

Considerations Before Getting a Chinchilla

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Although people think of chinchillas as cute, incredibly soft, and cuddly, and so of course they would make good pets, that is not always the case. Here are some quick facts to help you decide if a chinchilla is really the pet of choice for you.

Chinchillas are rodents, native to the Andes Mountains in South America. They have strong hind legs and move about by using a hopping gait. They are surprisingly good jumpers, hence the need for a cover on a chinchilla cage.

Chinchillas are as soft as they are because of the incredible density of their fur, with as many as 60 hairs growing from only one hair follicle. Because of the hair density, they are highly susceptible to overheating and become uncomfortable in temperatures above 75°F, suffering potential heat stroke at temperatures above 80°. They also do not tolerate humidity. The best environment is a temperature range of 50-65° with a relative humidity of less than 50%.

Chinchillas will live for 15-22 years, so acquiring one is a long-term commitment. They are nocturnal, with the majority of activity and feeding taking place at night, and sleeping during the daylight hours. Because they are an active and acrobatic creature and curious by nature, they require a large [enclosure](#) - ideally 6-7 feet by 6-7 feet by 3-4 feet. Shy, too, they also need a hide box and a nesting box.

Chinchillas have the somewhat unique grooming habit of dust bathing. Commercially formulated chinchilla dust baths should be purchased for this purpose. Given the opportunity, they will "bathe" in their dust once a day, but should be given this opportunity at least several times a week.

Chinchillas should be fed a diet of timothy hay, which can be supplemented with chinchilla pellets.

Chinchillas can be kept singly or in pairs (although this will add space requirements). The best age to purchase your chinchilla is between 3-4 months of age. Frequent, gentle handling will speed the taming and bonding process. Although they do not like to be held, chinchillas, once tame, are fond of climbing on their owners. Please consider these points when deciding whether a chinchilla is a good pet choice for you.