



Introduction Guide To The Care Of

Degu's

Scientific Name: Octodon Degus

Life Span: Approx 5 – 8 years in captivity

Size: Body is about 5-7 inches long; the tail is another 5-6 inches.

Appearance: Degus are rodents that look similar to gerbils, but are slightly bigger. A degus front legs are shorter than its back legs and they have quite long ears. They have silky coats of fur that are grey-brown tinged with orange and their bellies tend to be a cream to yellow colour.

Temperament and Handling: Degus are very social animals and can become very tame if handled from an early age. However, they do best if kept with other degus because of their social nature. They are playful and curious. Without social interaction and opportunity for exercise, they can be aggressive and neurotic. Degus are diurnal (active during the day). In the wild they live in communities (much like prairie dogs) and dig an elaborate system of burrows to live in.

Housing: Degus need a large cage. For a couple of degus a minimum of 24 inches by 18 inches by 24 inches tall is about the minimum size. Larger is definitely better and large multilevel cages such as those made for ferrets or chinchillas are ideal. The cage should be made of wire since degus are avid chewers. However, the cage must have a solid (not wire) floor and shelves and ledges should also be made of a solid surface since degus are prone to foot problems. As with other small animals, avoid cedar or pine shavings. Provide an absorbent layer of pet-safe bedding in the bottom of the cage. A nest box is necessary to give degus a sense of security - a wooden box about 6 by 8 by 6 inches is appropriate and if it has a flat roof the degus can use it as a shelf to sit on. Nesting material (tissues or paper towel, hay, shredded paper) should also be provided. Degus should have a solid surface exercise wheel (11 inches is a good size) in their cage. Thick branches can be added to the cage and will offer both exercise (climbing) and chewing opportunities. Thick cotton ropes can also be used for climbing toys. Using heavy ceramic dishes is a good idea (chew proof), and a water bottle with a sipper tube can be used for water. You may need to get a chew guard for the water bottle. Like chinchillas, degus need regular dust baths to keep their skin and coat in good condition. Provide a shallow bowl with an inch or two of chinchilla bath dust (sand) a couple of times a week (leave in the cage for a half hour or so). Since degus are such determined chewers, it is vital to provide them with lots of opportunities to chew. A variety of wood blocks and chews as well as branches can be provided. Willow balls and toys made for rabbits are great for degus, and cotton rope and wood toys designed for large parrots are also a good choice. A mineral or salt block designed for rodents can be attached to the cage.



WEIRD 'N' WONDERFUL

Pets and reptiles

Heating and Lighting: (see above)

Feeding: The basis of a good degu diet is a combination of high quality chinchilla or guinea pig pellets, and rodent blocks. Also available is specifically designed Degu food from brands such as science selective and xtra vita. Grass hay (such as timothy hay) should be available all the time (you can get small hay racks to make this easier), and a small amount of alfalfa hay can also be offered. A variety of fresh vegetables can be given, especially sweet potato (peeled, uncooked), carrots, broccoli, leafy greens, green beans, and dandelion leaves (*must* be pesticide-free). These should be offered in small quantities only or they may cause diarrhea. Vegetables that are members of the cabbage family (cabbage, broccoli, brussel sprouts, kale) should be fed only in very small quantities and some degu experts advise avoiding them altogether. Degus are prone to diabetes and are designed to eat a diet high in roughage and low in carbohydrates. Do not let your degus get overweight or obese, and keep sugary foods to a minimum. Fruit should be avoided as a treat (including raisins) due to their high sugar content. For treats, most degus relish seeds (e.g. sunflower seeds), peanuts, and whole nuts in the shell. However, these should only be an occasional treat, due to the high fat content. Make sure you change the water in their bottles regularly - they often do not drink a lot but it is important that they have a supply of fresh clean water available at all times.

Please Note: *Never grab or try to pick up a degu by the tail. They can easily lose part of their tail and have a messy injury as a result. Shedding their tail is probably a natural defense of wild degus to escape if caught by the tail.*

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 😊