

DEGU

What kinds of things make them good pets?

Degus make excellent pets for similar reasons to other rodents but there are some things that they can do that other rodents cannot such as exhibit advanced behavioural characteristics. One of these is their ability to recognize people, sounds and even objects. If a degu sees a person that it knows as someone that gives it attention it will usually immediately run up to the side of its cage and stand on its hind legs practically begging to be let out. Should you not get it out then it will sometimes squeak quite loudly. When you do get it out it usually warbles with joy. If a degu sees another degu that it knows then it will react accordingly. If it knows the degu as a mate it will usually sing out in joy and warble quite loudly. If the other degu hears this it may and usually will respond in the same way. If the degu sees another degu that it does not like then it will chatter and even squeak out loudly. They eat politely with their fore paws like other rodents and will not gulp all their food down in seconds. They seem to have very good eyesight and a highly developed sense of hearing. They can recognize objects and people with great accuracy and ease. If they see a person that they know approach their cage they will react instantly in an appropriate way. When they hear a sound that they recognize such as another degu or a person's voice they will also look in that direction so see who it is. As you can see a degu is a very fun little creature that has many physical and mental traits that are very well developed.

Behaviour

Degu behaviour is very fascinating. They are intensely hyper sometimes and very tranquil at others. To some it may appear that they never sleep because they always seem to be on the go or ready to leap. They do sleep at night but have short sleep cycles which means that when they do fall asleep they wake up again only about 20 minutes later. While they will get a full night's sleep each night they tend to do it in lots of little bits. Humans also do this but our sleep cycles are much longer. They love to run around and climb and love getting into dark, warm places. Degus are very social with both people and each other. When they see each other they will almost always react in some sort of way. In most cases two male degus will not get along together and will fight. However there are some cases where two males *may* get along. If two males that are brothers who have been together since birth are kept in the same cage and there are no females within smelling distance then they should get along. Two males from separate litters may also get along also if no females can be seen or smelled etc. However if you do put two males in the same cage and they do fight then separate them as they will fight to the death in almost all cases if they are not stopped. Female degus apparently will get along with each other. Personally I have had experience with putting 2 males together but not 2 females until recently. The females get along just fine and only seem to have small amounts of bickering over who is going to be the 'boss'. When I let my males see each other they got mad and chattered and squeaked and tried to kill each other. This is why they had to be in separate cages. If a degu sees a person it recognizes it may react with a variety of sounds depending on its mood. Don't be surprised if a degu jumps out of its cage when it wants out and you have taken the lid off. On the topic of lids a good lid to get is a wire mesh type lid or anything they cannot chew through but will still allow air in. When you have degus out it is important to keep a close watch on them at all times. They are very curious and are always exploring their environment. They can run very fast and because of their size it is easy for them to get away and get into things. Because of this you should never let a degu run free out of its cage. When you pick them up it is best to let them step into your hand rather than simply grabbing them, grabbing can result in scarring them and you may end up getting bit. Never pick a degu up by the tail or grab the tail, degus have the ability to drop their tails like a lizard if it is grabbed and unlike a lizard's tail it doesn't grow back.

Sounds they make

Degus have a wide variety of sounds that they make to one another depending on their mood. If they are in a good mood then they will usually make a warbling sound that sounds a lot like a bunch of short high pitched squeaks together at a very fast rate. This sound usually indicates that the degu likes whomever it is making the sound at, whether it be a person or another degu. A male degu will almost always make this sound to a female degu that he wants to mate with when he sees her. If you would like to hear these sounds then go to the [sounds page](#). Another sound that they make is the popular chattering sound. This sound means basically the same thing that it means when a guinea pig or squirrel chatters. A chattering degu is an unhappy degu. They will usually only chatter when they are being teased or if a male sees another male. This sound sounds like a fast version of the sound you get when you tap your top teeth against your bottom teeth. The third sound that degus make is a loud squeak like a mouse, rat or squirrel. If they make this sound it usually means that they are very upset or annoyed about something. They will often make this sound to wards another degu if they simply do not want to see that degu. They can also make this sound to wards a person if they are doing something and are suddenly grabbed or startled. And finally they may also make this sound if they are grabbed in an unpleasant way. If your degu makes this sound as you go to pick it up do not continue to pick it up in this fashion. A degu that is making this sound to a person as that person is going to pick it up is saying that "I do not want to be handled in that fashion and if you continue to do this to me I will bite you in self defence". The best way to pick up a degu is to let it crawl into you open hand then to gently lift it up in a secure manner. When two degus are making this sound to each other separate them immediately or they will fight.

