



Guinea Pig Bonding Guide

If you have found your way to this guide, you must be considering adding a guinea pig to your family, so let me be the first to say - Congratulations! Guinea pigs are curious, social “herd” animals who enrich our lives and thrive in the presence of other guinea pigs, so the more, the merrier! It is important to remember, though, not every guinea pig wants to share their enclosure space with friends, and not all guinea pigs you introduce to each other are going to like each other. In this guide, we will cover correct bonding methods to equip you with the tools you will need to give your guinea pigs the best chances of a successful bond.

First, it should be noted that all guinea pigs are different with individual likes, dislikes, and personality traits. All of these things, as well as their *history* (for example, has one guinea pig always lived alone, or are they used to sharing their space with another) should be taken into consideration anytime bonding takes place. Some guinea pigs do not prefer the company of another guinea pig in their enclosure space and that’s okay. Neighbors with separate enclosures can offer each other beneficial interactions. Males can oftentimes be more difficult to bond with a cagemate than females, as they are typically more territorial and generally should not be kept in groups larger than 2, but we have come across several females who will not accept a cage mate, as well. It is recommended to have a “back-up” plan just in case bonding does not work out.

It is recommended to quarantine your new guinea pig for two weeks before introductions, especially if your new guinea pig’s history is unknown or if they have not seen a veterinarian in the last 30 days. This helps prevent the spread of possible illness and allows your new guinea pig time to adjust and acclimate to their new home.

Once you are sure all piggies are in good health, we recommend housing the cages side by side, so the guinea pigs can become acquainted safely through a barrier. It can also be helpful to “scent swap,” meaning you will place bedding or hides from one cage into the other and vice versa. This allows the guinea pigs to become familiar with the scent of their new buddy in the comfort of their own home. You can house your guinea pigs side by side for however long you feel necessary, but we recommend a minimum of one week before introducing them without a barrier. It may take longer than a week for them to be ready to meet without a barrier, and that’s okay! Once both guinea pigs seem unbothered by the presence of their neighbor and your new guinea pig seems comfortable in their new home, you may try an open introduction.

It is crucial to introduce the guinea pigs in a *neutral* area outside of their cages, such as a playpen, bathroom, etc. Guinea pigs should never be introduced in one of their cages. This can be threatening to the cage occupant and will almost always result in conflict.

In the neutral area, give your guinea pigs several large piles of hay and multiple water sources. If you choose to feed veggies, make sure there are **plenty** and **spread out**. This will prevent resource guarding for these high value items. Avoid using any accessories from cages such as hides or used liners or bedding that have a guinea pig's scent on them. Placing items in the bonding area with a guinea pig's scent on it may cause them to become territorial.

Upon introduction, you may notice some teeth chattering, mounting, chasing, nipping, and rumblestrutting. These are all normal behaviors when introducing guinea pigs and is one of their ways of establishing dominance. In every pair of guinea pigs, there will be a leader and a follower. In herds, a chain of command can be seen from top to bottom. Bonding is the guinea pigs opportunity to work out these logistics.

Behaviors that warrant separation during bonding include frozen "stare-offs" with heads raised, lunging towards each other, fighting, biting, or pulling out hair. If any of these behaviors are displayed, end the bonding session and return the piggies to their appropriate cages, still side by side.

You should never break up a fight with bare hands. It is recommended to keep a towel or blanket nearby to throw over the guinea pigs if you need to quickly separate them. A guinea pig's teeth can do serious damage to your hands and arms if you try to intervene in a fight without protection. If things did not go well during the first interaction, don't lose hope! As long as the guinea pigs are separated before blood is drawn or an injury occurs, they can go back into their enclosures side-by-side, and you can try again in 1-2 weeks.

While your guinea pigs are getting to know each other in their neutral area, you will want to complete a *thorough* cage clean of the cage they will be living in (if it is not a brand new, unused cage). All hides and accessories should be wiped down with a water/vinegar solution, bedding should be replaced and all prior scents removed so neither of the piggies recognize it as "their home" and become territorial. It can also help to rearrange the cage a bit so both piggies feel like they are in a new place and can explore their new home together.

Once your guinea pigs are calm and content with their new buddy (sharing food, laying down, no longer chattering or rumbling) you can try to add them to their freshly cleaned cage. All guinea pigs should have easy, unlimited access to large quantities of hay without being in each other's way or having to compete with other guinea pigs. Having their own space and all of their needs met is a very important factor in a happy guinea pig relationship! If you notice any behaviors that warrant separation (mentioned above), place the guinea pigs back in their bonding area and try again later.

You may want to keep a close eye on your guinea pigs the first few days of their new living situation. If you notice any blood on bedding or wounds on your guinea pig(s), especially around the ears, eyes, nose, mouth, or back, separate them and contact a licensed,

exotic-animal veterinarian for further care instruction. If all seems well and you have content, happy piggies, **CONGRATULATIONS!** You are now an expert at bonding guinea pigs and you should be so proud of yourself! Enjoy the rewarding experience of watching your guinea pigs interact and thrive together.

Notes

- Buddy Baths - you may have heard the term “buddy baths” if you have researched bonding techniques online. This is a form of trauma bonding that we do not recommend. Baths are very stressful for guinea pigs, and the idea behind a buddy bath is that enduring the traumatic experience together will help the guinea pigs bond. This is not necessary. It **can** be beneficial for the guinea pigs to have similar scents during introductions, so each can be separately wiped with an unscented baby wipe prior to introductions if you choose.
- Meet and Greets - we are often asked if we offer “meet and greets,” a situation in which you would bring your current guinea pig into the rescue to meet adoptable guinea pigs and see who they get along with. We do **not** recommend this practice for several reasons; the first being the risk of spreading bacteria. Because guinea pigs are such experts at hiding illnesses, or could be carrying bacteria asymptotically, it’s always possible we could be passing around bacteria without even knowing it. The second reason we do not offer this is because it is not a good indication of the potential bond between the guinea pigs. The guinea pig being brought into the rescue will be stressed from the car ride and from being in a new environment with the scents and sounds of 30 other guinea pigs. Placing the guinea pigs together when one is under so much stress will almost always result in a fight. This is not a fair shot at bonding, as they may have had a successful bond in a less stressful situation. The third reason we do not recommend these types of introductions is because the guinea pigs will have to be separated for the ride home, and the adopter will be starting from square one once they arrive home. Now, both guinea pigs will be stressed from the car ride, the new guinea pig will be stressed in a new environment, and a fight is likely to occur. We have seen piggies do fine in the rescue for up to an hour, and then fight at home, or fight in the rescue when they may have done perfectly well at home. All in all, this is not a recipe for a successful bond and we do not offer it.

Questions?

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You can also join us on Facebook in our group [THE COZY CAVY COMMUNITY](#) - a safe online community to share experiences, ask questions, offer support and share in the guinea pig enthusiasm with other piggy parents!