



Just what is a “Guinea Pig?” It’s not a pig – even though the female is called a **sow** and the male is called a **boar**. It’s not a rabbit – but it is the American Rabbit Breeders Association who recognizes thirteen breeds of Cavies for exhibition. Guinea Pigs are in the rodent family Caviidae and the genus *Cavia*. They were originally native to the Andes Mountains of South America. Domesticated guinea pigs can be a great 4-H project choice for learning about pet care, showing animals or breeding.



Exploring 4-H Guinea Pigs

Spark Activity: Guinea Pig Olympiad

Guinea Pigs are naturally curious and enjoy play time. How creative can you be in setting up an obstacle course for your pet? You may want to start with a plastic table cover as the base (it makes clean-up easier) and then use old boxes of different shapes and sizes to create walls and rooms like a maze. Oatmeal containers make great tunnels, cereal boxes can easily be cut to make walls, shoe boxes can be used to make rooms within the maze, larger boxes with holes cut in the sides can be great fun. Cut them to size, arrange them to contain your pet and then tape them securely into place. Then hide some fun along the way – a nutritious treat on top of a small box, shredded paper for them to play in, some hay tucked inside a small piece of toilet paper tube, a small ball to chase, or you might even make your own snuffle mat and hide treats inside.



Learn why animal enrichment is important, especially for our animals which are often kept contained. Be sure to research all of your supply choices for guinea pig safety before you start building your obstacle course maze. Bonding with your pet is one important (and very fun) part of being a responsible pet owner.

4-H Project Levels and Goals

Beginner

- Learn different guinea pig types
- Develop care management plan
- Learn suitable housing needs
- Describe the nutritional requirements of your guinea pig
- Learn five signs of an unhealthy guinea pig
- Learn how cavy's communicate with sounds and body postures
- Learn to handle and tame your pet

Intermediate

- Understand how to use and clean a gravity flow water bottle
- Learn the internal, external and skeletal body parts
- Describe three characteristics of groups of Guinea Pigs: self, agouti, solid, marked
- Learn the importance of keeping feed, care and health records
- Learn to properly groom your cavy
- Learn proper cavy showmanship

Advanced

- Research medicine and drugs approved for cavies
- Visit a cavy breeder – learn about reproduction, sexing, breeding and raising litters
- Describe dental structure of a cavy
- Learn to trim a cavy's toenails
- Identify health problems common among cavies
- Learn about cavy digestive system
- Complete a cavy pedigree

Put Your Project Into Action

Show Your Skills

- Create a scrapbook of your 4-H Guinea Pig Project and add updates throughout the year
- Create a display on cavy care and safety

Service and Leadership

- Donate a new book about guinea pigs to your local and/or school library
- Learn about animal shelters that accept guinea pigs and about guinea pig rescues
- Develop skill-a-thon stations to teach others about cavies
- Organize a project to make cavy cages or toys and donate them to a local animal shelter
- Invite a small animal vet to speak at your 4-H club meeting
- Become a member of American Rabbit Breeders Association and/or American Cavy Breeders Association
- Teach another member about cavy showmanship
- If your local fair does not have a cavy show, work with your Extension staff and/or Fair Board members to begin a cavy show at your fair

Entrepreneurship

- Design a caviary with a specific number of sows and boars and a plan for marketing offspring
- Develop a business plan for raising cavies for profit

Connecting with a Mentor

- Interview a current cavy owner to learn about their successes and challenges
- Visit a cavy breeder to learn about their operation and their suggestions for you as a cavy enthusiast
- Develop a veterinarian/client/patient relationship and work closely with them to develop a wellness plan for your animal/s

Events

- Local 4-H Show
- Visit the American Cavy Breeders Association website for a listing of shows in your area



Careers for People Interested in Guinea Pigs

Small animal veterinarian Pet store employee
Animal nutrition Animal shelter employee
Animal biosecurity

Start a Conversation

How many different breeds of guinea pigs are there and how do they compare?

What are the things you should do to care for your guinea pig every day? What if you skip one of those things for just one day?

What are the correct steps to grooming your guinea pig? Have you trimmed its nails?

What are some different types of enclosures you can build for your guinea pig?

Want to learn more?

go.illinois.edu/4Hguineapigs

Explore more at Illinois 4-H!

4-H.extension.illinois.edu



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