



Degus

All pet owners have a responsibility to look after and care for their pets. If you're thinking about having degus as pets, learn as much as you can about how to care for them beforehand. You should take your lifestyle and household into account when deciding whether you can offer them a good home. This leaflet explains degus' basic needs so you can decide if they're right for you...

Am I the right pet for you?

Degus are great pets for older children and adults. They're friendly, inquisitive and easy to look after. With lots of attention they can become very tame. Degus are very intelligent and love to play and explore. They usually live between six to eight years.

Do I like company?

Degus should be kept in same-sex pairs or in groups of up to 6, as they thrive in this social situation. They tend to be happier and healthier when they have a playmate, and it means that they can snuggle up with one another when they're asleep. If you plan for your degus to live together you should buy them at the same time as they'll already be friends. It can be very hard to introduce degus to one another later in life.

Where do I like to live?

Degus are part of the rodent family and love to chew everything. Therefore, it's essential that you buy an appropriate cage from which they can't escape. A wire cage is a good choice, but it's important that it has a solid (rather than mesh) base to prevent your pets from developing problems with their paws.

Degus are very active, like to climb and need space to exercise. Ideally, their cage should have several levels or shelves as degus love to bound around from one level to another! Keep the cage out of direct sunlight and damp spots and away from anything which may cause rapid temperature fluctuations such as radiators or draughts. Degus don't like high temperatures so don't keep them in an overly warm room.

You should provide a large wooden nesting box full of hay for them to sleep in. Clean branches from stoneless fruit trees, such as an apple tree, will provide entertainment, as will gnawing blocks. A cuttlebone is great for chewing on and provides calcium. Wooden and woven toys made from natural materials are always welcome – you'll find these in your local Pets at Home store.

What do I eat?

There are a few specific diets for degus and Pets at Home degu nuggets are recommended for your pets. It's important to feed them what they're used to as this will help to prevent stress caused by changing their food at the same time as their surroundings. Good quality hay, such as Timothy hay, should always be available as should fresh water in a sturdy bottle.

Never feed your pets foods that are high in fat or sugar (sucrose, glucose, fructose) or honey, as this can cause diabetes and will make them very ill. Fresh (not dried) fruits in very small quantities make ideal occasional treats. Pets at Home stocks a selection of small animal treat sticks which may be given to your pets occasionally. However, you must check that they're specifically designed for Degus as some treats will be too big for them and may contain sugar. Vitamin supplements are useful to ensure your degus remains in optimum health, and mineral treats are also popular.

You'll need to buy a sturdy feeding bowl that is hard to tip over such as a heavy earthenware or stainless-steel bowl. Uneaten food should be removed every day and the food bowl and bottle should be cleaned and refilled daily.

Enrichment

Always keep more than one degu in a cage to provide companionship. Your pets' lives can be enriched by providing them with toys and stimulating natural behaviour. For example, hiding treats around the cage keeps them amused and stimulates natural feeding. Branches, shelves, different levels and tubes provide hideaway holes for food similar to those they'd find in the wild. It's important to replace their toys and rearrange the contents of their cage regularly to stop them from becoming bored.

Time spent outside the cage should be built up slowly and carefully supervised as degus move very quickly. Do not allow them out in your kitchen or bathroom, as there are many hazards, and they may chew on electrical cables. A small pet playpen is useful. Many parrot toys are excellent for degus, especially if they're wooden and chewable! A large runner ball is ideal for burning off energy, and you won't have to worry about your pet escaping.

How to handle me?

When you take your degus home, allow them a few days to get used to their new surroundings without being disturbed. You should then start talking to them quietly so that they get used to your voice. Never pick a degu up by its tail. This could harm your pet and is very painful.

The next step is to introduce your hand into their cage and perhaps offer a treat. Once they're comfortable with you, you can pick them up. Hold your pet close to your chest so that it's facing you with one hand over its back and the other hand supporting its bottom. It's important that you handle your pets regularly to develop their confidence and maintain your relationship with them. Degus do wriggle a lot but once they're at ease with you, they may sit on you and allow you to stroke them.

Keeping me clean

Degus are very clean pets. Their cage and toys should be cleaned thoroughly at least once a week using a pet-safe disinfectant.

Keeping me fit and healthy

With the right care and attention degus are usually problem free. Avoiding sugary foods is vital to avoid diabetes. Feeding them correctly will help to avoid issues in later life. As with all pets you should ensure that your degus are kept in clean and hygienic conditions. If your pet shows any signs of being unwell contact your vet immediately.

Top tips for a healthy pet

Dental - Gnawing toys are an essential part of your pets' dental routine and should always be available as they help to prevent overgrown teeth.

Vitamins and supplements - Vitamins can be added to your pets' food or water. Probiotic supplements can help to maintain healthy digestion and relieve stress. Getting used to their new surroundings can be stressful for your degus, so consider buying probiotic supplements before you take them home.

Grooming - Providing a dust bath filled with chinchilla sand several times a week will enable your degus to groom themselves, keeping their coats clean and shiny. Dust baths should be removed after half an hour or so to prevent them from becoming soiled.

Cleaning and hygiene - Clean your pet's home at least once a week using a pet-safe disinfectant.

The five welfare needs

A Good Home - Your Degu needs a suitable place to live

A Healthy Diet - The right food for a healthy balanced diet, and fresh water on tap

Ways to stay happy - The chance to do the things degus love to do like climb, run, gnaw and explore

The Right Company - Being with or away from other animals

Help to be Healthy - Protection against pain, injury, suffering and disease

Shopping list for your degu

- Degu cage
- Nest box
- Small animal litter
- Timothy hay
- Pets at Home Degu nuggets
- Sturdy food bowl
- Water bottle
- Mineral stone
- Vitamin supplement
- Bottle brush
- Dust bath
- Chinchilla dust
- Large tubes and wooden toys
- Gnawing sticks or chews
- Treats
- Pet-safe disinfectant
- Book on degus

Pets at Home

Visit your nearest pet care centre to pick up essentials for your degu, or you can shop online at www.petsathome.com.

The Pets Foundation

Changes do happen, and if you can no longer care for a pet you've bought from us, please get in touch so we can try to rehome them. Never abandon your pet or let them loose in the wild.