

Degu



Necessities:

- Wire Cage
- Bedding
- Water bottle
- Food dish (ceramic or metal)
- Degu food
- Chinchilla dust/container
- Chew sticks
- Hay (timothy or alfalfa)
- Fresh greens/veggies
- Hiding place

Extras:

- Toys
- Cage furniture
- Wheel
- Hammock

General:

Degus are PLAYFUL, CURIOUS and intelligent with a lively temperament. They look like giant gerbils but are actually related to the Chinchilla. The degu jumps less and is smaller and hardier. Degu fur is soft and brown with a cream color on the stomach; the tail has a black tuft. With the tail included, the degu measures 13 to 17 inches in length and weighs 8 to 9 ounces. Native to Chile, where it lives as a desert animal in underground burrows, the brown degu climbs bushes and trees from dawn to dusk to collect food. Degus live 7-8 years. They have a gestation period of 90 days and an average litter size of 4-6. The babies are generally weaned by 4 weeks of age. They are very social and it is recommended to keep them in pairs. If you decide to keep one singly you must be prepared to spend a lot of time with it. They tend to be very talkative and will let you know when they are happy, sad or scared. With their charming personality, this new critter on the block is bound to win the hearts of pet lovers everywhere. The breeding and selling of degus is closely regulated by the USDA. Make sure when purchasing one of these little cuties that you are dealing with a USDA licensed business or person.

Handling:

When you come by to meet a degu, we will show you how to pick it up. If someone is afraid of picking up a degu we will encourage them to try a different pet. It is sometimes helpful to carry them around in a bonding pouch around your neck so that they get to know your scent and voice. Try to NEVER pick your degu by its tail. Degus are very fast moving and fragile, so they don't make the best pet for young children. Don't pick it up, let it come to you. Once the degu is taught to climb on a person's hand to get a treat (such as a small piece of broccoli or carrot), it can be carefully lifted - only so that it can jump down if it wants to. When handled often, degus can be very friendly and enjoy human interaction. Never use hand sanitizers before handling your pet. Wash your hands with soap and water before and after handling.

Exercise:

Exercise is very important. Degus are very active and always on the move. A metal wheel is VERY important, as are chew toys. Their teeth grow constantly so they MUST chew. Give them lots of things to chew, as they can't get enough. There are many safe wood houses and toys made of wood or hay that work well for degus. You can even use wood bird toys, most of which are designed with destruction in mind. As with any toy, watch for strings or broken pieces that might harm the degu. Switch them regularly so that the old toys becomes new again in the degu mind.

Housing & Bedding:

We strongly recommend an ALL metal and wire cage (no smaller than 24"x24"). Aspen® or Carefresh® litter work well as a bedding (NEVER CEDAR or PINE). We also sprinkle about a tablespoon of 20 Mule Team Borax® in the bedding to help prevent mites. A large tank (no smaller than 12"x30") can also be used. They are escape artists. The cage should be totally cleaned out at least once a week or twice a week if using a glass tank. A 10% solution of bleach and water should be used for cleaning the cage or tank, food dish and water bottle (Household cleaners leave residues that can be extremely toxic). Degus are fastidiously clean and generally choose one corner or spot to go potty in. This area should be scooped out daily - or you can litter box train your pet by placing a small animal litter box with kitty litter in its chosen spot. The bedding should be kept clean and dry at all times. Small animal safe branches (nothing from the yard; these can carry mites and toxins) or climbing toys and nesting areas should be available and they love to burrow. Degus chew EVERYTHING! Make sure that all of their toys are animal safe. Degus enjoy taking dust baths. You can leave a ceramic dish (not easily tipped) with a couple of tablespoons of chinchilla dust in their cage to use when they like.

Diet:

A degus diet should be very consistent. Sudden changes or too many greens given all at once can cause gas, bloating and diarrhea. Clean fresh water should be available AT ALL TIMES! We carry, use and recommend Sunseed® Degu Diet which is designed specifically for their needs. They are prone to diabetes so the use of foods with high sugar content is NOT recommended. Guinea pig and Chinchilla diets have A LOT of sugar. Rabbit pellets are also not recommended. Fresh greens like kale, collard greens, mustard greens, dandelions (fertilizer and pesticide free), sweet potato, red and green pepper, parsley, dried rose petals are good for them, given approximately 2 times a week. STAY AWAY from fruit (it's too high in sugar). Fresh hay like timothy, alfalfa, orchard or oat hay, is a must every day. Baby degus should have as much pellet food as they want but adults should eat only about 1/4 cup pellets and be encouraged to eat more hay. It is very important to monitor your degus weight. Use heavy-duty, non-chewable feeding cups (we use ceramic dishes) and a water bottle that can be attached to the outside of the cage. These accessories must be cleaned frequently.

Temperature:

They like temperatures between 75-85° F without humidity. In Western Washington this can be difficult during the summer months. Make sure there is good air circulation in the room. If you have any questions on this, please give us a call. I once had a group of degus brought to me that had been in buckets in a car on a hot day, Most were gone within an hour of arrival due to lack of air circulation.

Lighting:

Degus are active from dawn to dusk and do not require extra lighting. It is important to have a 12/12 day to night cycle of light to promote good appetite and sleep cycles. Usually the normal lighting in a home is enough. DO NOT set your cage in front of a window. It is drafty and when the sun comes through the window glass it can burn your degu.

Health and well being:

They are a very hardy animal with relatively few known health problems other than diabetes, dehydration or getting too cold. Also be aware of airborne toxins and fumes such as air fresheners, incense, fumes from household cleaners, neighbors spraying insecticide, fumes from home improvements such as new carpets, paint, glues, wood floor finishes, etc. For these reasons also we do not recommend leaving your degu alone for a weekend in a closed up home. If you purchased your degu from us, we do provide boarding accommodations. If you have any questions, please give us a call. Our favorite exotic vet is Dr. Karen Obegi at 206-365-1102.

For more really good information on Degus, check out www.Degutopia.co.uk