

Basic Miniature Pig Care

The Vietnamese potbellied pig (VPBP) is a relatively small breed of domesticated pig that was developed from wild Vietnamese breeds in the 1960s. The VPBP was introduced to the United States in 1985, and there was a tremendous rise in the popularity of miniature or potbellied pigs in the late 80s and early 90s. Today VPBP remain a popular pet in many urban areas.

The term “miniature pig” usually describes a variety of smaller pig breeds as well as crossbreeds, including not only VPBP but Julianas, KuneKunes, and others. Purebred VPBP are usually black with upright ears and straight tails.



Miniature pigs usually weigh between 70-150 lb (32-68 kg) and they stand 14-20 in (36-50 cm) at the shoulders. Miniature pigs reach half their adult weight by about 1 year of age and will continue to grow until 3-4 years of age, when their growth plates completely fuse.

The life span of miniature pigs typically ranges between 14-21 years, with an average of 15-18 years. Minipigs begin puberty as early as 2-4 months of age.

LEGISLATION

Many cities, counties and municipalities do not allow livestock, including pet pigs, within their boundaries. As livestock, miniature pig transport is also regulated by strict rules that may differ from state to state. Most states require a health certificate signed by an accredited veterinarian. Many states also require pigs be tested for pseudorabies and brucellosis before a health certificate can be issued.

DIET

Wild pigs are opportunistic omnivores, eating roots, berries, and whatever else they can expose with their snout and hooves. Free-ranging pigs forage for food by grazing and rooting for approximately 7 hours each day.

Domestic pigs will eat almost anything, but pet pigs should be fed **diets specially formulated for miniature pigs**. Complete feeds are available from a variety of manufacturers, including Ralston Purina’s Mazuri® Ross Mill Farm’s Champion™ Pig Food, Heartland, or Manna Pro. Commercial hog feeds are formulated to produce rapid growth over a relatively short time period and should not be fed to pet animals.

Feeds are often classified as a starter ration (for piglets in the process of being weaned), grower (fed until puberty), breeder, or maintenance. **Maintenance rations are started at about 8 weeks**, and they contain approximately 12-14% protein, 2-6% fat, and 12–15% fiber.

Pigs easily gain weight and cannot be fed free choice. **Food should be fed in measured amounts**. Adult pigs should be fed approximately 2–3% body weight on a daily basis. Small meals in multiple locations encourage activity and exercise.

Offer pigs opportunities to **graze on grass or grass hay**, which provides an excellent way to hide food, slow feeding, and encourage foraging. Pigs that are allowed to graze should have their pelleted feed feed adjusted to accommodate the additional calories.

~1 cup complete pig chow for every 50 lb (23 kg) of pig

Divide this volume into at least 2 daily feedings

For pigs that spend some time indoors, a rooting box is also recommended. Create a rooting box from a low, roomy container, like a child's wading pool or the bottom half of a kennel crate, filled with a layer of large, smooth stones. Offer dry pig feed and treats in the rooting box to promote foraging behavior and provide stimulation. Clean the rooting box monthly or when it gets wet. Feeder puzzles can also challenge pet pigs. Cardboard boxes and crumpled newspapers can be used to hide food items and commercially available enrichment toys are also available like the Kong® Wobbler (Kong Company, Golden, CO, USA), Busy Buddy™ Kibble Nibble™ and Magic Mushroom™ (PetSafe, Knoxville TN USA), as well as [The Manna Ball](#) and [Buster® Cube](#).

Treats may include small amounts of:

- Grass hay (fiber to help control hunger)
- Fresh vegetables like green beans or lettuce
- High-water content fresh fruit (grapes, watermelon, etc.)
- Dry, unsalted popcorn
- Whole grain cereal (no sugar coating)

Secure food and water bowls to the ground so the pig cannot climb in the dishes or tip them over. Provide a bowl with a weighted bottom and/or wide base; alternatively, secure the bowl within the center of a tire. Place the bowls on an easily cleaned surface, like a shower stall or a large, shallow tray.

