



Keeping Pigs as Pets

The pet pig

Several different breeds of pig are kept as pets including the Vietnamese Pot-Bellied, Kune Kune, Gloucester Old Spot, and the Tamworth. On average, so-called miniature breeds, such as the Vietnamese Pot-Bellied, can grow to about a quarter to half of the size of a commercial type pig and weigh anything from 35kg to 70kg, but if overfed can exceed 150kg. Other breeds will grow as large as a commercial type pig i.e. 200-300kg, sometimes more. Some have a very good temperament; others should be handled with care! The average life span of these breeds is five to ten years, although some can live up to 25 years.

What do pet pigs need?

A pet pig has similar behavioural, nutritional and housing requirements to a commercial type pig reared for meat.

Behaviour

Pigs are highly intelligent and social animals, preferring to be in the company of other pigs. When available, they will use specific areas for dunging, exploration and sleeping. It is important that pigs have sufficient space to allow them to make these separate areas. Being highly inquisitive, pigs will spend a large part of the day exploring their environment, rooting and foraging at the earth, causing the land on which they are kept being greatly disturbed with all visible signs of vegetation quickly disappearing. Straw, hard plastic balls and tyres can be placed in the pig pen for the pigs to play with, encourage exercise and prevent boredom. Pigs must be exercised regularly to avoid obesity, constipation and prevent their feet from becoming overgrown.



Housing

A minimum area of 36 metres square (6m x 6m) is required per pig, but preferably larger. Pigs are very strong animals and the area in which they are housed must have strong but safe fencing surrounding it to prevent them from escaping. It is important to ensure that pigs are not exposed to draughts, sudden temperature changes and prolonged exposure to sunlight. Pigs are very poor thermo-regulators, meaning they have great difficulty keeping cool in summer and warm in winter. It is very important to ensure that in warm weather pigs are provided with a wallow (with clean water) and adequate cover to shelter from the sun (pigs are prone to sunburn and sun stroke). In cooler weather and at night, pigs must always have access to warm, dry, draught free, straw-bedded accommodation, as they are very susceptible to the cold.

Feeding

To prevent the spread of disease it is illegal to feed any waste food to pigs. This includes meat, bones, blood, offal, or other parts of the carcass of any livestock or of any poultry, or product derived from the carcass, or hatchery waste, eggs or egg shells. In addition, used cooking oil and table/kitchen scraps cannot be fed to pigs, even if no meat or meat products are prepared in the kitchen. Pigs should be fed several small meals a day rather than one large meal. A commercially prepared pig ration should be fed (available from agricultural merchants). This should have a maximum of 12 per cent protein and adequate vitamins and minerals.

Concentrated food should be given in divided meals with the total amount not exceeding two to three per cent of the pigs' bodyweight. Fibre should be added to improve gut fill and prevent constipation. Pigs can be encouraged to explore and forage for food by throwing a small quantity of the food ration into the paddock where they are housed. A supply of clean, fresh drinking water must be available to the pigs at all times. Adult pigs may drink up to 20 litres of water a day and even mini pigs may drink around five litres.



Veterinary care

Pet pigs are prone to several specific health problems:

1. Pigs can suffer from dry, scaly skin. Baby or vegetable oil can be rubbed on the skin to reduce the dryness. If the skin is crusting, causing scratching, the animal should be checked for mange. Sunburn is a common problem in pigs. Shade must always be made available.
2. Pot-bellied pigs can suffer from inverted eyelids. This causes the hairs on the eyelid to irritate the outer surface of the eye (the cornea) and can develop into conjunctivitis. Action needs to be taken, so a vet must be consulted.
3. Arthritis and lameness can be a problem especially in older animals. Feet should be regularly checked to ensure they are not becoming overgrown and foot trimming carried out if necessary but only by a trained, skilled person. Keeping the pig's weight in check, by providing the correct diet and adequate opportunities for exercise, helps to reduce the problems caused by arthritis.
4. Worms, mites and lice: Pigs should be treated every 6 months with Ivermectin (name brand Ivomec or Noromectin) –Treats, mites, lice, and a variety of internal parasites.

Vaccination

It is recommended that pet pigs are vaccinated with Eryvac and 5in1 – At 9 and 14 weeks of age and then 6 monthly for Eryvac and yearly for 5 in 1 thereafter.

Desexing

Pigs may be castrated and spayed to avoid unsociable behaviour and to decrease smell and unwanted offspring. Please call the surgery for an estimate.



Legislation

Under the Animal Welfare Act, which came into force at the end of March 2007, anyone who is responsible for a pet has a legal responsibility to meet the five basic welfare needs of pets. These are: a proper diet (including fresh water), somewhere suitable to live, any need to be housed with or apart from other animals, allowing animals to express normal behaviour, and protection from and treatment of illness and injury.

Transport

It is illegal to transport pet pigs in any vehicle that has not been properly constructed to carry them – this includes a car. Pigs must be transported in compliance with the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 2006. Any vehicle used to transport pigs must be thoroughly washed and disinfected after use with a disinfectant approved as preventing diseases including Swine Vesicular Disease and Foot and Mouth Disease.