

SMALL PETS 13

Caring for your degus



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CROSS

The charity dedicated to
helping sick, injured and
homeless pets since 1897.



Caring for your degus

Degus are fun, sociable animals that love to keep active. Whether you just want to know more about them or you're thinking of getting some, our factsheet will tell you more.

What's a degu?

The degu is a member of the Octodontidae family of rodents. They're in the sub-order caviomorpha, which means they're related to guinea pigs and chinchillas although recent studies show that they may actually be closer in relation to rabbits.

Degus originate from Chile and you can find them anywhere from coastal plains to the Andes mountains. They live in groups of up to 100 in complex burrows which have nests and food stores. Degus are diurnal which means they're active during the day. They love human interaction and enjoy living in busy, active homes.

The life span of a degu is around five to nine years, although in the wild it's only one to two years. An adult degu is around 15cm long and has a 15cm tail with a tuft at the end. Their coat is mid to dark brown with a light cream belly and white feet.

Home comforts

Degus like to live at temperatures below 20°C. Anything warmer than this can make them distressed and they're prone to heatstroke. They're pretty resistant to even extreme cold but they don't like wet or damp conditions.

Degus need constant stimulation to keep them happy and healthy so there should be plenty of

space to exercise and it's best to keep them in wire cages with lots of levels and ramps. The flooring should be solid and covered with a material suitable for burrowing, like a mixture of peat, dust-extracted bedding and bark chippings.

Tree branches like pear, apple, ash, beech and oak are great for furnishing their cage and degus love to gnaw on them. A solid exercise wheel, 25cm in diameter, should be provided to help them exercise. Clay piping can also provide a tunnelling system for them which is lots of fun and offers great enrichment.

Degus need to have a sand bath available to them every day and after they've been handled. Because degus love to dig, a digging box using organic soil and sand is sure to go down well and a treat ball will help to keep them busy – plus it's great exercise. Toys, like jingly balls, sisal and corn toys are also fun for degus to play with.





Socialising

Degus are very sociable so they should never be kept alone as this can make them very stressed. They should live in groups but male groups shouldn't be kept near females as they're likely to fight.

Dinner time

Degus can't digest or metabolise sugar and carbohydrates and they're very prone to diabetes so it's important to make sure they get the right diet.

A mix of guinea pig and chinchilla pellets, the ones without molasses, are best. They also enjoy sweet potato, dandelions and leafy vegetables. Degus should have hay available all the time – you can make it fun by filling in a box and letting them forage.

Keeping healthy

Degus should be bright with clear eyes and ears and glossy looking fur. They should have clean tails with no signs of faeces from their rear end. Their teeth should be yellow and not white – white teeth are a sign of a vitamin A deficiency. If you notice a wetness around their mouth, this could be a sign of overgrown teeth. Discharge and difficulty in breathing could be an indication of a respiratory problem.

Breeding

The average litter size of a degu is five but it can be any number from one to eight. The weaning age is around five to six weeks and the breeding life of a degu is six years.

What to consider when getting a degu

Degus love human interaction but they don't really enjoy being handled a lot so they're not ideal for young children. They are highly active during the day, love to burrow, climb and gnaw and can live for up to eight years.



Happy, healthy pets

Blue Cross advice leaflets are packed full of top tips to help owners with their pet questions. They cover a wide range of topics, from training a puppy to caring for an older cat. So if you need some support to help you with a pet problem, whether it's about a dog or a degu, we're here for you.

You can read and download our leaflets online at www.bluecross.org.uk

Visit our website to take advantage of all its features, including:

- blog posts from Blue Cross experts
- latest news
- events near you
- pets needing new homes

Or you can join in the chat on our online communities. Find us on Twitter and Facebook – just search for Blue Cross.



Blue Cross

Blue Cross has been dedicated to the health and happiness of pets since 1897. Abandoned or unwanted, ill or injured – we do what's needed to give every pet a healthy life in a happy home. We're a charity, so the more help you give us, the more help we can give pets.

How you can help

Blue Cross doesn't receive any government funding, so we rely on the generosity of pet lovers like you. There are lots of ways you can help the sick, injured and abandoned pets in our care, like making a donation, fundraising for us or leaving us a legacy.

Please call us on 0300 777 1897 or visit www.bluecross.org.uk



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