

# YOUR PET CAVY

Distributed By

The American Cavy Breeders  
Association

may be wire or solid. Wire floors should not be used for cavies because there is too much chance for injury due to toenail or the entire foot getting caught in the mesh. There has been research on the use of wire floors and it has been proven that cavies fare much better and are much happier with a solid floor. If you are keeping your cavy in a fairly warm, draft-free area a wire sided cage is fine - however, you will have to contend with the almost endless scattering of bedding on your floor. The cavy's cage should be at least 15" high. This will usually keep a cavy in his home, however cavies can and do jump as high as 24". Since most cavies don't try to escape the security of the cage may depend on what you wish to keep out rather than what you wish to keep in.

Ideal temperatures for the cavy range from 65 to 75 degrees with 50% humidity. This range fits most homes. Cavies can tolerate temperatures as low as 60 degrees and as high as 90 degrees without suffering any ill effects. Sudden extreme changes of temperature should be avoided.

## Bedding

Wood shavings, either fir or white pine, are highly recommended for bedding. There are many types of small animal bedding in small packages available in pet stores, but these can prove to be rather expensive. Wood shavings can be purchased in a 40 lb. paper bale and are relatively inexpensive. These bales can be purchased from farm stores, feed dealers and garden centers. When buying these bales be sure to specify "small animal" bedding as these shavings are graded according to size. We do not recommend the use of cedar shavings as bedding. Many rodents, including cavies, are sensitive to the cedar oil and it may cause problems such as runny eyes, discharge from the nose and skin irritations. Cedar is also more expensive. Avoid using a bedding that contains very fine particles and dust. The bedding should be changed at least once a week. If you run out of bedding shredded newspaper can be used in emergencies.

## Crocks and Bottles

You will have to provide your cavy with a water source and a container to put his pelleted feed in. A heavyweight crock, one the cavy cannot tip over, is ideal for pelleted feed. The dish should not be so large that the cavy decides it would make a great place to sit and sleep. Some cavies do get into the bad habit of defecating in their feed dish and thereby spoiling the feed. This undesirable habit usually starts when too large a feed dish is used. An open crock should not be used as a feed container. Since cavies like to cavort about their cage you will soon find the water unfit to drink. A water bottle with a ball-bearing tip is ideal. The size of the bottle you need depends upon how many cavies are housed in one cage. An eight ounce bottle will serve one cavy and a sixteen ounce bottle can serve two or three.

## Handling Your Cavy

When you first bring your new cavy home he may be frightened and unsure of his surroundings. He may not eat or drink much the first few days, and when you enter the room he may run to a corner of his cage to hide. After he gets to know who delivers his breakfast, within a very short time he will squeal and squeak when you enter the room. Cavies are not known for their intelligence,

but they do respond to something special - and that is affection! A cavy handled gently learns quickly. Many cavies learn to beg for a fruit or vegetable treat or to have their head scratched. When lifting your cavy extreme care must be exercised to support the entire cavy. One hand should support the cavy's hindquarters (palm up) and the other hand under the cavy's chest. You should never try to pick up a cavy around the shoulders and rib cage because you can easily crush the ribs and cause internal damage. Additional care should be exercised when handling a pregnant sow - the less the better! If you must handle a pregnant sow, be sure she is totally supported. If you allow your cavy out for an occasional run, be sure to pet-proof the area. Because of their inquisitive nature, they will "taste" everything within their reach. Secure all electrical cords out of reach. If there is wood furniture within their reach you can be sure they will try to chew on it.

## Cavy Behavior

A cavy's own personality is as different as the individual who owns him. By observing your pet you will soon learn what his likes and dislikes are. Some cavies enjoy having the top of their head scratched and some like to be scratched under the chin.

If you plan on having one cavy as a pet, either sex will do well. A single cavy can become very attached to its owner and will squeal with protest whenever he feels he is being ignored.

If you decide to keep two cavies, two sows will get along. You can keep two boars together, however, they must have been brought up together from infancy, otherwise they will fight. Occasionally two sows will squabble, but those squabbles are usually minor. If you decide to keep a boar and a sow, you will have to be prepared for subsequent pregnancy and birth. A sow should not be bred before she is three months of age. Ideally, she should have her first litter just before she turns six months old. Even though cavies are members of the rodent family, they are not prolific. White mice, rats, and hamsters average a litter every 25 days, the cavy gestation (pregnancy) period lasts 68 to 72 days (approximately 10 weeks). While other rodents are born naked, blind and helpless, the cavy is born with its eyes open, a full coat of hair, a set of teeth, and can run! The number of young per litter is 2-4 for a cavy. Day old cavies usually start to nibble on solid food, and are weaned at 3-4 weeks.

