

Pig Care Guide

Having pigs in your life can be a wonderful experience and very rewarding, but only if you think through your decision very carefully before you adopt and ensure you and your family understand and accept all that will be required of you as a responsible, loving pig owner.

Everything should be prepared before your pig arrives. Make sure you have all the necessary fencing if your pig is being kept outdoors and check that your pig's shelter and bedding is all prepared. Make sure there is fresh, clean water in the area for them to drink, as well as a small amount of food for them – this will help them to settle in their new home.



In their new housing, let your pig come to you when they are ready. She might take some time to approach you, once she feels comfortable enough. When she approaches, move and talk slowly and gently and try not to make any sudden movements or loud noises that might scare your pig. It might also help to have a few food treats with you when your pig approaches, as this will help your pig think positively of you. Once your pig is comfortable with you, try giving her a pat or two - this might take some time so don't rush it.

Remember that once you get your pig home, everything is brand new for them, which might be a little frightening for them. Your pig will probably check out their new home by sniffing and rooting around the area with his/her snout. Make sure you keep a watchful eye out for your new pig at this time, as they are very curious, especially in new environments. It also helps to have made sure there is nothing your pig can get access to that might be dangerous for them, such as chewing on electric wires or loose parts of their housing or shelter.



A good way to start to tame your pig is by gentle handling at feeding time - touching their backs gently, talking in low tones and stroking and scratching them. The best places to touch your pig are behind the ears, shoulders, along the back and down their sides. Many companion pigs enjoy cuddling their owners and will often approach and nudge themselves up against them, asking for pats and back rubs. This is a good way to bond with your pig.

Although pigs love affection, some do not enjoy being picked up and will squeal if they do get picked up, whilst others may not mind. If your pig squeals when you pick her up, put her down gently and get her used to being petted instead. If you do decide to pick up your

small piglet/pig, you should remember there are right and wrong ways of picking them up, and they should be picked up carefully with both hands around the body of your pig and then cradled gently against your body whilst carrying.

Once your pig starts to grow, it is safer for both you and your pig if you do not pick them up. Occasionally, you will need to move your pig from area to area, so you should train your pig to respond to commands such as 'come' or even get them to respond by name – the same way as you would call a dog. This way your pig will come when called and you can call her into different areas when required. You can also train your pig to wear a harness, and in this case, she can be walked on a lead.



Pigs are very smart, social animals and a pig alone with nothing to do is likely to be an unhappy pig. Pigs should ideally be kept in pairs or small groups, so they are able to form social groups, have good companionship and feel safe together. This way they can play, forage and sleep together.



Pigs should also be provided with lots of enrichment in their environment to keep them busy, interested and active. You can use toys and activities to keep your pig's clever mind happy, as well as giving them exercise. Also training your pig is another great way to provide stimulation for both you and them.

Ensuring that they have a lot of space in which to display their normal behaviours of foraging and rooting at the ground is also very important, as they can spend over half the day involved in this activity if allowed.

Diet



Pigs will eat just about anything – even things they should not eat, therefore it is very important that you provide your pig with a balanced, nutritious diet to ensure they are eating all the right foods and staying healthy.

Pigs can come in a variety of sizes depending on their breed, so the amount they will need to eat will vary. Like humans, pigs are omnivores so they will eat a

wide variety of food. The average diet for a companion (pet) pig kept at home will consist of a combination of pig nuts (commercial pig pellets) and a variety of limited fruits and vegetables. There is a range of pig food available to buy which are suitable for lifestyle block pigs.

These feed mixes are either in the form of pellets or crushed up. They are made up of soy and grains such as barley, oats and wheat. These feeds contain the right amount of nutrients in them to keep your companion pig healthy. Most pigs will need about 2-3kg of feed mix a day, which should be fed twice daily, but again this will depend on the breed and size of your pig. If you are unsure, it is best to speak to your veterinarian or an experienced pig owner about the right diet for your pig.



Most pigs will graze on grass if they are provided with it in their housing area. However, pigs should not purely live on grass alone. Make sure you are feeding your pig a balanced and varied diet, along with the grass it grazes on. Just be sure to reduce your pig's diet accordingly if he/she is grazing throughout the day.

Hay can also be given to pigs to eat to keep them busy throughout the day. Some pigs do not seem to like hay, but many others will eat it willingly. If you do choose to try and feed your pet pig hay, make sure the hay is of good quality. Pigs will not want to eat dirty or mouldy hay and it's not good for them.

