavy companions', and it's a powerful gift you can spread to others.

### Where to Start

There is a wealth of information on the Internet about guinea pig care, but this often feels daunting and overwhelming, and much of the information publicly available conflicts with itself, leaving concerned guinea pig owners and owners-to-be feeling unconfident in moving forward with what to do.

Of course you just want to make sure you're doing the right thing for your guinea pig, but sometimes it's not quite clear what the 'right' thing is, or if there even is a right thing! In many situations, there are several 'right' ways you can approach certain aspects of guinea pig care that are equally fine, but that's not always clear and leaves many guinea pig newbies worrying they'll accidentally harm their guinea pig or cause unwanted backlash in forums.

*So what kinds of concerns do new guinea pig owners have, and what's important for you to know as you tend to your guinea pig's needs?*

### What You Need to Know

**Aspects of guinea pig care that you'll want to feel comfortable with include:**

- What goes into giving your guinea pig proper living quarters
- Knowing how to safely clean/sanitize a cage and how often
- Handling your guinea pig properly
- How to help your guinea pig to feel comfortable and be social around humans

- Knowing how to quickly and easily check for potential health issues that often go unnoticed until it's too late
- Exactly what to feed your guinea pig and how much
- What common foods can make your guinea pig sick and why
- The two absolutely essential components to a guinea pig's diet that some guinea pig owners overlook
- Where to adopt a guinea pig
- Simple measures to take to boost your guinea pig's chances of living as long as possible
- How to identify a proper guinea pig veterinarian
- Knowing how to introduce multiple guinea pigs to one another
- Knowing what to do if your guinea pigs don't get along with each other
- How often and how to bathe a guinea pig
- How to clip your guinea pig's nails and how often
- Where to find affordable, high quality guinea pig food, hay and supplies
- How to keep your guinea pig happy, entertained, and comfortable

You will undoubtedly still have questions about specific things as they come up in your own unique situation. This mini-guide has already armed you with the knowledge needed to get started with guinea pig ownership, but there is always more to learn before you can truly feel comfortable.

***Which brings us to our final considerations...***



# FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

*You've made it through all five questions and you are this much closer to being ready for a guinea pig! **Congratulations!***

As mentioned in the previous section, you're well on your way to being prepared for piggies, but there is a lot more to learn, and it can feel like a daunting task.

Luckily, *The Guinea Pig Guide* is here to help with all of that!

I created this mini-guide and *The Guinea Pig Guide* to provide you with a flexible yet clear, concise, all-in-one guide to every aspect of caring for a guinea pig so you can relax and enjoy your time together instead of spending hectic moments chasing down information online. These resources will help you to eliminate the stress and confusion of checking dozens of conflicting sources and to get you back to the most important thing— spending time with your piggie and discovering how wonderful life with guinea pigs can be!

*The Guinea Pig Guide* addresses all of the concerns in the previous question and many, many more, with fun print-outs and other materials to make caring for your guinea pig as organized and stress-free as possible.

To learn more about *The Guinea Pig Guide*, visit [www.theguineapigguide.com/book](http://www.theguineapigguide.com/book). I hope that it will serve you and your guinea pig well for years to come!

## **A Final Thank You**

Thank you so much for reading this mini-guide and taking the responsible steps toward being a loving, caring and empowered guinea pig owner. I hope you've enjoyed it and found it helpful! If you have, please feel free to share with wild abandon on the social network of your choice, print and give to friends, any way to spread the word about guinea pig care!

If you have additional questions or if you're on the fence about the full version of *The Guinea Pig Guide* and would like help deciding if it's for you, please feel free to email me personally any time at [lesley@theguineapigguide.com](mailto:lesley@theguineapigguide.com)

Whether you find a guinea pig or a guinea pig finds you, thank you for letting me be a part of your journey to life with guinea pigs! I hope you get the chance to realize how sweet, personable and funny they are, and never look back.

## About the Author/Illustrator

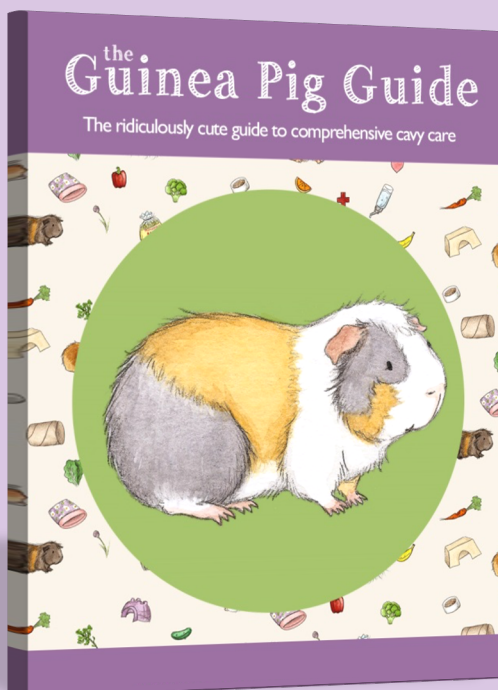


Lesley Anderson is an author/illustrator who found her muse in the form of a sweet and humble rodent when she adopted her first guinea pig, Gus, in 2005. Having never given guinea pigs a second thought prior to meeting Gus, and, shortly thereafter, Max, Lesley's journey in loving, learning about and caring for them inspired her to share her excitement about these sweet creatures through care tips and **guinea pig artwork** online.

After overhearing so scary comments at pet stores ("oh look at the big hamsters!") and receiving so many questions from beginning guinea pig owners, it was clear that the world needed more accessible guinea pig care information (and with cute illustrations!). And so, *The Guinea Pig Guide* was born.

When not writing about, thinking about, or drawing guinea pigs, Lesley spends her time writing musicals, baking, enjoying the outdoors and spending time by the sea.

*Photo by the wonderfully talented Shannon Corsi – [www.shannoncorsiphotography.com](http://www.shannoncorsiphotography.com)*



***Ready to learn everything you need to know about piggie care, and have a ridiculous amount of cuteness-infused fun in the process? Yay, I knew you would be!***

***With over 100 pages of thorough, easy-to-read advice, there are dozens of adorable piggie illustrations, printouts and more awaiting you in The Guinea Pig Guide!***

***Visit [www.theguineapigguide.com](http://www.theguineapigguide.com) to learn more and download your copy instantly!***