

THE BASICS OF POTBELLIED PIG CARE



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INTRODUCTION

Potbellied pigs can be wonderful pets, but can also be a disaster if you aren't prepared for or don't know enough about them. This booklet is just an overview of the general care of potbellied pigs to help you decide if a pig is the right pet for you.

The information in this booklet comes from the authors experience as well as two book sources:

1. POTBELLIED PIGS IN YOUR HOME
by Dennis Kelsey-Wood
1994
T.F.H. Publishers, Inc.
Neptune City, NJ
2. POTBELLIES AND OTHER MINIATURE PIGS
by Pat Storer
1992
Barrons Educational Series, Inc.
Hauppauge, NY

It is strongly recommended that you purchase and read a book on keeping potbellied pigs so you can help yours be the best pet possible.

BASIC STRUCTURE

According to industry standards the weight range at one year of age is 40-70 lbs. with unneutered males ranging up to 90 lbs. The maximum shoulder height at one year is 18 inches. Colors can be black, white, silver, or any combination of the three. There is no relationship between color and quality.

Pigs can reach 150 lbs. if overfed, but beware of ads claiming very small size because they are often underfed, immature and unhealthy. Proper feeding will be discussed later.

Disposition is generally the same for male and female if both are neutered/spayed. Attitude problems usually come from intact pigs and pigs that were not trained or socialized properly. It is best to neuter the piglets early (as soon as 6 weeks). It is less expensive and easier for the veterinarian because of less fat layers to cut through. Also the more fat the pigs are, the more prone to anesthesia problems they are. Anesthesia drugs accumulate in the fat so more drug may be needed to induce the pig, but then it takes longer for the drug to metabolize from the body because it sits in the fat for a long time. There is also a chance of an unneutered pig to "forget" housetraining while they are in heat.

VIRTUES

Potbellied pigs are very intelligent, easy to train and are very sociable. They form strong bonds with the family as well as with other pets because they live in herds and will consider the rest of the "family" part of his herd.

They slow down as they mature so they won't demand a lot of "playtime" and they won't drag on a leash!

They rarely get fleas or lice because of their sparse hair, and are very clean animals. They tend to soil in one place and won't soil near their bedding. Their feces contains less ammonium compounds than does cats, so their litterbox won't smell as bad.

They tend to live 10-15 years.

PROBLEMS

Most problems are only a problem because owners were drawn-in by the "cuteness" of the little piggies and weren't prepared for the real-life care that goes with them.

According to most local governments, potbellies are still considered swine and are therefore subject to local ordinances pertaining to commercial swine. These ordinances may include but are not restricted to: housing, transportation, vaccination, disposal of waste, licensing, breeding, limits on numbers, and leash laws. Check with your local authorities to learn what pertains to your home.

Pigs need a lot of time. They don't do well if left alone for long periods. Because they are very social and intelligent they need to be with other animals and/or people. They can become bored and destructive if left for very long. They also can become depressed and unhappy if left for long. You must have a caretaker for the pig when you go on vacation. They are not like cats that can just be left for a few days. Remember when obtaining a pet, the only way for it to work out is if you both benefit. It's not fair to the pet if it is a one-sided deal.

Feeding a pig can be slightly more expensive than feeding a dog or cat, and the feed may be difficult to obtain.

To be a good pet, the pig must be trained. Some problems encountered with improper or no training include: aggressiveness, biting, charging, damaging furniture, excessive squealing.

They don't do well on hard floors and they are sloppy eaters. They like to root and browse so you need to keep them busy with this behavior (this will be discussed later).

TRAINING

It is not the purpose of this booklet to teach you how to train your pig. I strongly recommend you buy a book to properly train your pig.

Never be harsh with training. Pigs do not respond to power struggles. They best learn by kindness and a little food! Use a lot of praise and never let coming to you be negative. Just like dogs, they learn from the present not the past so don't scold them for making a mess two hours ago!

NUTRITION

Pigs are omnivores which means they will eat plant and animal. They love fruits and vegetable. Remember, and underfed pig can be just as unhealthy as an overfed pig. **Do not** listen to some people's belief that if you only feed it a little the pig will stay "small". This is as ridiculous as saying if you only feed a baby a little it will stay small. Yes, it may be small, but only because it is malnourished!

Feed a pigchow that is specifically for "exotic" pigs. Some examples are: Mazuri, Heartland Exotics, and Southern States (makes sure you specify "potbelly" or you will get a commercial blend that is made to make pigs fat!).

Pigs root because they are hungry (for the most part). Giving them plenty of fruits and vegetables will keep them satisfied without putting excess weight on them. **Never** give them chocolate...it can be poisonous to them.

Feed according to instructions on the bag, but the rule-of-thumb is to feed about 3% of their body weight in food, and divide this into 3-4 feedings a day while a piglet and 2-3 when an adult. Never feed just once a day. Mazuri has three kinds of feed: Starter- piglets <2 mos, Grower- 2 mos-breeder age, and Breeder-for breeding adults. Check the other brands to see if they have different stages of feed.

Pigs love to graze on grass. This also helps provide for their special mineral needs. This is why they are not very good apartment pets. They love to be outdoors grazing and rooting and if not provided for, can become sad pets.

