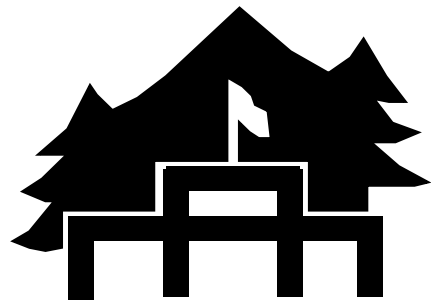


Chimacum School District's

ANIMALS IN THE CLASSROOM

Safety & Care Guidelines



**ANIMALS PROHIBITED IN THE CLASSROOM:
(No wild animals of any type are allowed in
classrooms*)**

Small Animals

Raccoons, baby raccoons
Squirrels
Bats
Wild rodents
Aggressive rabbits

Snakes, Reptiles & Amphibians

Large pythons
Ball pythons
Frogs (wild)
Turtles
Caymans (small)
Alligators

Birds

All psittacine (hooked bill) birds
Parrots
Parakeets
Cockateels
Baby chicks, chickens
Turkeys
Ducks
Any wild or injured birds

Fish

Dangerous fish such as piranhas, and those with
venom.

Insects

Bees
Centipedes
Spiders

*** Animals in this category may only be brought in
by special arrangement for an assembly or
presentation as approved by the Principal, and
only when under the care of a professional
handler in compliance with Washington State
Administrative Codes, including 246-100.**

**ANIMALS ALLOWED IN THE CLASSROOM:
(Must be bred in captivity)**

Small Animals

Guinea pigs
Hamsters
Rabbits (hand raised)
Mice
Rats

Snakes, Reptiles & Amphibians

Leopard gecko
Inland bearded dragon
Corn snake
Boa constrictor (under 8 ft. In length)
Tree frog
Argentine horned frog

Birds

Most birds are banned from schools by the
Dept. of Health due to Psittacosis.

Fish

Most types of fish are allowed

**ANIMALS allowed
for short term classroom visits
(Show & Tell)**

Dogs, cats and pets listed above are allowed by
prior arrangement with the classroom teacher
and the Principal.

**For complete details on WHY certain animals
are not acceptable classroom pets, please
continue reading.**

ANIMALS IN THE CLASSROOM SAFETY & CARE GUIDELINES

Introduction

The purpose of this manual is to provide information for safe handling and care of classroom animals, for the protection of all in the Chimaquum Schools. Responsible and humane handling of animals is important for many reasons, but especially because animals that are properly cared for make better pets. Mishaps with classroom animals can be avoided and this manual tells how. If a bite happens or an animal escapes in spite of all our care and efforts, these guidelines explain what to do.

1. Parents should be notified if a live animal is to be kept in their child's classroom. Children who have allergies, asthma or any breathing difficulty may react unfavorably to confined exposure of this sort.
2. Keeping and handling of live animals in classrooms should be in a designated area only. Designated areas will be determined by the building principal and classroom teacher and shall include impervious cleanable surfaces with spot ventilation directly to the outside of the building.
3. Cages should be lockable and cleaned daily either by the classroom teacher or by students with adult supervision. Feces, urine, fur, feathers & feed may adversely affect indoor air quality (IAQ).
4. If adverse IAQ is a concern, remove all animals and live specimens from the school until the issue is adequately addressed. Classroom animals and live specimens are a common cause of indoor air quality problems.
5. Improper care and handling of classroom "pets" can result in exposure of students and staff to salmonella, campylobacter, psittacosis (parrot fever), rabies, toxoplasmosis, lice, ticks, fleas, as well as bites, scratches and stings. The location of the nearest first aid kits should be designated
6. A copy of this booklet must be available in the classroom for handy reference.

The American Lung Association and the Washington State Dept. of Health have some recommendations and requirements concerning live animals in school &/or public settings. For further information, see WAC 246-100 & 110, and local Health Department guidelines.

Care and Handling of Classroom Pets

Small Animals

Small animals such as guinea pigs, hamsters, mice and rats can make very good classroom pets if proper care is taken to avoid accidents. All student contact with animals should be organized and supervised. Whenever possible, leather gloves should be worn when handling animals. **Hands should be washed after gloves are**

removed. Children should not touch animals with their faces. (Almost all accidents can be avoided. Please see "Mishaps, Bites and Escaped Animals" later in this manual.)