Pigs can eat a variety of produce (fruits and vegetables) in moderation. If you are feeding your pig produce, however, remember to decrease the amount of pellets or feed mix so they are not eating too much. Healthy vegetables that are suitable for pigs include:

Asparagus	Celery
Dark leafy greens such as kale, watercress, collard greens and spinach. These are full of fibre and will make your pig feel full and less hungry	Lettuce
Bean sprouts and green beans	Kumara
Broccoli	Potato
Cabbage	Parsnips
Cauliflower	Peas
Carrots	Pumpkin
Cucumber	Radish
	Turnips
	Tomato (no leaves or plant stems though!)
	Zucchini



Some pigs will prefer their vegetables cooked rather than raw. Any cooked vegetables should be baked or steamed and should not be cooked with butter or salt. The majority of fruits are suitable for pigs including; banana, berries, kiwifruit, mango, nectarine and many others. Remember that fruit must only be fed in limited amounts, as too much can lead to over-eating. Pigs becoming too fat leads to an unhealthy pig.

Just like people, pigs have individual taste preferences and will have foods they dislike and foods that are their favourite! Introduce different healthy foods to your pig to find out what they do and don't like. Once you have found what their favourite foods are, these can also be used as rewards for training your pig.

Pigs will want to eat anything they can, therefore you need to ensure your pig does not eat poisonous foods or those which are harmful to your pig. There are a few foods that pigs should not eat these include:

- *Seeds from apples and pears seeds and kernels from apricots and peaches:* These seeds and kernels contain harmful substances which can make your pig very ill and can even lead to death. When feeding these fruits, always be sure to remove the kernels and seeds first.
- *Wild Mushrooms:* Commercially grown and sold mushrooms are fine to feed to your pig, however, some wild growing mushrooms are likely to be poisonous.
- *Green Potatoes:* Sometimes the tops of potatoes or their sprouts can be green, especially when potatoes have been left in the sun. Make sure you do not give the green parts of potatoes to your pig, otherwise it will get a very bad tummy ache!
- *Rhubarb:* This plant contains an acid in it that is highly toxic to pigs, so avoid giving rhubarb to your pig.
- *Meat:* In New Zealand, it's actually against the law to feed pigs meat or food that has touched meat.



Pigs will eat a variety of foods, and a lot of it, therefore you need to be careful about what, and how much you feed your pig. Pigs can put on weight easily, so you should feed them only what they need to be healthy and full. Pigs that are overweight can develop health problems and become ill. A pig that is overweight is at risk of getting a painful condition in their legs and joints called arthritis. This can make it hard for them to walk.

Other problems overweight pigs may develop include breathing problems, organ failure, and heart disease. You need to be very aware of overfeeding your pig, therefore talking to your local veterinarian about amounts and type of food to feed your pig is important.



Pigs do not have the ability to sweat naturally, so they need a lot of water (and not just for drinking!). The quality of water is also very important as about half the weight of a pig is water! Pigs can drink up to 20 litres of water a day, and they can become very ill (or even die) without enough water. Water should always be fresh and clean so that your pig does not pick up any illness from the water and become ill.

Your pigs should always be able to get to and drink water whenever they need. Pigs usually eat and drink out of large tubs called troughs. Pigs are very playful and have been known to try and swim in their water troughs or flip them over for fun with their very strong noses. This means your pig could end up wasting water, or contaminating it, therefore using a proper water trough or drinker that your pig cannot tip it over, is important.

Suitable Environment

All pigs should live in a suitable and comfortable environment. A pig's home affects how a pig feels, thinks and behaves.

If your pig will be living outside, you will need to make sure their housing area is safe and secure from either them being able to escape or from other animals coming into their environment. This requires sturdy fencing to help keep your pig in its own area, and to prevent them from going into places they shouldn't or possibly becoming lost, or getting hurt. A sturdy fence will also help prevent other animals from disturbing or upsetting your pig.



All pigs need a weatherproof, well-ventilated, comfortable shelter to feel safe and secure in. This might be a shed, or barn or even an arc. Your pig's shelter should keep out the rain and the wind, keeping your pig warm and dry inside. It is also important that their arc is in a sheltered area and not placed directly into the wind.

During the hot summer months, your pig's shelter should also protect them from becoming too hot and should be well ventilated. Make sure that your pig's shelter (arc) isn't made out of material that heats up in the sun (like metal) and it may have vents in the back or side walls which allow the air to move around in the shelter, so it's not too hot.