Diet

It is important to be careful of what you give your degu's. A degu will eat just about anything it is given. Unlike North American rodents and guinea pigs degus lack the ability to properly digest sugar. This is not the result of a failed organ but instead an evolutionary thing. In the part of Chile that degus are located there really isn't very much in the way of fruit, very much like in the prairie's. As a result of this, degus have evolved a body that cannot digest sugar simply because it is not the kind of thing that they can get in the wild. Never Give your degu's anything with sugar! When a degu eats anything with sugar in it and this includes natural sources such as fruit they suffer the same effects as diabetic people do without insulin. Logically you cannot give them insulin so obviously it is best to simply avoid the sugar. The kind of food that is okay to give a degu is food that is meant for the kind of animal that they are. They do like small animal food but the corn and sunflower seeds in it are not good for them.

Sunflower seeds have too much oil and fat. Corn has too much oil. Carrots are O.K. - in a small quantity like a one inch cube per day per degu. Carrots also have a lot of sugar. That is why the yellow vegetable of choice should be Sweet potato (yam is similar but lower in vitamins).

In laboratories, degus are fed rat chow (also called lab blocks or rat blocks) and they do well, but you can be sure that they are not all that happy eating it. You could also be well fed if you drank only a liquid called 'ensure' but you wouldn't be happy eating that all the time.

Degus should have a yellow vegetable (sweet potato), a green vegetable (dandelion is loved by them but beware of pesticides), but any very green leaf vegetable, preferably not from the cabbage family is O.K. Don't cook the sweet potatoes, give them to them raw. Also make sure to remove the skins and roots, as I have read that these are toxic to degus.

Here is a list of vegetables in the cabbage family as provided by [Amanda Rose](#)

Beet greens Horseradish
Bok Choy Kale

Broccoli Kohlrabi
Brussels Mustard Greens
Sprouts Radishes
Cabbage Rutabaga
Cauliflower Swiss Chard
Chinese Cabbage Turnips
Collard Greens Turnip Greens
Garden Cress

Also give them some Guinea pig pellets - not a mix of seeds and stuff, just the pellets. Then some form of hay - timothy hay, alfalfa - oat hay - but some form of hay. Alfalfa blocks are better than no hay.

DON'T give your Degus treats of large amounts of fruit or peanuts. Degus cannot metabolise simple sugar such as is found in fruit, and they will develop diabetes and cataracts if fed sugary fruits and vegetables. They love raw peanuts, but the fat collects in their livers, and is harmful - particularly to pregnant females. A few sunflower seeds are beneficial to your Degu, but not more than 6 per day. Guinea pig pellets are rich in vitamin C and will keep your degu's teeth and gums healthy. Food dishes should be cleaned weekly, with hot water. Their water bottle should be rinsed and refilled every day.

Introducing new companions

Having one degu is a very rewarding experience. Having more than one can be that many more times as fun. It is important to keep in mind however that degus like other animals do have a sense of territory. If you want to introduce a new degu to a degu that you already have it is important to try to do it at as young an age (degu's age) as possible. The best way to introduce a new degu is to first let them sniff each other while you hold both of them, if they react by chattering then that is not totally a problem because they are just simply saying that this is a strange degu and see it as an intruder. At this point you must get them used to each other. Always make sure that you have a backup cage that can become one of their homes should they decide that they do not like each other. If it is at all possible place them in the same cage with a divider halfway between so that one is on one side and the other is on the other side. Make the divider one that is non toxic, non chewable and allows them to see and smell each other. Both sides must have food and water access and wheel access so it is important that this takes place in a relatively large cage. After about a week the degus should be getting used to each other and you can remove the divider. If space permits keep both wheels and food dishes and water bottles in so they will not start to fight over them. If they start to fight for no reason and will not stop then separate them and put one in the backup cage, this is a pairing that just will not work. If you want to try to put a degu in with a rabbit or a guinea pig then follow the same rules as above except keep the divider in for at least a couple of weeks as to allow each of them to become accustomed to a new species. And as always make sure to give the original animal lots of attention, especially when giving the other animal attention. Like human babies and children and dogs and cats they can quickly get a sense of abandonment if you only give the new one attention.

Closing Statements

In conclusion a degu is an animal that makes an excellent pet. They have many characteristics that are very desirable in a pet. They are very cute and affectionate. They are clean and do not require a very large cage and will only bite if severely provoked. Their longer than average life span means that they will provide you with many years of entertainment and affection. they are truly a wonderful little mammal.