Animals that are well cared for do make better pets! Keep bedding clean and dry; and cages well ventilated. Cages should be cleaned daily. Feed pets appropriate foods on a regular basis and keep fresh water available at all times. Use a metal screen or net to keep flammable bedding material from touching lights or heat lamps. Be sure that pets are not exposed to extreme temperatures, especially heat radiating through sunny windows.

Hands should always be washed after handling animals, cages, bedding, etc.

Snakes, Reptiles and Amphibians

There are many reptiles available through pet stores and dealers. Some are better suited to classroom study than others. Remember that reptiles are a long-term acquisition. Many live for 10 to 20 years.

Careful research on behavior patterns and required care is recommended before acquiring a classroom reptile. The Herpetocultural Library Series is an excellent resource for information about specific reptiles. (See "Resources" for more information on how to obtain these books.)

This small list of reptiles suggested for classroom study was developed with help from experts at the Woodland Park Zoo.

leopard gecko	boa constrictor (under 8 ft in length)
inland bearded dragon	tree frog
corn snake	Argentine horned frog

Reptile tanks and aquariums should be as natural as possible, and maintained appropriately. Feeding should be handled by an adult. **HANDS SHOULD BE WASHED** after handling a reptile, as should all surfaces the reptile has touched. (Please read "Preventing Salmonella".)

Using Latin (or "scientific") names is not a way of showing off obscure knowledge. It's the proper and accurate way of specifically referring to a kind of living thing. Knowing the Latin name for reptiles and amphibians means that much more information is accessible in the scientific and even in the popular literature about reptiles and amphibians -- information that may be critical to properly caring for an animal.

Suggested Reading List

Due to the increased interest in reptiles and amphibians, there is more literature available on them than ever before.

Living Snakes of the World, by Mehrtens

Giant Lizards, by Sprackland

Breeding Vivarium Animals, by Zimmerman

Encyclopedia of Turtles, by Pritchard

Keeping and Breeding Geckos, by Senfer

Amphibians and Reptiles of the Pacific Northwest, by Nussbaum et al

Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians, by Stebbins

Life of Reptiles, by Bellairs

Reproductive Husbandry of Pythons and Boas by Ross & Marzec

Living Reptiles of the World by Schmidt & Inger

Living Amphibians of the World by Cochran

Atlas of Reptiles and Amphibians for the Terrarium, by Obst et al

Reptiles and Amphibians in Captivity: Breeding, Longevity, and Inventory by Slavens & Slavens

Birds

The Department of Health prohibits most birds from classrooms. Psittacine birds (hook beaked) such as parrots and parakeets may carry and transmit a harmful bacterial disease called psittacosis (parrot fever). Baby chicks and ducks often carry salmonella and/or campylobacter, dangerous bacteria that are especially harmful to children.

Fish and Aquariums

Fish aquariums should be cleaned and cared for regularly. Used tank water should be disposed of in sinks that are not used for food preparation, or for obtaining water for human consumption.

Weekend, Vacation Care

Be sure that classroom pets and animals are fed and cared for on weekends and during school vacations. It is especially important to find good, qualified summer caretakers who are interested in caring for a pet. This should be considered BEFORE a classroom "adopts" an animal. Often, adult volunteers can be found to pick up pets and take them home over weekends and vacations. Alternative care and arrangements should also be made in case of severe weather and unexpected closure of school.

Veterinarian Care

Teachers should select a veterinarian for the classroom pet and have instructions for substitute staff, should an emergency arise. (A note kept near the animal's cage would work nicely.) The Chimacum School District is not responsible for the costs incurred from veterinarian visits.

ANIMALS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR CLASSROOMS

SMALL ANIMALS

<u>TYPE OF ANIMAL</u>	<u>SAFETY PROBLEM/DISEASE</u>
Raccoons, baby raccoons	not bred in captivity, unpredictable
Squirrels	not bred in captivity, unpredictable
Bats	rabies, should not be held in captivity
Wild rodents	unpredictable, biting
Aggressive rabbits	unpredictable, biting

Even very small animals from the wild should never be kept as classroom pets. They can harbor very serious diseases like rabies as well as pests like lice and fleas.

