

VETERINARY SURGEONS

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Newsletter – AUTUMN 2012 Issue 15

CLINIC NEWS

Autumn is definitely here! Some really cool mornings now but at least the sun is shining through during the day. As the mornings and evenings get darker, remember your own safety and that of your dog when you are out walking. Make sure you both have high vis gear on.

Since our last newsletter, our head veterinary nurse at our Straven Branch, Tania, has become engaged to her partner Carlos. They are both over the moon and very busy planning their spring wedding. Also, please join us in congratulating, Jess, another of our Straven Road veterinary nurses, who is getting married this Autumn.

Make sure you like us on Facebook to keep up to date. Because of all your support we have been able to claim this URL so we are now very easy to find on Facebook!! Tell all your friends too.

<https://www.facebook.com/veterinarycentre>

Thanks to the generosity of Hills Pet Food, once we reach 250 LIKES on our Facebook page, we will draw a winner for a small bag of Hills Pet Food, so make sure you click on the link above today.

For this newsletter we have come up with a couple of articles about topics you may not be familiar with. The first is on backyard hens, which are becoming increasingly popular and guinea pigs, which make great pets for children.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Backyard Poultry by Anne Finlay, BVSc

Keeping hens in your garden is rewarding and fun but there are some important considerations before you begin. They do require some time for feeding and cleaning. You need a reliable person to care for them when you go on holiday for longer than a weekend. Free range is ideal but they can wreak havoc in your veggie garden (or even worse, your neighbours garden) and their droppings attract flies in summer and can pose a health risk, especially to very young children.

Council Regulations

Christchurch City Council does not have strict guidelines around housing chickens in the city. They ask that they do not cause a noise or hygiene problem. Tasman district council ask that you have no rooster, no more than 6 hens

and have the hen enclosure at least 2 metres from a boundary fence. I think that these are a good guide.

Housing

Your henhouse should be weather-proof and provide shade. It must be well ventilated which usually entails 1/3 to 1/2 of one side having open wire mesh. Be careful that this side is sheltered from southerly rain and also from strong wind.

The floor can be dirt or concrete. Concrete is easiest to keep clean. It should be covered with straw or untreated wood shavings. I find a 30cm bed of pea straw the best because it is light to clean out and your compost heap will love it. Make sure that it is mould and dust free, as these can cause respiratory disease. (if it has been rained on after bailing the chances are that it will contain moulds) You require at least 1/3 of a square metre of floor space/hen.

The perches should be 5cm square with the top edges rounded. They are usually placed about 60cm from the floor but heavy breeds may need them lower. Make sure that your nesting boxes are lower than the perch or your hens will sleep/defecate in the boxes.

Nesting boxes should be about 30cm square and have deep clean bed of straw. A thick layer of newspaper under the straw makes cleaning easier. They should provide privacy. (A shredded feed bag stapled from the top will provide a good curtain).

It is a good idea to have a run attached to your henhouse which allow your birds access to the outdoors but keeps them contained. If they are not going to be allowed any time outside the run consider having it divided in two so that you can rest one side.

Hens love to bath in the dirt. This is a way of helping to keep their feathers in great shape but also to help rid them of lice or mites. If they are free range some of the day they will find their own spot. If not supply them with an area of well dug dirt that does not get wet. You can add ash and diatomaceous earth (from a garden shop). This helps to dehydrate the lice and mites.

Feeding

Keep your food and water supply inside the house to deter wild birds from contaminating/eating it. Feeding a well-balanced diet is essential for your hens. Good quality commercial hen food is available at most farm/stock supply stores (e.g. PGG Wrightsons on Blenheim Rd or CRT Farm centre on Waterloo Rd). The food either comes in pellets or mash/meal. The mash can be fed dry (which I find good for



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very young chicks but wasteful with older birds) or mixed with water for a wet mash. It needs to be fed fresh each day as it quickly goes rancid. Pellets are often easiest. (110-170g/day/bird). Check the date of manufacture as some essential vitamins will deteriorate after 3 months.

It is important if you are raising young chicks that you feed chick crumbs until 6 weeks and then growers pellets/mix until 18 weeks when you will begin layer food. Young growing birds that are not laying have different nutritional needs to laying hens.