Inside your pig's shelter, they also need bedding to help keep them warm and dry. Otherwise, it would be like you sleeping without blankets in winter - brrr! Pigs also love to build nests, so the best way to provide for both comfortable, warm bedding and being able to make a good, deep nest, is to provide material for your pig to use. For this, you should use clean, dry straw or hay.

You will need to top up your straw bedding in your pig's shelter regularly, and make sure to check that the bedding is clean and fresh all the time, otherwise, it's not very comfortable for your pig. Make sure you provide enough straw so the bedding and nest can be quite deep. If you have more than one pig, which we recommend, you might notice your pigs cuddling up together, as they are very affectionate and also cuddle up to one another for warmth.

Depending on whether your pig lives in a barn, where the floor might be earthen, or whether they sleep in an arc outside with a wooden floor, the flooring of your pig's shelter should be sturdy and stable, as pigs like to feel their hoofs are firmly on the ground at all times.

The flooring should be slip resistant so that your pig is not likely to slip or fall over and injure themselves. You can ensure this by either using rubber matting on the floor where they walk about in the barn, or cover the area they live in, sleep in, with hay. The flooring should also be comfortable enough that it will not hurt your pig's feet to walk or stand on.



An interesting fact is that pigs are not able to cool down by sweating – like we can – therefore it is very important that they are able to keep cool by other means when the weather is warm. To protect your pig from the sun, and hot temperatures, you should provide shade for their environment outside. This can be done with shady trees or hedges or areas covered by shade cloth, or a sheltered area which provides some moving air out of the sun.

Some pigs also have very light skin and can become sunburnt outside if no shelter is provided – just like you and me. Another way to keep your pig cool is to provide them with a wallow. Pigs love to wallow in mud as a way to cool down and not overheat. For smaller pigs, you might use a small kiddie pool with fresh, clean water, or even hose them down with water outside. For larger pigs, a hole in the ground filled with enough water that the ground around becomes muddy is just perfect for your pig.

This way it creates a wallow, in which your pig will “wallow” in, just make sure that the wallow doesn't dry out or become too deep with mud. Mud can also act as a sunscreen for your pig, providing protection from the sun and keeping your pig cool at the same time.



Pigs love to forage and root up the ground, so there should be grass/pasture available to pigs in the area they live in. Just remember to keep any flower or vegetable gardens fenced off from your pigs if you don't want these to also be rooted up and destroyed by your naturally curious pig.

Contrary to popular belief, pigs are not dirty animals. They actually really enjoy being clean and having a large enough area where they can keep their different living areas separate. For example, your pig needs an area large enough so that the toilet area can be separate to where they sleep. If you provide a large enough area outside, plus a warm comfortable shelter or arc, your pig will go outside to toilet. Pigs are very smart and can also be toilet trained.



Pigs are naturally intelligent, playful animals, therefore the more space you can give them, the better off they will be. A pig who does not have a lot of activity throughout the day or is frustrated because of lack of space can become destructive.

If you have enough space for the pigs to root around on the ground and forage, grassy areas, area where your pig can go to the toilet (away from their sleeping area), enough room for a good muddy wallow, good sturdy fencing and a comfortable shelter - you should have enough space for your pig to live comfortably.

There are many different breeds of pigs, which grow to different sizes - allow more than enough space for your pig based on the final size your pig will become. Depending on where you live, it is always important to check with your local Council on conditions for keep farmed animals on your property.

Behaviour

Foraging: Foraging is a natural behaviour that involves an animal searching for and eating food. In the wild, a large part of a pig's day can be spent foraging for food. So, how do we make sure your pig doesn't get bored – and forage in your dad's rose garden! There are a number of things you can provide for your pig, which stimulates them to forage for their food and prevents boredom:

- Treat balls or dispensers: You can buy special treat balls from a pet store or you can make your own homemade treat dispenser. Basically, these are containers with holes in them that when food is placed inside, your pig has to move the container around to try to make the food fall out.
- Try filling them with things such as carrot sticks, oatmeal, popcorn, cranberries, unsalted nuts or special pig nuts. Your pig can then use its nose to move the ball around and try to get food from it. They find this super fun.
- If your pig is housed and fed outdoors, you can always make their feeding time more exciting. Hiding their food throughout their enclosure encourages your pig to hunt out, forage for and find their own food. For example, you could hide apples and other fruits under piles of hay or make trails out of pig nuts scattered within the hay.
- Cardboard boxes can be filled with hay or crumbled paper - you could also hide a few small food items within them, so that they forage for them within the cardboard box.