Note: Kittens and puppies are only appropriate for short classroom visits. They can carry salmonella and/or campylobacter, which are harmful to small children.

SNAKES, REPTILES, AMPHIBIANS

<u>TYPE OF ANIMAL</u>	<u>SAFETY PROBLEM/DISEASE</u>
Large pythons	biting, aggressive behavior
Ball pythons	from the wild, should not be held in captivity

Lizards	difficult to care for, usually not bred as pets, salmonella
Frogs (wild)	salmonella, should not be held in captivity
Turtles	high rates of salmonella
Caymans, small	high rates of salmonella
Alligators	unpredictable, biting, salmonella (prohibited)

All reptiles and amphibians can carry salmonellosis, even when bred as pets or for display. Children, without close adult supervision, should not handle them. Salmonella is very harmful to children and can sometimes even be fatal. **ALWAYS WASH HANDS THOROUGHLY AFTER HANDLING reptiles and amphibians.**

Since there are so many reptiles available as pets, a list of snakes and reptiles that are easy to handle is provided in this manual. This list was compiled with help from the Woodland Park Zoo.

BIRDS, FISH, INSECTS

<u>TYPE OF ANIMAL</u>	<u>SAFETY PROBLEM/DISEASE</u>
Baby chicks, chickens	salmonella, campylobacter (very harmful to small children)
**parrots, parakeets, cockateels (psittacine birds)	psittacosis
Wild or injured birds	lice, unpredictable
Dangerous fish such as piranhas, etc.	biting, prohibited
Bees (not enclosed/encased)	biting, stings (allergic reaction)
Centipedes	biting, stings
Spiders	biting, possibly venomous

****(Washington State law restricts keeping Psittacine birds in classrooms due to the possibility of spread of infection)**

Diseases We Get From Animals

Salmonella and Campylobacter

Salmonella bacteria is probably the most likely disease to be passed from classroom pets to students. Salmonella is very commonly carried by reptiles and amphibians from the wild, and from pet stores. The Health Department reports that at least half the reptiles sold in Washington State may carry the salmonella bacteria. Baby birds, chicks, ducks, frogs, puppies and even kittens can also carry salmonella. Campylobacter is a dangerous bacterial disease that can be transmitted to small children. Humans can get salmonella or campylobacter simply by touching or handling animals, then touching food, or mouths.

Preventing salmonella/campylobacter Reptiles should not be kissed or touched by a child's face. Hands should be washed immediately after handling with warm water and antibacterial soap. If reptiles are placed on a surface outside their aquarium, be sure to clean the area afterwards with a spray-on disinfectant cleaner. Carefully clean desks, or tables used for eating. Use a toilet or utility sink (not a kitchen sink) to empty tank water.

Symptoms of salmonella infection: Stomach pain, diarrhea, nausea, headache, chills and high fever (up to 105 degrees). Symptoms show within 6 to 72 hours for salmonella.

Symptoms of campylobacter infection" The symptoms are the same as salmonella but take 1-5 days to appear.

Psittacosis

Also known as parrot fever, psittacosis is a bacteria that is passed through the air to humans, from parakeets, parrots and cockatoos (Psittacine birds). This disease is so hard to control that these types of birds are restricted by law from public places, unless the birds are contained in a separate room or glassed-in aviary. Other birds including pigeons and turkeys can also carry and transmit psittacosis to humans.

Symptoms: Symptoms include fever, headache, chills, muscle aches and cough. Symptoms show in 4 to 15 days. Symptoms may be mild but may result in heart or other organ damage.

Rabies

Rabies is a virus transmitted to humans when bitten by an infected animal such as a dog, cat, raccoon or bat. Cases of rabies in humans are rare but every precaution should be taken with wild animals or animals exhibiting strange behavior. Bites from bats, wild animals such as raccoons, and of domestic animals such as dogs, must immediately be reported to the Jefferson County Health Department ~ (360) 385-9400 and Animal Control ~ (360) 385-3831.

Symptoms of Rabies: An ill feeling, headache, fever, and numbness at site of bite; spasms of throat muscles, delirium and convulsions. Symptoms show in 2 weeks to 2 months and as long as 13 months after exposure.

Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is contracted through contact with feces of infected kittens or cats. Toxoplasmosis can be transmitted from pregnant mothers to unborn babies.

Symptoms : Include fatigue, muscle pain; in rare cases brain damage or death may occur. The same symptoms may appear in the unborn child.

Mishaps, Bites and Escaped Animals

Mishaps such as bites, escaped animals and spilled aquariums can be avoided!

Students should ALWAYS be supervised when handling or petting animals. (Whenever possible, leather gloves should be worn to prevent bites/scratches)

Organize students into small groups for close study or handling of animals. (Small groups can be more easily controlled, will have less impact on animals, and will probably learn more.)

Animal bites can usually be avoided if students are carefully supervised and kept in small groups

- Rough play or teasing should not be allowed
- Small seated groups are quieter and less likely to frighten animals
- Children can have positive interaction with small mammals, like rabbits, while sitting on the floor in a circle.

Surprisingly, rabbits do not like to be held and may kick with powerful hind legs. They will struggle to free themselves. Young students should not hold bunnies.

- Rabbits can chew through electrical cords. Be careful for their sake and yours.

If an animal escapes and is not immediately retrieved, notify building administrative and custodial staff to be "on the lookout" until the animal is found. Missing snakes can usually be found by waiting until the room they are kept in has been totally dark for at least 30 minutes. Enter with a flashlight and search quickly. Throwing

a towel or net over an escaped animal will often allow an adult time to pick up the pet. A broom can be used to corner an animal until they can be picked up. Use extreme care to not injure the animal or cause panic.

Cages, fish bowls, and aquariums should be kept out of reach of students, especially young children, when not being studied. All cages should be well constructed and have latches!

When cleaning, use spare cages and aquariums for temporary animal housing rather than allow students to hold animals.

Fish tanks and aquariums should be cleaned by an adult:

- Tanks filled with water are heavy and can easily be spilled by younger students (no matter how careful they are).
- Aquarium lights and aeration systems are powered by electricity. Keep water away from electrical outlets and extension cords.
- Keep flammable materials such as straw, paper, and wood shreds, from contact with bulbs to avoid risk of fire. Metal screens or netting can be useful for this purpose.

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD STUDENTS BE ALLOWED TO STICK THEIR FINGERS INTO A CAGE WITH AN ANIMAL INSIDE.

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF ANIMAL BITE

Animal bites can be serious and should be treated medically if skin is broken or the area is painful.

Animal Bite Reporting Procedures

A bite or a scratch from ANY animal that results in the breakage of skin **MUST** be reported to your Building Administrator and normal accident procedures followed. All incidents of unusual behavior by the animal must be noted.

Bites from wild animals such as raccoons, and other domestic animals such as dogs and cats **must** be reported to the Jefferson County Health Department at (385-9400) **and** Jefferson County Animal Control (385-3831).

Any animals exhibiting unusual behavior should be reported to building principal immediately.

RESOURCES

Woodland Park Zoo
550 Phinney Ave. N.
Seattle, WA 98103
(206) 684-4800

Herpetocultural Library
(Reptile Books)
available at pet stores or
Public Library

SPECIAL THANKS TO: Seattle Public Schools, and The Woodland Park Zoo for help in creating this informational book.

FLEAS: Siphonaptera

There are approximately 1,000 species of fleas in the world and about 250 are found in North America. The most common are the cat, dog, and human fleas. Other well-known species include the bird, oriental sticktight, squirrel, and coyote fleas.

Fleas are vectors of bubonic plague, and are carriers of other disease-causing organisms including parasitic tapeworms and pathogens causing murine typhus (Brill's disease), melioidosis, and tularemia.

Life Cycle:

Within 27 days, metamorphosis, from egg to larva, to pupa and finally to adult, is completed. Complete metamorphosis is temperature-dependent. At room temperature, the cycle is usually complete in 19-27 days.

Eggs

Adult fleas lay their eggs in dirt and lint found in the nests and bedding of their hosts and in their hosts' fur. Fleas lay several hundred eggs in their life time. After a blood meal, the female will lay 4 to 8 eggs. The average life span of the flea is 18 months; however, this varies with weather.