Household scraps are OK to feed but will alter the nutrition balance of the overall feed, so not too much bread etc which is low in protein. Salad greens, carrot peelings, cabbage, swedes and silver beet are all favourites. They will eat cooked meat leftovers but NEVER feed chicken or Turkey meat to your hens.

Hens allowed to free range will get grass and be able to forage for worms and other insects.

Wheat can be sprinkled on the ground, especially if birds are not able to free range. This will keep them active.

Clean water should be replaced daily.

Oyster shell or limestone grit ad lib should be provided to help with good quality egg shells. Hens use gravel in their crop to help digest food. Free range hens should be get an adequate supply while they forage but hens kept contained in a run should be supplied with a container of grit.

To read the rest of the article which continues with sections on cleaning, health and disease, visit the full article on our website:

<http://www.veterinarycentre.co.nz/backyard-hens.php>

FEATURE ARTICLE

Guinea Pigs as Pets By Barbara Eddy, VN

Guinea pigs make fantastic pets for children and adults alike as they are very social creatures with loveable personalities, an excellent size for handling and housing in the town house environment.

An adult guinea pig reaches about 1 to 1.2kg in bodyweight and is approx 23- 27cm long. They have a wide range of vocal noises from grunts, squeaks, wheeks and chirrups. Being gentle in nature they are easy to tame with daily handling. If a guinea pig is mishandled they will bite and wiggle sometimes scratching you so an adult should always be there if a child is caring or handling their pet.

Basic requirements

Before getting a guinea pig please be aware that unlike most small pocket pets with short life expectancies, these little creatures do live for 5-7 years normally and some have been known to make 8 or 9 years of age. They need daily feeding and fresh hay and cleaning several times a week. If you want your guinea pig to live outside you will also need to check it has enough food, water and shelter (you may need to move their cage several times a day to protect it from the weather) .

Social needs

Being very social creatures it is best to get two guinea pigs. Never put a rabbit in with a guinea pig as they can

injury each other and have different diet needs causing one of them to have a deficiency (guinea pigs need more veggies and greens than a rabbit).

Male or Female?

When considering two guinea pigs many people ask if males or females are better together. I find either two females or two males are generally fine together. The biggest thing is personality. Some breeds are more dominant and aggressive than others. If you have two male from the same place they should be fine, but if you have a female in the same house or cage next door it can cause the males to start fighting. Because I have both male and females guinea pigs I keep my males in separate cages but next door to each other that way they have companionship without being able to hurt each other.

Housing

Housing in Christchurch should be considered carefully. In the summer a hutch outside is great, they love to eat fresh grass and the exercise is good for them. In the winter the cold damp ground can cause them to get sick so the hutch either needs to be moved to a sheltered area (inside a garage or shed or lifted off the ground. Best of all is to get an indoor cage).

Outdoor cages come in many sizes and designs. Make sure it is strong and weather proof. Locks on doors and lids are priceless in preventing unwanted cats and dogs getting inside the cage. The roof should be sloping so rain will drain off. Small wire on the floor can cut your guinea pigs feet so a solid floor is better.

Many hutches have a solid sleeping area and no wire on the floor of an eating area. Please watch out for uneven lawns- guinea pigs are experts at getting out of their cage to go exploring round the garden. They can be hurt by other animals when outside their cage.

Some hutches are on legs off the ground these are great as they are dry and away from the damp in winter and you don't have to bend down to clean the cage. Watch out your guinea pig friend doesn't fall out though when you open the door. In the winter and at night a cover to protect your pet from rain and wind and other animals is a great idea, this can be pulled up or off during the day so your pet has fresh air and sunlight. A hutch may need to be moved during the day to stop it getting to hot from being in full sunlight or covered if it rains.

Indoor cages are great all year round. They are then safe from animals outside and you don't have to worry about the weather, and you can interact with them a lot more making them much tamer. A cage about 100cm x 50cm and 30cm tall is the minim size needed for two guinea pigs. They need a a drink bottle or bowl, bowl for pellets and sleeping area (cardboard box with a door cut out or you can buy plastic or wood castles or large tunnels.

To read more, including sections on breeding, bedding, water, food, Coat types, nails and bathing, visit our website: <http://www.veterinarycentre.co.nz/pet-guinea-pigs.php>

We would love to hear your feedback on our newsletter. We thank you for your custom and we look forward to seeing you again soon.



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