



# WEIRD 'N' WONDERFUL

Pets and reptiles

## Introduction Guide To The Care Of

### Chinchillas

**Scientific Name:** Chinchilla lanigera

**Life Span:** about 15 years, but 18-22 years is not uncommon.

**Size:** Body length about 10-14 inches; tail is another 5-6 inches or so

**Appearance:** Chinchillas are soft furred rodents with long, strong hind legs, large ears and a tail that is approx one third the length of their body. Their natural hair colour is a very dense blueish grey above and yellowy cream below.

**Temperament and Handling:** With gentle handling from a young age most chinchillas will become quite tame and bond closely with their owners, although sometimes they do not like to be held or cuddled. They are very active and playful. Chinchillas can be kept singly, and usually will do fine as same sex pairs especially if they are litter mates or introduced at a young age. Chinchillas are largely nocturnal so will be most active at night. Sometimes they are called crepuscular, meaning their activity peaks at dawn and dusk. In any case, they should be kept in a fairly quiet area during the day. They prefer a consistent routine for handling a feeding times and may be stressed out by changes to their routine. Since they are so active and playful, chinchillas need a roomy cage for exercise as well as daily playtime. Warm temperatures are more of a concern for chinchillas than cool temperatures, so care must be taken that pet chinchillas do not become overheated.

**Housing:** Chinchillas, part of the rodent family of animals, love to chew everything; it is therefore essential that their cage is made of wire mesh to ensure that it is escape proof. They can be very active and therefore need a lot of space to exercise. This requires a large cage that should ideally have several levels with a large enclosed nesting box and some bedding inside. Branches or cuttlebone should also be made available so chinchillas can gnaw to wear down their teeth. The bottom of the cage should have a mesh floor set above a tray that can be filled with wood based cat litter. The cage must be placed somewhere which does not get damp and is well away from draughts. Chinchillas can stand cold but suffer if the temperature rises above 20C. Your Chinchilla should have access to a dust bath filled with Chinchilla sand which should be placed in the cage so that the animal can use it as required. If your chinchilla overdusts itself, or you find the bath is being used as a toilet then remove the bath and simply put it back into the cage every other day for 20 minutes or so. Cages and all equipment should be cleaned and disinfected regularly, at least once per week.

**Heating and Lighting:** (see above)

Weird 'N' Wonderful Pets and Reptiles  
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**Feeding:** Chinchillas require a lot of roughage, and the diet should mainly be made up of a good quality grass hay along with pellets made for chinchillas. Treats should be given in moderation (one teaspoon per day in total). The digestive system of chinchillas is fairly sensitive so any diet changes should be gradual.

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 😊