Larva

Flea larvae are whitish, legless, worm-like creatures with leg hooks that help them cling to the host's feathers or hairs. Although capable of crawling on dirt and debris, larvae shun light and prefer to bury themselves.

Flea larvae weave silken cocoons spun out of saliva and particles gathered from their environment. This process provides camouflage for them. Fleas have been implicated in the transmission of tapeworms to dogs and humans. Children are more likely to be infected with tapeworms than adults because of their playing habits. Humans do not harbor the adult worm.

Pupa

Pupa have a creamy white outer casing which later turns brownish. The final metamorphosis, from pupa to adult, can only take place through vibrations caused by the host's visit to the pupal site. Sometimes this takes months. This stage can only occur when the pupa is moved or vibrated. This unique requirement for completion of metamorphosis usually is accomplished when the host returns to the nest or bedding site.

Adult

Fleas, sometimes called "Jumping Dandruff," have flat, narrow reddish or chestnut brown colored bodies less than one-quarter inch long. Their helmet-shaped head is fairly small and their bodies are covered with bristles that point backwards. Adult fleas are wingless and have strong, muscular legs adapted for jumping. These external parasites are extremely agile, making their way through fur, feathers, or clothing. Both males and females have, and use, their sucking mouth parts for obtaining blood meals. The male is usually smaller than the fertilized female.

Flea Bite

A small spot with a red halo appears where a host is bitten. There is usually very little swelling. The allergic, dermal reactions seen are caused by the salivary gland secretions that enter the wound.

Relief for fleabites can include:

1. Carbolyated vaseline
2. Calamine lotion
3. Cooling preparations, many available over the counter

4. If serious itching or allergic reaction appears from flea bites, contact a physician.

General Control

The first line of defense is prevention. Overall sanitation plays an important role for control such as:

1. Screen foundation vents to eliminate animals or pests entering or leaving under buildings;
2. Wash and clean the classroom pet's bedding regularly;
3. Vacuum carpet regularly; and dispose of vacuum cleaner bag in an outdoor garbage receptacle;
4. Do not allow pets such as dogs, cats, or birds in buildings unless they have been treated for flea control;
5. Report stray and/or wild cats to local humane society if on District Property.

Notify the Director of Maintenance if you suspect a flea problem in your building.

CARE OF SMALL MAMMALS

Common Small Mammals: Mouse, Hamster, Gerbil, Rat

Small mammals have become popular companions for children because of their small size, friendly dispositions and ease of care. With proper attention to their needs, small mammals can live full and happy lives in a minimum of space. These characteristics also make them good companions for adults who live in apartments and work long hours.

Housing

The cage should be made from wire or glass, not wood or plastic which will be easily chewed. A wire mesh cage or glass aquarium are the best types of caging. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. Wire cages allow the animal space to climb, are well ventilated, and can be divided into different levels. Negative points are that they can be drafty, the bedding may leak out, and urine may corrode the metal. Glass aquariums effectively contain bedding and provide a draft-free environment. Aquariums do not allow the animal to climb, and do need more frequent cleaning than a wire cage as they experience a build up of condensation and ammonia from urine. An aquarium should be fitted with a snug-fitting screen to prevent the animal from escaping, something at which most small mammals are quite adept.

Since the small mammal will spend the vast majority of his life in the cage, it is important that it be as big as possible. It should provide room to eat, sleep, exercise and play. A square or rectangular shaped cage is better than a round one, as many of these animals enjoy sitting or sleeping in corners. Minimum cage sizes are given below (measurements are in inches).

ANIMAL	LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT
Gerbil	20x10x8
Mouse	12x8x6
Hamster	22x14x8
Rat	24x12x12

The cage should be placed in a draft-free area, out of direct sunlight. High pitched noises can be very distressing to small rodents, so place the cage with this in mind, away from TV remotes, squeaky door hinges, computers, ringing phones, etc. It should be cleaned at least once a week, more often if necessary. The cage can be washed in diluted bleach, then rinsed and dried thoroughly.

