Degu Care Guide

15-page illustrated guide | Social groups, low-sugar diet, habitat and health



Degus are social, active rodents that need same-species companionship, a large secure habitat, constant hay and a strict low-sugar diet.

A practical, species-specific guide for responsible ownership in the United States. Use it alongside an experienced small-mammal veterinarian and current local rules.

1 | Is a degu right for you?

Degus are bright, active, social rodents that are best observed and gently tamed rather than carried. Typical lifespan is about 5–8 years. They need same-species company, daily interaction, a large habitat, and a diet planned to reduce diabetes risk.

– Do not keep a degu alone unless a vet or behavior expert advises for welfare reasons.

– They are a long-term commitment compared with mice and hamsters.

– Identify an exotics veterinarian before adoption.

2 | Choose healthy companions

Adopt a compatible same-sex pair or group. Ask the rescue about introductions, sex confirmation, diet and health history. Look for bright eyes, smooth coat, normal droppings, good grip and active movement. Degus can fight, so carefully monitor introductions and provide multiple resources.

– Never keep mixed sexes without a deliberate, expert-supervised plan.

– Avoid handling the tail; skin can be seriously injured.

– Do not house with chinchillas, guinea pigs or other species.

3 | Large escape-proof habitat

Use a tall, sturdy metal cage with narrow bar spacing, solid shelves and multiple levels. Include hides, hay racks, chew-safe wood, a heavy food dish, water bottle and a solid-surface wheel. Degus climb and chew; check latches, platforms and plastic parts regularly.

– Avoid wire floors and unsafe gaps.

– Place the cage away from direct sun, drafts and loud activity.

– Provide a secure play pen for supervised exercise.

4 | Bedding, nesting and cleaning

Use a low-dust, safe substrate with enough depth for digging, plus plain paper nesting material and cardboard tunnels. Spot-clean wet areas, remove old food and wash dishes and water bottles regularly. Keep the habitat dry and well ventilated; ammonia and damp bedding can harm health.

– Avoid cedar and aromatic untreated wood shavings.

– Do not use loose fluffy cotton nesting.

– Retain some clean familiar bedding after a full clean.

5 | Hay and low-sugar nutrition

Provide unlimited grass hay and a measured complete degu pellet or vet-approved low-sugar rodent pellet. Offer appropriate leafy vegetables in small quantities and fresh water continuously. Degus are highly vulnerable to problems from sugary diets; avoid fruit, honey, molasses, sweet treats and high-carbohydrate snacks unless the vet specifically advises otherwise.

– Check product labels for added sugars or molasses.

– Do not use guinea-pig or chinchilla food without checking its ingredients and suitability.

– Make diet changes gradually and monitor weight and droppings.

6 | Chewing, exercise and enrichment

Degus need safe materials to chew because their incisors grow continuously. Provide untreated, species-safe wood, tunnels, climbing routes, foraging and a solid running wheel. Rotate toys and supervise daily out-of-cage activity in a degu-proof area.

– Block wires, houseplants, furniture gaps and toxic materials.

– Avoid wheels with rungs that catch toes or tails.

– Check toys for splinters and swallowed plastic.

7 | Dust bathing and grooming

Offer a shallow bowl of chinchilla dust for short supervised dust baths several times each week, then remove it so it stays clean. Degus groom themselves; do not bathe routinely in water, which can chill them and damage coat condition. Seek veterinary advice for persistent soiling, itching or hair loss.

– Use commercial dust made for chinchillas, not talc or construction sand.

– Never lift or restrain by the tail.

– Do not apply mite powders or sprays without veterinary direction.

8 | Handling and social trust

Start with quiet presence and treats. Scoop the body securely with both hands while keeping it low over a safe surface. Let the degu retreat and avoid chasing or grabbing. Children should sit on the floor and be directly supervised.

– Never pick up by the tail; degloving injuries can occur.

– Avoid loud, sudden handling.

– Transport in a secure ventilated carrier with familiar bedding.

9 | Veterinary prevention

Schedule a new-pet exam and ask a veterinarian familiar with degus about an appropriate wellness interval; yearly checks are a practical baseline for healthy adults. Discuss dental health, weight, diet and diabetes risks. Routine vaccines are generally not used for pet degus.

– Keep weight records and note thirst, urination and appetite.

– Bring the pellet label and habitat photos to appointments.

– Never trim teeth or give medication without a vet.

10 | Warning signs and emergencies

Call promptly for reduced eating, fewer droppings, weight change, increased thirst or urination, cloudy eyes, drooling, difficulty chewing, rough coat, diarrhea, skin wounds, breathing changes, head tilt or lethargy. Collapse, severe breathing distress, seizures or inability to eat are emergencies.

– Diabetes and dental disease need professional diagnosis.

– Keep an ill degu warm, quiet and safely contained for transport.

– Do not wait for symptoms to resolve on their own.

11 | Approximate U.S. costs

A suitable multi-level enclosure and safe furnishings may cost about $200–$600+ initially. Food, hay, dust and bedding can run roughly $30–$70 monthly for a pair; exotic-vet exams often range $60–$180+ by location. Plan for several hundred dollars yearly plus a reserve for dental care or emergencies.

– Call clinics to confirm they see degus and ask fees in advance.

– Insurance availability may be limited; compare exclusions.

– Budget for companions and the larger enclosure they require.

12 | Children and other pets

Degus are social and can learn to accept calm interaction, but they are fast and delicate. Adults should handle daily care and supervise children. Cats, dogs, ferrets and snakes can frighten or injure them; use a secure room and prevent direct contact.

– Wash hands after handling and cage cleaning.

– Keep predator pets from pawing at or staring into the cage.

– Never leave degus with another species unsupervised.

13 | First weeks and routine plan

Set up the cage, hay, safe pellets, dust bath, hides and carrier before adoption. Keep the existing food while the pair settles and avoid stressful rearranging. Observe how companions share food, water and nest sites. Arrange a vet exam and keep an emergency clinic contact nearby.

– Daily: hay, water, appetite, droppings, activity and pair behavior.

– Weekly: spot-check weight, teeth-visible behavior, cage safety and bedding.

– At least yearly: veterinary wellness review or sooner for changes.

Sources and further reading

This is an original educational guide, not a reproduction of the requested book. The supplied eBay item number is included for reference; listing title, author, and edition could not be independently confirmed. Consult an experienced veterinarian for individual care decisions.

– User-supplied eBay listing

– Merck Veterinary Manual: Biological Data of Pet Rodents

– PDSA: Degus as Pets

– RSPCA: What to Feed a Pet Degu

– Royal Veterinary College: Degu Care and Advice