



Introduction Guide To The Care Of African Pygmy Hedgehogs

Scientific Name: The most common species of domesticated hedgehog is the African pygmy hedgehog, a hybrid of the white-bellied or four-toed hedgehog (*Atelerix albiventris*) and the Algerian hedgehog (*A. algirus*).

Life Span: Approx 3-6 years in captivity

Size: 5 - 12 inches long

Appearance: A Pygmy Hedgehog is a small animal, they have a cute, furry face with a long muzzle/snout, medium sized eyes, small ears and mouth with whiskers around its nose. They have four legs and a small tail (usually not visible). Its body is covered with about 6000 spikes (quills). They come in loads different colours and patterns.

Temperament and Handling: Careful handling is a necessity. Most hedgehogs do not particularly like to be cuddled, but most will allow themselves to be picked up and will readily climb over their people. Tame hedgehogs by handling gently and frequently, gently scooping up the hedgehog around the sides. If you get your hedgehog from a good breeder who has been handling them, your hedgehog will most likely be quite tame already. Initially, your hedgehog may curl into a ball when you try to pick him or her up. However, if you just cradle the ball of hedgehog in your hands the spines do not really hurt, and usually the hedgehog will unroll within a few minutes and start exploring once it realizes you mean no harm. Be careful the hedgehog does not manage to coil into a ball over one of your fingers though - this is extremely painful! If your hedgehog is really resistant to handling at first, a thick towel should be all you need to be able to pick him or her up. When starting out with a new hedgehog, try to practice handling at times the hedgehog is awake (e.g. early evening) as a sleepy hedgehog will understandably be more grumpy. You can also try hand feeding favorite treats such as mealworms to gain the trust of your hedgehog.



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Housing: Allow a bare minimum of 2-3 square feet of floor space (bigger is better). Many types of cages can be used - but always avoid wire floors and be cautious about the spacing of wire sided cages - the narrower the better. Aquariums, plastic commercial cages or even modified plastic storage bins can be used. Clear plastic storage bins can be modified to allow adequate ventilation (a row of holes around the top of the bin and/or in the lid works okay). Many keepers opt to using a well ventilated vivarium as it is easier to monitor/control temperatures. Bedding: aspen shavings or newer alternatives to wood shavings can be used, but avoid cedar shavings (see Top Ten Alternative to Cedar Shavings for more information). Pine is probably okay, especially kiln dried, but there are alternatives available. Some people use indoor outdoor carpeting such as AstroTurf (using a heat source to seal the edges to threads do not come loose) to line the cage. Litter box: a small shallow pan with dust free cat litter can be provided and may become the hedgehogs primary bathroom area. Do not use clumping litter though. House/Hide: a cardboard box or some other enclosed hiding place should be provided as a secure haven for your hedgehog. Exercise: a wheel provides great exercise and helpful in preventing obesity. An open sided, solid surface wheel is necessary, and should be quite large (greater than 10 inches, at a minimum).

Heating and Lighting: African Pygmy Hedgehogs are best kept at around 70-75 degrees (that of a comfortably heated house). If the temperature is significantly lower than this, hedgehogs will attempt to hibernate (something that should not be allowed as it can prove to be fatal for the hedgehog). During the colder months or if all round heating is a problem, small heat pads can be placed underneath the sleeping quarters of the cage.

Feeding: This is a controversial area in hedgehog care. For many years, high quality cat food has been the recommended food of choice, such as go cat and iam's, supplemented with mealworms and or crickets and other treats. Commercial hedgehogs diets are now available, which are not ideal but are, for the most part, better formulated for hedgehogs than cat food (although some hedgehogs do not like them as much as cat food). These can still be difficult to find in pet stores, but are becoming more widely available online. Prepared insectivore diets (such as Zoo Fare) are another good alternative, often favored by exotic animal veterinarians and zoos. In any case, a mixture or variety of foods is probably the best choice, for both health and preventing diet boredom. Hedgehogs tend to love mealworms, and make a good occasional treat, but these should be fed nutritious foods such as fruit, vegetables and dog food before giving them to the hedgehog. Crickets can also be fed. Small amounts of hardboiled egg, baby foods or fruit can be given as occasional treats. Treats should be fed in moderation only, however.

Please note that this is only an introductory guide based on our opinions and experience, we advise you to continually research and learn as much as possible from as many sources as you can, every animal is different and new care and information is always being developed and found 😊

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