Bedding and Furnishings

Softwood shavings or hay are the best types of bedding with which to line your small mammal's cage. Do not use cedar or hardwood chips as the oils they contain can be harmful to the animal. Shredded paper towel or tissue can be offered for nesting material. Do not use newspaper as the ink it contains can be poisonous. All small mammals should be supplied with a nest box, a hiding place to which the animal can retreat for privacy. A smooth edged coffee can or used oatmeal container makes a good nest box.

Toys should be supplied for both exercise and enjoyment. All small mammals, except rats, should have a metal (not plastic) exercise wheel. Most wheels are too small for rats and can injure their tails. All rodents enjoy objects to climb on and in, such as ladders, blocks, empty orange juice cans and paper towel tubes.

Diet

A good staple diet for most small mammals is a commercially prepared mix available at pet supply stores. For rats, mice, hamsters and gerbils this mix will contain a variety of seeds, grains and baked pellets. In addition, fresh foods should be offered daily. Small amounts of fruits and vegetables should be given, with lefovers removed before they spoil. Favorite items include apples and carrots. In addition, a mineral lick should be supplied. Fresh water should be available at all times, to which a vitamin supplement may be added. Items on which to chew are vital to small rodents, as their teeth grow continuously throughout life and can grow so long that they impair eating. Chew sticks, such as fruit tree twigs or branches, should be offered, and replaced as needed. Additional items that make good chew toys are pine cones,

untreated wood blocks and whole walnuts. Dog biscuits are enjoyed by many rodents, especially rats, as they offer chewing enjoyment as well as something to eat.

Food should be offered in bowls that are heavy enough not to be easily knocked over and small enough to stop the animal from climbing in and leaving droppings. Dry food, such as seeds and grains which will not spoil, may be placed directly in the litter. When the litter is cleaned, however, uneaten food will need to be sealed in a leak proof bag and disposed of directly in the dumpster.

Handling

With frequent, gentle handling your small mammal will come to enjoy being taken from his cage. Always use two hands when picking the animal up and support both ends of his body. When holding or carrying the animal, keep him close to your body so that he feels secure and does not try to jump. Until he is accustomed to being handled, always keep a grip on the base of the animal's tail and handle him over the cage or while sitting. This will keep him from falling out of your hand, an act that can easily be fatal. Most small mammals are nocturnal, and sleep much of the day. It is best not to wake them during this time, but wait until evening before removing them from their cage.

Although all small mammals enjoy exercise time out of their cage, this is especially important for rats. Large and active, rats thrive on social contact as well as a stimulating environment. If not provided with this on a daily basis, they become bored and even neurotic.

Health

All small mammals are very susceptible to respiratory infections if left in a draft or exposed to very cold temperatures. This is why the placement of the cage is of great importance. Overall, small rodents are very hardy and thrive with consistent care and a good diet. It is important to know the signs to watch for that may indicate that your animal is sick. These include; diarrhea; ruffled coat, weight loss, listlessness, loss of appetite, or discharge from the nose or eyes. If your animal shows any of these symptoms, a veterinarian should be contacted.

Numbers of animals

Most of the small rodents kept as companions are social animals. Rats, mice and gerbils enjoy living with others of their species. Same sex pairs, or opposite sex pairs in which the male is neutered, are the best combinations. Same sex pairs usually must be raised together from birth to prevent fighting. If these social animals do live alone, their human companions have an added obligation to supply them with the social interactions they need, through daily handling and time spent out of the cage. Hamsters, however, are not particularly social, and seem not to mind living alone.

Reproduction

Along with their popularity, small mammals have also acquired many of the problems that face other types of companion animals. Like their feline and canine counterparts, small rodents are often bought on impulse and as soon as their guardian tires of their "cuteness", they are neglected or discarded. Their rapid reproductive capacity, combined with their human's lack of forethought, has also made them chronic examples of the pet overpopulation problem. PAWS receives approximately 100 unwanted small mammals each year. Many are unwanted youngsters from unplanned litters. The vast majority of these animals do not find new homes.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT RABBITS AND GUINEA PIGS

Can rabbits really be litterbox trained?

Yes! Rabbits can be box trained! It is however, much easier if the rabbit is neutered or spayed. It is best to provide a few litterboxes or a cage at first. Clay litter must never be used in the boxes as the rabbits may eat it and become seriously ill. Crown animal bedding and/or hay is the best material.

