

Degus

LIFESPAN 5-9 YEARS

Description

Degus are small mammals native to Chile. They closely resemble chinchillas, and are close relatives. However, degus are very unique exotic animals.

Housing

Degus are very active animals. Much like chinchillas, they should be housed in large, tall cages. The more degus you have, the larger the cage should be. Critter Nation, Martins, or Quality Cage Company habitats are popular choices. Be sure to choose a cage with small bar spacing.

A minimum cage size for a single degu is 24inx24inx24in (2ftx2ftx2ft). Because degus are usually not housed alone, the cage should exceed these measurements. The cage should have a solid floor. The cage should be housed away from direct sunlight or extreme temperatures.

Do not let the room temperature exceed 65-75°Fahrenheit.

Good bedding choices include: Kiln-dried pine shavings, KD aspen, or recycled paper bedding.

The bedding can be shallow – a deep layer is unnecessary. Degus do like to burrow at times, so a large litter box with ample bedding makes a good dig box.

Avoid: Cedar, corn-cob, or straw bedding.

The cage should include: Feed dish, water bottle, wood jump ledges, and chews/hideouts.

A wheel can be added if it is of proper size – at least 12" and solid surface.



Diet

Degus can be sensitive, so their diets must be monitored carefully. They can not process simple sugars - Degus can develop diabetes and/or cataracts due to this. Therefore, fruit and sugary treats should be avoided.

There are a few degu-specific pellets on the market, but they can be hard to find. Degus can be given chinchilla or guinea pig pellets, or a mix of the two. Pellets should be of high quality and should not contain any seeds, nuts, or treats.

Degu Diet Needs:

Protein = 15 % or less

Fat/oil = 4 % or less

Fibre = 15 % or more

Total sugars = less than 5 %

Acceptable Degu Pellets:

- [VitaKraft Sunseed Degu Formula](#) - can be purchased through [Foster & Smith](#)
- [Supreme Selective For Guinea Pigs](#)
- [Mazuri Chinchilla food \(high in protein, mix with acceptable guinea pig food\)](#)

As we continue to find other acceptable degu pellets choices (and where to find them), we will update this list.

Please consider the possibility of ordering food online if you can not find the above pellets in stores. This is essential to your degu living a long and healthy life!

Try to stay away from feed that contains molasses (or honey, sugar, fructose, and glucose.) Always check ingredient labels.

Avoid rabbit feed as it can be harmful to degus.

Degus can be given fresh vegetables and dried herbs. Fruit should be avoided due to excess sugar.

Safe vegetables include: Romaine lettuce, Celery (small pieces to avoid strings), Parsley, Carrot Greens, Zucchini, Cucumbers, Red Peppers, Green Peppers, Butternut Squash, Radish, Broccoli (in small amounts - may cause bloat), and carrots (in small amounts - high in sugar).

Dried herbs: Oregano, Mint, Parsley, Basil, Chives, and Coriander.

Degus need vitamic C in their diet. Vitamic C tablets can be given as dietary supplements. This can be purchased at a local health store, or found at a pet store through the Oxbow brand. Avoid liquid supplements - and do not add anything to their drinking water. Vitamic C supplements are not required if you are including a variety of fresh produce in their diet. Red Peppers and Parsley are a great source of Vitamic C for degus. Vitamic C supplements may help those that have, or are beginning to develop cataracts. It is also good for those who are ill.

Grooming

Degus do not require water-baths, but should be given dust-baths to remove oils and dirt from the coat. Chinchilla bath dust can be purchased for this purpose. Degus should have access to this dust at least once a week.

Some degus may need their nails clipped on occasion. It is best to let a veterinarian show you how.

Exercise

Degus may be provided with a proper running wheel for in-cage exercise. The wheel should be large enough for the degu to properly stretch his/her back. The diameter should measure no less than 12" across. It should be solid-surface to avoid injury or discomfort to the feet. Wheels specially made for degus or chinchillas would suffice.

One or Two?

Degus are social creatures. They enjoy being together. Degus should be housed in same-sex pairs or groups, but be sure to provide adequate living space.

Health

It is important to find a vet experienced in degus, as well as an emergency vet for after-hours care. Degus do not require routine veterinary care, but can fall sick or injured just as any other pet.

More common health ailments to watch out for include:

. Teeth

Degus should have an orange hue to their teeth. If the teeth become white or pale, it indicates a nutrition and vitamin deficiency. Diet should be adjusted accordingly, as well as a visit to your veterinarian to assure good health.

. Malocclusion

Like most rodents, Degus can come down with a condition known as malocclusion. Malocclusion causes teeth to overgrow. In most cases, this turns to be severe and very painful to the animal/s involved. A veterinarian is required to trim and maintain the teeth.

If you notice you degu drooling, not eating or losing weight, or acting lethargic – it's time to see a veterinarian.

• Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

Avoid placing the cage in an area that is cold or damp or with drafts. Do not house the degu in a place with smoking, burning candles, or air fresheners.

If you notice your degu wheezing, sneezing, nasal/eye discharge, or acting lethargic – it's time to see a veterinarian.

. Diabetes

Diabetes can occur when excess sugar is provided in the degu's diet. Degus can not process this sugar, and eventually it can cause Diabetes. The main symptom for diabetes in degus is cataracts forming in the eyes, as well as excessive thirst. Diabetes in degus is not a curable condition, but can be maintained. It is important to visit your veterinarian if you suspect your degu has come down with diabetes.

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