Even though pigs can get messy as they go back and forth between food and water dishes, it is important to **offer plenty of water**. Restricted access to water can lead to health problems like bladder infections and bladder stones. Fresh water should ALWAYS be available.

HOUSING

Temperature

Adult PBPs are most comfortable at environmental temperatures ranging between **60–75°F (15–24°C)** with a humidity of 50%.

Pigs are incapable of sweating and they are **susceptible to overheating at temperatures exceeding 85°F (30°C)**. Pigs will begin to pant as they get warm, but this is often insufficient for cooling. Fans and water for wallowing should also be provided when it's hot. Water for soaking and cooling outdoors should be provided in a separate container from drinking water. Shade is also important because pigs have sensitive skin that can sunburn.

Strict indoor life (e.g. apartment dwelling) is never a good option for pet pigs. Pigs restricted to the indoors will root on objects like carpet and walls. In addition, hoof overgrowth tends to be more extreme in indoor-only pigs and boredom is an issue as well. While pigs are indoors, provide a designated rooting area and/or rooting box (*see Diet above*) to minimize destruction and confine pigs to a pig-safe room when they are unsupervised.

All house pigs should **spend several hours each day outdoors** exploring and rooting the ground. The **outdoor pen** should be at least 8 x 15 feet (2.5 x 4.5 m) per pig, although more space promotes more exploration and exercise. Pigs are strong and intelligent, so fencing and enclosures need to be strong and secure. Suggested fencing materials include wood, chain link, hog panels, and T posts. Pigs will also attempt to dig under the fencing, so at least 1 foot (30 cm) of mesh fence should extend beneath the ground. Note: Fencing must not only keep pigs in but keep predators such as dogs out.

The pen should include a clean, dry, draft free **insulated “pig house”** for sleeping and nesting, measuring approximately 6 square feet (2 square meters). The floor should provide good traction (e.g. rubber stall mat or outdoor carpet). During the cold winter months, a commercial pig heating blanket or a heat lamp safely placed out of reach may be used with caution. Provide **proper nesting material** such as straw/hay, blankets (fleece recommended as these are more resistant to ripping), sleeping bags, aspen shavings (avoid cedar). Bedding must be deep enough to allow for rooting or for the animal to completely cover itself. Replace wet or dirty bedding daily. Replace ripped blankets to prevent accidental foreign body ingestion.

Pigs are highly social and intelligent animals that do best in a herd of at least 2 pigs. Aggression can stem from territorial disputes over sleeping quarters or food or may simply be an effort to gain status in the herd. In single-pig households, the human family is the pig's "herd" and aggressive behaviors are common if not recognized early and appropriately modified. These behaviors tend to emerge around the age of 2 years when a pig is developing its social standing within the herd.

Miniature pigs should also not be left unsupervised with dogs. A startled pig will instinctively run away while squealing, which can elicit a natural predatory response in some dogs.

PREVENTIVE CARE

Vaccination

Vaccination should be performed for both indoor and outdoor pet pigs. Routine vaccines for adult pets may include: rabies, erysipelas and leptospirosis. Depending on your pig's risk of exposure, your veterinarian may also recommend vaccines for *Bordetella*, *Pasteurella*, and tetanus among others. Young pigs begin a vaccination schedule between 8-12 weeks of age. The initial series consists of 2 injections, 3-4 weeks apart. Vaccines are then administered semiannually or annually.

Fecal parasite testing

Although intestinal parasites are uncommon in pet pigs, infection still occurs. Fecal exams for parasites and ova should be performed when a pig is initially brought home and then periodically.

Surgical sterilization

Sexual behavior begins very early in pigs—before weaning—and can include: unpredictable behavior, aggression, rooting, destructive and mounting behaviors. Intact pigs can also be difficult to housetrain, and intact boars give off a strong odor. Spaying and neutering is recommended to improve pet quality, reduce destructive behavior, and prevent uterine infections and tumors in female pigs as well as testicular tumors in male pigs.