Can guinea pigs be litterbox trained?

There is much debate on this subject. It depends on the guinea pig. Some will return to a cage or box to go potty while others will not.

Can a rabbit be a good housepet?

A rabbit can be a wonderful house pet. They are clean and can be box trained. They can be very affectionate and are fun to watch. Rabbits are very intelligent and do many amazing things.

Why can't we turn unwanted rabbits loose?

In the wild rabbits live an average of less than two years, compared to 8-10 years in a good home. They are subject to animal attacks, disease, injury, and starvation. Shelter rabbits are domesticated and cannot survive on their own. Over a long period of time, significant differences have developed between wild and domesticated rabbits. An example of this is the breeding cycle. Wild rabbits breed seasonally, our shelter rabbits are always ready to breed. Lets not mess with Mother Nature by ruining the two populations.

Do these animals bite?

Rabbits can bite especially if they are frightened or feel their territory is being invaded. You should use caution in approaching a strange rabbit. In general, rabbits do not bite without cause. A guinea pig will rarely bite.

Can these animals get along with other pets?

Rabbits seem to get along well with other animals. There are of course exceptions. An introduction should be done with caution and supervision. Rabbits should not live in the same house as ferrets. The same applies to guinea pigs.

Can rabbits or guinea pigs jump fences or dig under fences?

Rabbits can dig under fences and jump over them. Outdoor fences must be at least 3.5 feet high or covered. Fences must also be extended underground. Guinea pigs do not jump high or dig. Cage or fence walls need only be 10 inches high.

How often do you have to clean their cages?

Rabbit cages should be cleaned thoroughly once a week; litterboxes should be cleaned once a day. With a guinea pig it will depend on the type of bedding and number of pigs. At least once a week is recommended, but it may need to be done once a day.

What kind of shots do they need?

These animals don't need shots.

Should I get two animals? What is the best combination?

Two are always happier than one, but it also takes more time and money. The best combination is a male and female-one or both fixed. A female/female mix also works. A male/male combination can sometimes work, but don't try it if you have a choice.

If I only get one rabbit, why do I need to get it fixed?

Male and female rabbits spray if not fixed. They can also be moody and less social if not fixed. Up to 95% of females die within 5 years of ovarian cancer if not spayed.

Should I spay/neuter my guinea pig?

There is NOT a large difference between a fixed or non-fixed pig. However if you have two, make sure a vet correctly sexes them. When the two sexes are living together, make sure one is fixed.

How do I handle and communicate with these animals?

Rabbits do not like being held. If you want to communicate with a rabbit, get down on their level-the floor. They will nudge, kiss and jump all over you. Guinea pigs love to be talked to and will tolerate being held. Guinea pigs vocalize a lot. If you watch them, you can figure out what some of their sounds signify.

Why can't our rabbit live outside in a hutch?

Rabbits are active and social animals. Would you keep your cat in a box outside all day and night? An outside rabbit can fall prey to an animal attack. Much of the fun of having a rabbit will be missed if they are kept outside.

What about chewing?

Rabbits and Guinea pigs can be quite destructive with their chewing. This does vary from animal to animal. Some won't chew at all, some will eat your house. There are many bitter products that will stop your pet from chewing. None have been found to be 100% successful. The best idea is to bunny-proof the house and discipline the animal when needed. All electrical cords should be covered with plastic tubing. ALL books should be moved from the animal's reach. If carpet chewing is a problem, cover the area with linoleum, a rug, or a piece of carpet remnant. You can also find plastic strips to cover baseboards and furniture.

How much does it cost to keep a rabbit or small mammal?

The initial expense may be large. A good, large cage can cost up to \$80-\$100. You may also need to buy a water bottle, food dishes, and a litterbox. Hay, food and litter can be cheap if bought in bulk. If hay is used as litter a months supply is about \$6 if bought at a feed store. A three month supply of food for a rabbit is about \$5. As with other pets, vet care is expensive. A yearly checkup can cost about \$25 but is important and can prevent serious and more expensive problems.

Why do rabbits lie around and not doing anything?

Rabbits are usually most active in the morning and evening. They spend a large period of the day resting. As soon as the sunbeams fall, the circus begins. Watch your rabbit run, flip and frolic.