

Best Toys for your Small Animal

Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs are not the most play-inclined of pets, but there are several toys that seem to pique their interest. Cat balls, squeak toys and large children's building blocks to climb on are high on the favorites list. Tunnels and mazes made for cats or ferrets are also very entertaining to guinea pigs.

Good guinea pig toys include the following:

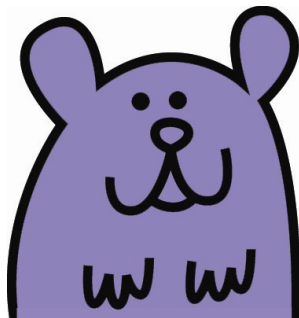
- Pick guinea pig-safe toys without small parts that can be chewed off or broken. Look for toys that say they are "Pet Safe" or "Safe for Children Under 3." Rotate the toy selection frequently so that there is always something new for your guinea pig to explore and look at.
- Engage in interactive play that requires help and encouragement from you. Set up an obstacle course of mazes and tunnels and offer a reward when your guinea pig reaches the end. Hang treats from a string and encourage your guinea pig to use his ingenuity to reach them.

Play is good not only for your relationship with your guinea pig, but for his health as well. A variety of toys will help keep him both happy and healthy.

Hamsters

Because your hamster loves to explore, he will play with and investigate anything that smells new or contains narrow areas. A myriad of objects may be introduced as toys as long as they meet the standards for keeping your hamster safe and healthy. Therefore, it is best to avoid any natural product that may contain insecticides such as cedar, brittle plastics, plastic food wrap or anything that can shred, become embedded or tear your hamster's cheek pouches. It is also important to avoid worn fabric or polyester batting which your hamster will chew, shred and swallow but cannot digest.

Good hamster toys include the following:



- Common twigs and branches or hobby store dowels which may be cut to length and propped at angles to keep your acrobatic hamster chewing and climbing as well as smelling new scents.
- Bits of leaves or grass that are free of insecticides to provide an opportunity for your pet to smell, play and hoard.

- Undyed cardboard tubes which can be cut into small pieces and placed around his cage for him to rearrange.
- Objects made of sturdy mesh for clinging to and climbing on.
- Ceramic mugs and small glass jars that will soon be stuffed and turned into burrows, but because of their slippery surfaces, they should be settled into cage litter or bedding to prevent injury from falls.
- Pet stores can supplement your homemade supplies with seesaws and merry-go-rounds that may be more appropriate in a confined but free-roaming area outside your pet's usually small cage.

Gerbils

Your gerbil has a wonderfully inquisitive nature, so there is no toy you can give him with which he won't be curious enough to play.

If you use your imagination, chances are you can provide your gerbil with toys available right in your home. Any safe, non-toxic object that your gerbil can safely climb or explore will likely enchant him for hours. In addition, your gerbil will take pleasure in the many toys that are commercially available for you to choose for him.

Good Gerbil Toys include the following:

- **Exercise Wheels:** Only the type for gerbils! These are enclosed or have closed rungs. This is very important since your gerbil can catch their tails and feet in the wheels with open spaces between the rungs. Hamster wheels are not recommended for gerbils.
- **Wood Chew Blocks:** Satisfy their need to gnaw and chew!
- **Plastic Tunnels:** Tunnels keeps your pet entertained and challenged; but make sure to get plastic ones rather than wood, as gerbils tend to chew through wood, thus shortening the useful life of the tunnel.
- **Run-about balls:** Monitor your pet when they roll about in these balls. Normally safe, but they can roll into furniture and open up, thus allowing your pet to escape.
- **Seesaws:** These are as much fun for him as they were for you as a youngster.

- **Small boxes:** You probably have a few of these empties around from business cards, checks, baggies, etc. Your pet will scamper endlessly over, around, in and out.
- **Empty toilet paper rolls:** Perfect for recycling! They encourage your gerbil run through and explore, and satisfy his urge to chew.
- **Mazes:** Find a commercial one or you can make them yourself using boxes and cardboard.