## Grooming

Cavies enjoy being groomed, although some cavies may protest loudly in the beginning. They soon learn this becomes a time when they are cuddled and fussed over. You should use a soft bristled brush and brush the coat in the direction it lays. Occasionally they need a bath. We recommend the use of non-tearing dog/cat shampoo. If your cavy is bothered by lice and mites, a cat flea shampoo can be used safely. The cavy should be bathed in a warm area, towel-dried and if possible dried using a hair dryer. Use a medium setting and stay 5-6 inches from the cavy's skin. When the cavy is almost dry you can place it in a box with clean bedding in a warm area and let it finish drying. You should not bathe the cavy more than once a month as excessive bathing could lead to dry skin problems.

## The Cavy

Cavies (pronounced K-V) are commonly known as "Guinea Pigs". Cavies have been Domesticated for hundreds of years, first by the Indians of South America. They were brought to Europe in the 1600's and since then have become very popular pets. They are affectionate and respond well to their owners attentions. A female cavy is called a "sow" and a male cavy is called a "boar". Because they do not require a lot of space and are relatively odorless they fit in well with most households.

## Housing

When selecting housing for your cavy you must consider the following: For each cavy you must have at least two square feet of floor space. The floors should have a solid bottom and the sides

## Feeding

To save waste on feed, feed the cavy just enough pellets to last a 24 hour period. Most adult cavies will eat about 1/3 cup of feed a day, but there are some that will require more. It is very important that you feed your cavies at about the same time each day. The cavy's basic diet consists of pelleted feed. These pellets are made from various grains and alfalfa with added vitamins and minerals. There are pelleted feeds for both cavies and rabbits available. Cavy pellets have vitamin C added to them. Cavies are very much like people in their need for an outside source of vitamin C. Cavies, like people, cannot synthesize their needed vitamin C from food and must have it added to their diet. When buying cavy pellets make sure they have not been on the shelf over 90 days. After 90 days the quality of the vitamin C is minimal. Another important point to consider when buying pellets is the protein level. Cavies need at least an 18% protein level in their pelleted feed for them to stay healthy. Most cavy pellets are 18% to 20% protein. If cavy pellets are unavailable, or you are uncertain of the quality of the cavy pellets, you can use rabbit pellets. Make sure you use an 18% pellet and provide a source of vitamin C. Do not use a medicated rabbit pellet. Vitamin C can be provided in one of two ways: provide the cavy with fresh fruit and vegetables or use vitamin C in tablet or crystal form as a water additive. Cavies require a minimum of 10 mg. of vitamin C daily, but this can vary from one cavy to another. An easy way to add vitamin C to the diet is to supplement the water supply.

## Vitamin C

Vitamin C tablets are made by using a binding material that does not dissolve and will leave a residue in the bottle. The use of tablets will necessitate the daily brushing of the bottle. The recommended dosage for an 8 oz. bottle is one 100 mg. tablet and this is added to the water daily. Whether or not you use vitamins in the water, the water bottle and the crock should be washed with hot soapy water at least once a week.

## Fresh Foods

Cavies enjoy any of the fresh vegetables and fruits your family would enjoy. The rule of thumb when introducing cavies to different foods is, "give them a little and introduce them one at a time". Cavies, like people, have individual and preferential tastes. What one cavy enjoys, another may totally ignore. Much of the vitamin C requirements of a cavy can be satisfied through the addition of fresh foods to the diet. If you are relying on fresh fruits and vegetables to supply the required vitamin C these foods should be fed every day. One half of an orange would satisfy the vitamin requirement for one cavy daily. Some vegetables high in vitamin C are kale, broccoli and spinach. Cabbage is also very high in vitamin C but seems to always be a controversy. If the cavy likes cabbage and it has not been sprayed, then by all means give your cavy cabbage. Any fruits or vegetables that have been sprayed should not be fed to your cavy. When feeding fruits and vegetables wash them thoroughly and cut out any bruised spots. Dandelion is another source of green food for the cavy that can be found in almost everyone's lawn. As long as the lawn has not been sprayed or treated in any way, you can harvest the dandelion. Cavies also love hay.

