

## **Rabbits**

Rabbits are gentle, social herbivores that flourish when given space to explore combined with secure hiding spots that let them feel sheltered. Their digestive system is optimized for near constant intake of high fiber plant matter, so unlimited fresh grass hay is the cornerstone of health, keeping gut motility active and naturally wearing down continuously growing teeth. Supplemental leafy greens add hydration and micronutrients, while calorie dense pellets are best limited to prevent obesity and cecal imbalance. Subtle body language—upright periscoping to survey, relaxed loafing, binkies during energetic play bursts, quiet tooth purring when content, and a sudden ground thump as an alarm—communicates mood and environmental assessment. Because powerful hind limbs attach to a comparatively delicate spine, proper handling always supports the hindquarters to avoid twisting injury. Enrichment that channels instinctive chewing (untreated wood, woven hay toys, cardboard tunnels) protects household items and provides mental stimulation. As crepuscular animals, rabbits show peak activity in early morning and evening, making those ideal windows for exercise and interaction. Temperature management matters; they dissipate heat poorly and benefit from ventilation, shade, and cool surfaces in warmer months. Preventive care includes timely spay or neuter (reducing territorial spraying, hormone stress, and certain cancers), routine nail trims, grooming for long-haired breeds, and daily monitoring of hay intake and fecal output—early reductions can signal gastrointestinal stasis requiring prompt intervention. Bonded pairs or compatible small groups often engage in mutual grooming that reduces stress and reinforces social bonds, but introductions must be gradual and supervised to avoid territorial aggression. A thoughtfully structured habitat layers vertical interest (low platforms), safe chew outlets, litter areas with absorbent material beneath hay racks (encouraging proper foraging posture), and rotation of novel objects to sustain curiosity. Consistent human interaction built on calm approach and reward-based reinforcement yields trust, enabling stress-free health checks over the animal's lifespan.

## **Guinea Pigs**

Guinea pigs are vocal, herd-oriented prey animals whose rich acoustic communication offers clear windows into wellbeing. Distinct sounds—wheeking in food anticipation, soft chutting during exploratory contentment, low rumbling tied to dominance or courtship, abrupt squeals signaling discomfort—form a daily diagnostic soundtrack. Unlike rabbits, they cannot synthesize vitamin C, making a dependable dietary source essential: stabilized, date-fresh fortified pellets plus daily servings of high-C vegetables such as bell pepper or select leafy greens. Unlimited grass hay (timothy, orchard, meadow) supplies fiber for hindgut fermentation and continuous dental wear of ever-growing incisors and molars, helping prevent malocclusion and secondary gastrointestinal slowdown. Housing emphasizes horizontal space with unobstructed run lanes, multiple side-entry hideouts (avoid single-door “dead end” shelters that trap animals), and textured, dry, absorbent bedding spot-cleaned daily to reduce ammonia and foot issues. Gentle, predictable handling—supporting the torso firmly while minimizing sudden elevation—builds trust over time in a species naturally inclined to startle. Strategic enrichment includes scatter feeding, hay stuffed in paper tubes, and periodic rearrangement of tunnels to stimulate exploratory mapping without inducing undue stress. Cohabitation relies on social compatibility; stable same-sex pairs or

small groups reduce loneliness, though monitoring for barbering or resource guarding remains important. Cross-species housing with rabbits is discouraged: dietary micronutrient divergence (vitamin C dependence), size and strength mismatch, and potential pathogen asymmetry increase risk. Early health deviations often surface as quieter vocalization, posture flattening, reduced foraging enthusiasm, subtle weight drift (necessitating routine gram-scale tracking), or changes in pellet consistency and frequency. Fresh water access via cleaned bottles or wide bowls, protection from temperature extremes (notably heat stress), and a consistent light–dark cycle reinforce physiological stability. Preventive focus—balanced nutrient intake, abundant fiber, enriched social environment, vigilant daily observation—extends longevity while preserving the natural, curious behaviors that define healthy cavies.