

HOUSING

Degus require lots of space. Choose as large a solid-bottomed cage as possible and place it in a dry, draft-free room, out of direct sunlight. Height is important as well as length and width; degus love to climb. If the cage has different levels, cover the shelves with untreated wood to protect your degu's feet. Cover the floor with bedding such as aspen or pine shavings, recycled paper or corncob bedding. Avoid cedar shavings, which contain harmful oils. Your degus will also appreciate a nesting box. You can provide a box of untreated wood or an old cardboard box, which will double as a gnawing object. Tear unscented white tissue into narrow strips to provide a safe, inexpensive nesting material. Food should be offered in a ceramic bowl and fresh water in a sipper bottle.

Degus need plenty of exercise and stimulation, so provide a variety of toys. A large exercise wheel is a good choice. Many degus do well on metal wheels with rungs, but you should monitor your pet carefully on metal or plastic wheels with rungs to make sure he is not injuring his feet. Climbing frames of untreated wood and pesticide-free branches from beech, maple or fruit trees will allow your degu to climb, while a large deep box filled with soft sandy soil provides a place to dig. Pieces of untreated wood and cardboard rolls will satisfy your degu's urge to gnaw and help keep teeth properly worn down.

Keep your degu's habitat clean by removing soiled litter daily. Thoroughly clean the water bottle once a day. Wash food dishes and the cage bottom once a week. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding clean bedding and returning your pet.



HEALTH

Find a veterinarian specializing in exotic animals and experienced in treating degus before you have an emergency. Degus are especially prone to chronic respiratory disease, teeth problems and diabetes. Diabetes cannot be treated in small animals, so prevention is essential. Never feed your degu fruit or other foods containing sugar, honey or molasses. If your degu puts on weight, cut out all treats and, if you have been feeding her seed mix, switch to pellets. Degus are also prone to mouth infections, so keep the water bottle spotlessly clean. If your degu is not eating or drinking, or has diarrhea, see a veterinarian immediately.

FERTILITY

Degus become sexually mature very early — at between three and six months — and their gestation period (pregnancy) is very short. Determine each pet's sex, and keep males and females separate at all times to prevent unwanted babies. Because it is difficult to find appropriate homes for them, breeding degus is strongly discouraged.



A QUICK GUIDE TO DEGUS



Relative newcomers as pets, full-grown degus are about the size of a pet rat, with a long tail, large eyes and mouse-like ears. They are highly social animals and are happiest when sharing their habitat with another degu. Degus don't like to be handled, but do enjoy human companionship. Their antics, often accompanied by excited chittering or gentle coos, can keep you entertained for hours. Their average life span is five to ten years.

Before adopting a degu, consider the following:

- Degus need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat.
- Degus need daily exercise and play.
- All household members should understand how to hold a degu, and should be as eager as you to welcome a degu into the family.
- While they are excellent companions, most degus do not like to be handled.
- Degus require a larger habitat than most rodents.

SETTING UP HOUSE

Essential items

- Spacious cage with solid bottom
- Shavings
- Hiding box
- Food bowls
- Water bottle
- Guinea pig food or chinchilla pellets
- Hay
- Large ceramic bowl and chinchilla dust
- Gnawing objects
- Exercise wheel (try to find a large wheel with a solid surface)

Optional items

- Hay rack
- Climbing frame of untreated wood
- Digging pit
- Portable playpen
- Pesticide free branches



ONE OR TWO?

Degus are very social animals. No matter how attentive you are, a pet degu will be much happier with another degu companion. If possible, keep a pair of the same sex.

HANDLING

Most degus are cautious about being handled. But they must be handled daily if they are to remain tame. Do not put your hand in their cage and back them into a corner or swoop your hand down from above. Both will be perceived as the actions of a predator. Allow your degu to come to you. Start by letting your degu sniff your hand and progress to hand feeding. With enough training, your degu may eventually climb into your hand. You may then pick up your degu gently in your palm. Never pick a degu up by the tail!

Degus are very social animals,
so they need regular attention
but little physical handling.

GENERAL CARE

Regular exercise outside the cage is essential for your degu's health. A room can be made safe for degus by preventing access to electrical cords, removing hazardous items and blocking gaps under appliances and furniture. Alternatively, a playpen will allow your pets to romp in safety. Never let a degu outside of the cage unsupervised.

Degus clean themselves by rolling in dust, so you will need to provide a dust bath. Fill a large ceramic bowl with chinchilla dust and place it in your degu's cage. Remove the dust bath once your degu has finished. Repeat this two to three times a week.

DIET

Your degu's primary source of food should be guinea pig mix or chinchilla pellets. Most authorities believe that sugar is not good for degus, so check the ingredient list of any pre-packaged foods and avoid dried fruit or molasses. Fresh hay should be constantly available, preferably in a hayrack. Supplement your degu's diet with fresh vegetables, but never fruit, which is high in natural sugars. As an occasional treat, offer your degus nuts, seeds or puffed rice. Fresh water should be available at all times.

Please support the animals in our community.



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