- You can freeze fruit or vegetable pieces in water and make an ice block for your pig. Not only will your pig be entertained trying to get to the food inside by licking the ice-block, but this is also a great way to make sure your pig gets a bit more water.

Rooting: Rooting is one of those very important behaviours for pigs. In the wild, pigs can spend up to 40% of their day rooting around in the ground, foraging for food using their very strong noses.



For this very reason, your pig should be kept in a relatively spacious area where they can happily express this behaviour. Remember, your pig does not know the difference between where he/she can root around, or your special garden/flower bed.

Your pig should have an area of paddock available to them that they're allowed to dig up. If this can't be provided, you can make your pig rooting boxes instead. Rooting boxes can be made out of old garden planter boxes, plastic tubs or constructed by an adult out of wood.

The box should be filled with pig safe treats and toys, and then covered with dirt or bark. This allows the pig to have a special area in which they are allowed to root and forage. You will also be meeting two of the pig's most important behavioural needs – rooting and foraging.

Nesting: Pigs or sows (female pigs) have a natural instinct to make nests. This desire is particularly strong in pregnant sows prior to giving birth to their piglets. However, even pigs who are not pregnant feel the need to create a comfortable, nested sleeping area.



If your pig is housed outdoors, you need to provide lots of bedding material that your pig can make his or her bed with - hay is a good choice for this. You can start by slightly breaking up hay bales, from which your pig will move around carry more hay to the bedding area and use her snout to perfect her bed. Ideally, the bedding should be quite deep, so it provides support for your pig, and because pigs love to burrow.

You should aim for bedding to be about 40-50cm deep. Remember to change out the hay regularly and replace it with new fresh hay – pigs don't actually like being dirty and won't want dirty bedding! If housed indoors, you should provide your pig with bedding material such as plain cotton blankets to make a nested bedding area.

Pigs enjoy burrowing and hiding under material while they sleep, so make sure you provide enough blankets to make your pigs bed deep enough. You may also notice from time to time that your indoor pig will sometimes retrieve household objects and take them back to

their nest. Some pigs have been known to take their owners clothing or newspapers to their beds to make a nest out of!

Socialisation: Pigs are social animals, meaning they like to be in the company of other pigs. Pet pigs are happier in pairs or small groups, so if you are able, it is preferable to have another pig so that they keep each other company. Pigs have strong social needs and although they will bond with people, it doesn't replace the fact that another pig usually makes the best companions.



If your pigs are not from the same litter, they should be introduced slowly and allowed to take their time to get used to each other. When two new pigs first meet allow each pig to have a separate area where they can go to until they are ready to be together. Once your pigs get along together, they will provide each other with companionship and can play, groom and communicate with one another.

Communication: Pet pigs have also been known to bond well with other companion animals such as cats, dogs, goats and sheep. Like with other pigs, ensure an adult supervises when your pet pig meets other animals and allow your pig to retreat to a safe area when they want too.

Pigs have a range of different communication techniques that you can learn to identify. They are very vocal and communicate in grunts, squealing and snorting. Research has shown that pigs make at least 20 different sounds, which all mean different things.

- Grunting is usually heard when a mother pig is feeding her babies. These can be loud or soft. They can also be heard when a pig is content, like if you are rubbing your pig's belly or petting him or her, for example.
- A 'barking' type grunt is usually heard when a pig thinks danger or a threat is nearby. Listen out for this sound from your pig when it is meeting new people or animals, as it can indicate your pig is not entirely comfortable in the situation.
- Squealing usually means your pig is very excited about something. This is often heard when pet pigs are anticipating being fed! In some cases, it can also be a sign of pain. If your pig squeals when you try to touch them in a certain area and it looks like they do not want to move, this would indicate pain and you should call your vet.
- Along with these main sounds, you will hear a range of other sounds and noises your pig will make over time with you. Many pig owners have said that their pigs make unique sounds in a range of situations such as being greeted, wanting attention, wanting to go outside, being annoyed and much more. Try to get to know your pig and learn what noises he or she makes in certain situations with you so you can better understand how your pig might be feeling.

Training: Pigs are extremely smart animals. They love to learn new things and are very capable of learning a range of behaviours and understanding human words and sentences. By training your pig, not only are you stimulating your pig's mind and keeping him/her busy and entertained, you will also be bonding with your pet pig more closely and building a relationship built on trust.