HEALTH

The following are signs of sickness in a pig:

- runny eyes/nose
- excessive snorting/wheezing
- diarrhea
- repeated vomiting
- swelling, sores, abrasions
- bloody stools
- lameness
- seizures
- emaciation/anorexia
- reproductive failure

Please call your veterinarian if your pig exhibits any of these signs. Also, find a veterinarian that specializes in exotic pigs. A commercial pig veterinarian may be adequate but if your pig really gets sick he may not know how to properly treat the pig. These pigs do have some special concerns when dealing with their health.

The best way to prevent illness is to keep their bedding and surrounding clean. Clean the litterbox every day and the bedding as needed.

Pigs do not sweat and don't have fur to keep them warm or cool. They are very susceptible to heat stroke. You must provide a wading pool for temperatures over 80F and you must provide warm shelter/bedding for temperatures under 50F.

Pigs can become stressed easily. There is a condition called Porcine Stress Syndrome. They become frantic, respiration and heart rate increase, they become severely overheated and eventually go into shock and can die. Cause of stress can include: overcrowding, lack of bedding, malnutrition, bullying, lack of exercise, boredom, fright, excessive disturbances, unwanted petting, confinement, transportation, lack of rooting facility, and inadequate chewing potential. Not all of these will cause Porcine Stress Syndrome, but over time they all can contribute to an unhealthy, unhappy pig.

On the subject of vaccines, it is a bit controversial. Giving vaccines will certainly stress out your pig. You must weigh the benefits to the risks. Until potbellied pigs became house pets, pigs were only raised commercially on farms. This means that many pigs, perhaps hundreds, all shared bedding, toiling, food, etc. and usually in a confined area. This puts animals at a high risk of disease so vaccines were developed. Your pig will not need vaccines unless exposed to many other pigs such as at a show or around farm pigs. Most of the diseases vaccinated for can be prevented with good hygiene. Rabies is rare in pigs but not impossible. Any warm-blooded animal can get rabies. There is no vaccine specific to swine. Swine are usually vaccinated with a rabies vaccine made for other species and usually only vaccinated if in high risk areas. Always consult your veterinarian for his opinion since there are differing views on the subject of vaccination. If you want to vaccinate, these are the vaccines needed: swine erysipelas, leptospirosis, atrophic rhinitis, transmissible gastroenteritis, rotavirus, corona, E. coli, clostridium type C, salmonella, eimeria, candida, parvovirus, pseudorabies, and tetanus.

- Eyes** Pigs can have a condition called entropion. This means inverted eyelid. The lashes rub against the cornea and conjunctiva and can cause suffering and permanent damage if not surgically repaired. Pigs do not have very good eyesight. They use their keen hearing more than their eyes.
- Ears** They need to be cleaned with alcohol or peroxide and cottonballs. Never put a Q-tip in their ear canal. Cleaning once a week is sufficient.
- Skin** Check the folds of their skin regularly for parasites (esp. ticks) and sores. Pigs can and love to be bathed with a mild shampoo.
- Teeth** Try to clean their teeth once a week with a wet brush or washcloth. The tusks need to be trimmed by a veterinarian.
- Hooves** Hooves will grow like fingernails. In a young pig, they can be filed with an emery board and when they get older they may need to be trimmed. A veterinarian can show you how to do this.

The likelihood of parasites is low if kept clean and not exposed to other pigs or livestock. Simple remedies are sold for de-worming. First consult your veterinarian.

Along with hyperthermia, pigs can get sunburned, so give your pet plenty of shade or indoor relief from the sun. Signs of hyperthermia include: vomiting, collapsing, glassy eyes and shock. If this happens, immerse the pig in cool water or cover with wet cool towels, then call your veterinarian.

There are diseases that can be passed on from pig to human. They include: anthrax, brucellosis, Chagas disease, tetanus, erysipelas, leptospirosis, melioidosis, tapeworm, ringworm, salmonella, and trichinosis (roundworm). Good personal hygiene can prevent most of these diseases. The diseases are transmissible through body fluids, infected stool, and infected sores.

PREPARING FOR YOUR PIG

The following is a list of what you will need for your pet pig:

1. A pet carrier to bring him home
2. An outdoor shelter with hay/straw and good ventilation
3. An exercise area: the larger, the less damage to soil and vegetation
4. A secure fence that he can't get under
5. Crate for inside
6. Litterbox/liter- pine bedding is best
 - no cedar-type, its toxic
7. Wading pool for outside
 - must be sturdy
 - must have a slope
8. Child gates
9. Bed- blankets, sleeping bag
10. Toys- stuffed animals, balls, boxes with newspaper (for rummaging) soda bottles, rawhides, squeaky toys
11. Grooming brush
 - rubber horse type
12. Hoof conditioner
13. Spray bottle with glycerin/water mixture for skin
14. Food

You will need to pig-proof your house. Do the same as if baby-proofing a house. Hide electrical wires, remove toxic plants and chemicals from reach, secure cupboards, remove plastic bags, small toys, buttons scissors, needles, pins, aluminum foil, light bulbs and anything else you would move if you were bringing a toddler home. Remember pigs are pigs and will do just about anything to get to food. They will tip the garbage, get into cupboards, anything if they think they'll get food. So keep this in mind when preparing your home. Later you can get a good book and train your pig not to get into food areas!

CONCLUSION

I hope this booklet has helped you prepare for your new piglet. I wish you the best and know you will have hours of enjoyment with your new edition.

I am always available to answer questions you may have and will accept, at any time, a pig back if it does not work out with your family. My number is 301-829-5065 or 301-831-0867.

Piggest Wishes,

Maria