Hay can be given in small amounts. Giving too much hay at once would be wasteful. It would only get trampled and soiled. The hay should be green and have a fresh, sweet scent. Discard any hay that is moldy, off-color, or has a moldy scent. The hay you feed should be free of thistle and any other bramble. Orchard grass is excellent, is available and the next best hay would be timothy.

## Maintaining Good Health

When all of the cavy's basic needs have been met: draft-free environment, clean bedding, fresh food and water every day, your cavy should not experience any health problems. However, like people, they do suffer from colds and other illnesses. If you find your cavy is not eating or drinking, has eye and/or nasal discharge, ruffled appearance or diarrhea, it is wise to contact a veterinarian. Until you get your cavy to the veterinarian you should increase his vitamin C. If the cavy will not drink on his own, you can give him water using an eyedropper. You can also add some Karo Syrup to the water as a food energy source.

Cavies are members of the rodent family, and like their cousins rats, mice, etc. their front incisors continue to grow throughout their lives. Although they do not grow as fast as their distant cousins teeth, cavies do like to chew on wood. If there isn't a piece of wood (preferably pine) available they will chew on the cage wire and also on the feed crock. Occasionally they will pull their teeth out of alignment and this will cause them to grow unevenly. Since their teeth do grow continuously, it may be necessary to clip the front incisors, so they may continue to eat. If this happens to your cavy please seek the help and advice of a veterinarian or a professional breeder.

Occasionally your cavy may scratch, and this is perfectly normal. However, if he scratches himself excessively and is losing hair, there may be a problem with lice and mites. The mites and lice that infect cavies can only be transmitted between cavies. They cannot be transmitted to humans. The cavy mite appears as "peppering" around the lower hindquarters and jaws. These mites live off the dead skin particles and they will usually attach themselves to the hair shaft. The cavy louse appears white and are usually seen around the ears. Lice usually cause more discomfort to the cavy. Both lice and mites can be treated using a cat flea spray or powder. The cavy should be sprayed or powdered once a week for at least six weeks. This length of time is necessary to break the life cycle of the mite and louse. While the spray/powder will kill the adult lice and mites, it will have no effect on the eggs. It is necessary to repeat the treatment to eliminate the problem. A word of caution - be careful not to dust or spray around the eyes and mouth.

Occasionally it may be necessary to trim the cavy's toenails. This can be accomplished by using a dog/cat nail clipper. You must be careful not to cut too close as you may nick the vein in the toenail. If this happens bleeding can be curtailed by applying an ice-cube to the nail or by using a styptic pencil.

To ensure A Health And Happy Cavy:  
1. Clean the cage at least once a week.

2. Wash and disinfect the feed crock and water bottle once a week.
  3. Feed and water the cavy every day.
- And most important! Give him lots of love and attention!

In conclusion, your pet cavy will be a lovable, delightful pet. Provide for his most basic needs and you will be rewarded with devoted companionship for about 4 to 6 years.

This pamphlet has been provided by the America Cavy Breeders Association and by the following sponsors:

**ASSOCIATION:** The American Cavy Breeders Association is a "specialty club" of the American Rabbit Breeders Association, our parent organization. The ARBA provides us with judges, a Standard of Perfection, show rules and various important record-keeping junctions. It is recommended that the serious cavy enthusiast join both the American Cavy Breeders Association and the American Rabbit Breeders Association. You may obtain information on the ARBA by writing: Secretary, American Rabbit Breeders Assoc., P.O. Box 426, Bloomington, IL 61701.

## AMERICAN CAVY BREEDERS ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I hereby make application for membership in the AMERICAN CAVY BREEDERS ASSOCIATION. and agree to abide by its Constitution and By-Laws; whenever possible to attend and support shows; and to further the interest of the Cavy in every possible way.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Youth Names & Birth Dates:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

DUES: Adult \$15.00 \$40.00 3 years  
Youth (under 18) \$10.00 \$25.00 3 years  
Family \$20.00 \$50.00 3 years  
Subscription \$10.00 year  
(Receives Journals Only)  
Canadian: Additional \$5.00  
Foreign : Additional \$10.00

New memberships receive the Guide Book, Yearbook, Membership card and the ACBA Journal, published quarterly.

Please mail your application and payment to:  
Walter Linker, Secretary ACBA  
3034 Forest Oaks Drive  
Orange Park, FL 32073