

Caring for your

# Degu



**life span** 5-8 years is typical, although up to 10 is possible.

**behavior** Degus are very social animals and can become very tame if handled from an early age. However, they do best if kept with other degus because of their social nature. They are playful and curious. Without social interaction and opportunity for exercise, they can be aggressive and neurotic. Degus are diurnal (active during the day). In the wild they live in communities (much like prairie dogs) and dig an elaborate system of burrows to live in.

**diet** The diet should consist of rodent chow low in sugar (devoid of cane molasses) such as guinea pig or chinchilla pellets supplemented with green vegetables, and free-choice grass hay. Avoid fresh fruit and other sugar-rich foods such as corn, peas, and potatoes. Degus normally drink very little water, however be sure to keep fresh, clean water available for them.

**housing**

- **Cage furniture/Enrichment:** Degus are very active. Provide a wheel, PVC tubing for burrowing, and a hide box. Provide small nylabones, paper towel rolls, and pine cones for chewing. Hang small, sturdy branches across the cage for climbing and chewing. Also provide ladders and ramps for climbing. Provide a dust bath at least twice a week. The cage should be large and have solid floors.
- **Numbers:** Degus are social animals that may be housed in same sex pairs. Singly housed individuals may develop stereotypies, depression, or barbering without a lot of owner attention.
- **Temperature:** Degus easily succumb to heat stress at temperatures > 86°F.

## bedding

As with other small animals, avoid cedar or pine shavings. Provide an absorbent layer of pet-safe bedding in the bottom of the cage. A nest box is necessary to give degus a sense of security - a wooden box about 6 by 8 by 6 inches is appropriate, and if it has a flat roof the degu can use it as a shelf to sit on. Nesting material (tissues or paper towel, hay, shredded paper) should also be provided.

## dust bath

Like chinchillas, degus need regular dust baths to keep their skin and coat in good condition. Provide a shallow bowl with an inch or two of chinchilla bath dust (fine sand found at a pet store) a couple of times a week (leave in the cage for a half hour or so).

## chew toys

Since degus are such determined chewers, it is vital to provide them with lots of opportunities to chew. A variety of wood blocks and chews as well as branches can be provided. Willow balls and toys made for rabbits are great for degus, and cotton rope and wood toys designed for large parrots are also a good choice. A mineral or salt block designed for rodents can be attached to the cage.

## restraint

Most degus can be easily handled by encircling the middle with one hand and the tail base with the other. **NEVER** pick a degu up by the tail as they can shed their tails.

## healthcare

To minimize the risk of diabetes mellitus, avoid fruit and high-carb vegetables, and maintain a healthy body weight (no more than 250 g for females, 275 g for males).

It is also important to have a good relationship with a veterinarian to ensure the health and longevity of your degu. Annual wellness visits are recommended.