Pigs are able to reproduce at a young age. Male pigs are fertile between 6-12 weeks of age, and females can cycle as early as 12 weeks. Surgery is often recommended between 8-12 weeks of age and older.

Hoof trims

Most pet pigs require periodic hoof trimming, typically every 6-12 months.

Tusk trims

Canine teeth or tusks stop growing at about 3 years of age in female pigs; however, tusks in males grow throughout life. Tusks in males can become long and extremely sharp, and trim may be necessary to prevent injury to humans and other animals or damage to household furniture or flooring. Tusks can also become caught on caging or they may even grow long enough to penetrate the flesh of the face. However, tusk trim may be a predisposing factor in tusk root abscessation, so trim is only recommended for the above-stated reasons.

TRAINING

Housetraining

Pet pigs usually urinate and defecate at a single latrine site separate from sleep and food areas. Therefore, minipigs can be trained to use a litter pan or trained to request outdoor access when they need it. A litter pan should be placed at the opposite end of the room from the sleep and rest areas. The pan must be large enough for the pig to turn around completely and shallow enough to allow easy access; traction (rubber mat or bath tub appliques) should be provided on the bottom as the pig will avoid slippery surfaces. A shallow child's pool with a cut-out entryway can be used as long as it is secured to the ground. Older pigs prefer to go outside to eliminate.

Harness training

Gradually familiarize your pig with wearing a harness (specifically designed for pigs) and walking on a leash. Introduce the harness while your pig is eating a meal or favorite treat. Remember, restraint is a terrifying experience in these prey animals, so patience is key.

Regular walks provide a great form of exercise but are not a replacement for somewhere to dig. Allowing your pig to walk over a concrete surface daily can help wear down the hooves.

Crate training

Acclimating your pig to a carrier is useful for trips to the veterinarian. Feed your pig in the crate for several weeks before the car trip. You can also teach your pig to walk up a ramp into the vehicle.

Handling

Pigs are usually quiet animals but they will squeal and struggle when firmly restrained (or when frightened or begging for food). Scratching or petting your pig's neck, sides or belly can help to keep him calm.

- Hold a small to medium-sized pig by placing one hand beneath the rump and the other hand in front of the forelimbs and under the neck.
- Do NOT pick up miniature pigs by the legs as shoulder, lower back, and leg injuries can occur.
- Since regular hoof trims are required, teach young pigs to tolerate their feet being handled. Also teach pigs to roll onto their sides and reward them with a belly rub.

Basic skills

Pigs are intelligent animals. Training basic skills (e.g. sit, stay, come), and even trick training, provides enrichment and mental stimulation. Pigs can also be taught to target and manipulate objects. Behavioral problems, like aggression or dominance displays, are more likely to occur in pigs that are not properly trained or socialized.

COMMON PROBLEMS

Obesity

Obesity is a very common problem in pet pigs that is often associated with free-choice feeding (or overfeeding of inappropriate items such as dog food or table scraps) and lack of exercise. Obesity contributes to heart disease, respiratory disease, excessive skin folds around the eyelids that cause vision problems, and lameness.

Minimize the risk of obesity in your pet pigs with:

- Meal feedings
- Avoidance of feeding table scraps
- Exercise
- Measured feedings
- Low-calorie treats

If possible, weigh your pig regularly at home. You can also evaluate your pig's body condition using online reference charts (minipiginfo.com/mini-pig-body-scoring.html). It should be easy to feel each individual rib as well as the hips underneath the skin, but the spine should be padded and not easily felt.

Toxic exposure

Be mindful of the risk of household hazards. Exposure to toxins is common in pet pigs due to their voracious appetite, strength, and rooting behavior, which allows them to access protected areas in the home (like closed cabinets or the area behind the refrigerator).

Arthritis

Arthritis is very common in pet pigs and the condition often involves the elbow, wrist and ankle joints as well as the spine. Obesity increases the risk of arthritis. Preventive measures include good hoof care, non-slip walking surfaces, adequate bedding, and weight control.

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