You can house train your pig to respond to make life easier for both you and your pig. Your pig will learn their own name pretty quickly, and you can also toilet train him/her quite easily by using a litter area or a designated outdoor area. Pigs pick things up very quickly, so it won't take long before your pig is house trained. You can also do more advanced training with your pig and show your friends that your pig can do some really cool tricks! Pigs have been shown to be capable of learning many things, such as: sitting, spinning, shaking hands, rolling balls, retrieving objects, stay, opening doors or pushing buttons. Some pigs even have been trained to use obstacle courses, just like dogs!

When training your pig, make sure you use positive reinforcement training. This is where you reward the pig for the right behaviour, usually with a treat. Pigs have been shown to learn well with this type of training. There are lots of videos online that will teach you how to train a pig using positive reinforcement. If you train your pig properly, using positive reinforcement, you are likely to have a happy and busy pig.

The Importance of Enrichment



Pigs are incredibly smart and sensitive animals. They love to be kept busy and challenged, so they require both physical and mental stimulation to keep them happy and healthy. Your pig will need enrichment items, activities, as well as lots of attention and affection. Keeping a pig without companionship or enrichment is likely to lead to a bored, agitated or destructive pig.

Providing your pig with fun things to do, activities, toys and actively playing with your pig will also help you bond better with your pet pig. There are specific behaviours which are really important for pigs to be able to perform normally. If pigs are not able to perform these behaviours, it can lead to a range of problems and to a sad, depressed or bored pig. Such behaviours include foraging and rooting, being able to socialise, play and communicate with other pigs (or other animals) and nesting.

Health

Your pig will need some preventative treatments to make sure they do not become sick, ill or diseased. This is the easiest way to make sure your pig has freedom from pain, injury, and disease. Vaccinations protect pigs against the disease that can cause illness and death. There is a range of different vaccines available for pigs, but your veterinarian will be able to tell you what vaccines are recommended for your pig, based on breed, lifestyle and local and environmental conditions.

Pigs also need to be drenched regularly. This protects them against worms, lice and other parasites such as mites. Your pig's vet will be able to provide the special medication for this, suggest how often to treat your pig and they will show an adult how to give it to your pig.

Skincare: Pigs are prone to sunburn and do not do well in very warm or hot weather. To prevent sunburn, just like you or I, you should provide areas of shade for your pig to avoid the sun and keep in the shade. Another option is to provide an area of water or mud for your pig to cool down in – a wallow – as mud can act as a natural sun screen for pigs.



If your pig is scratching a lot and the skin starts to crust, your pig may need to be checked for mange. Mange is a disease caused by parasites called mites, which can spread very fast if you have more than one pig. If your pig has mites, you will notice him/her trying to rub against things to scratch themselves, or even shake their ears a lot, as ears are a favourite spot for the mites to attack your pig.

If you think your pig has mange, contact your veterinarian so they can give medication for your pig to get rid of the mites and help soothe your pig's skin.

Pigs can also be groomed with a brush. This keeps their coat nice and tidy and helps to get rid of any mud or dirt that may be built up. They also like this very much.

Eye Care: Pigs generally do not have very good eye sight and certain breeds of pigs are prone to eye problems.



It is normal for your pig's eyes to sometimes run with a little fluid, which can be gently wiped away with a damp cloth if it is building up. If the discharge becomes excessive or is yellow/brown in colour, you should contact your veterinarian as this could be a sign of an infection.

Hooves: Pigs have four toes which are covered in hard hooves. The two front hooves are large and flat and carry most of your pig's body weight. Since hooves do such an important job, looking after them and keeping them well maintained is very important. Your pig's hooves also need to be inspected often to make sure they are healthy and in good shape. You need to check that your pig is not limping, and that his/her hooves are not cracked or swollen. You should also check that they do not have any stones or other items stuck in between their hooves.

Your pig's hooves will grow over time and will need to be trimmed regularly with special tools. It is best to let a veterinarian or local hoof specialist trim your pig's hooves. If you let your pig's hooves grow too long, they can become overgrown and cause problems for your pig. Your pig will have difficulty and pain on walking and can lead to infections, lameness and pain.

To cut down on how often their hooves require trimming, another option is to give your pigs a dry hard surface for them to walk on – in addition to their other areas. Ensuring they have a dry place to rest, sleep or relax in, is important for good hoof health as well.



If your pigs show any signs of vomiting, diarrhoea, discoloured skin or urine, panting, shivering, quick weight loss, lots of dribbling, limping - or any other strange, non-normal behaviours, you should call your veterinarian to come and check on your pig. Pigs love to eat, so if your pig seems like it has lost its appetite and does not want to eat, this is a sign that your pig may be ill. This is why it's really important to spend time with your pig and understand his or her normal behaviours.