

Chinchilla Housing

Cages should be at least 2 ft x 2 ft for small chinchillas, preferably with multiple levels for exercise. They should have plenty of room to move around with areas for food and water. We do not recommend housing chinchillas together, especially mixing males and females.

Wire cages with plastic bottoms are best. Plastic-bottomed cages and wire cages with coating tend to last longer, as they do not rust. Wire-bottom cages must have netting that is small enough to prevent your pet's leg from getting trapped in the wire. The wire-bottom cages should have a tray underneath to catch litter and hay, but you should also have a litter box, as chinchillas prefer using one area as their "toilet".

Chinchillas require a weekly dust bath to keep clean. Some chinchilla cages come with a "dust house" on the side of the cage, but it is not necessary to have a bath always available. We recommend keeping a tin box, about the size of a litter box, filled with chinchilla dust. Once a week, open the box and place it in the cage. The chin will roll around as it needs, and when it's done, remove the box and replace the lid. This prevents you from needing to buy dust as often and keeps the dust clean and dry.

Bedding should consist of shredded newspaper or hay. Litter boxes should have either a recycled paper product (Carefresh or Yesterday's News). Wood shavings can cause liver and respiratory illnesses, so we do not recommend them for any pet. Clay litters expand in a chinchilla's stomach and can cause gastrointestinal blockages if accidentally ingested; therefore we never recommend clay litter for chinchillas, guinea pigs, or other small friends.

Water bottles are the easiest for keeping clean, fresh water for chinchillas. However, if the bottles are outdoors, they often grow algae. Clean bottles weekly with a mild dish soap, rinsing well before putting drinking water (filtered or bottled, not tap water) back into the bottle.

Chinchillas should be let out of their cages for at least an hour daily for exercise. You can let them hop around in a small room, but be careful of carpet, furniture, and electrical cords as they have a natural tendency to chew on everything. While your chinchilla is out of his cage, make sure you have a litter box and plenty of water and hay available on the floor.

It is best to wrap electrical cords with plastic cord protectors (several layers work best) or to place wood panels to cover outlets and cords. These panels should be about 2.5 feet high to prevent chewing on the panels and damaging the walls (chinchillas love chewing on wood trim and molding).

Chinchillas are prey animals, meaning that they are food for predators such as hawks, owls and dogs. If you let your chinchilla run outside, provide shelter for protection from predators. Dogs, cats, and chinchillas can get along; however you never want to leave a chinchilla unsupervised with a dog or cat.