

Pig Care

Basics

Pigs have an average lifespan of 10-15 years and their normal body temperature ranges from 101-103°F. There are a variety of pig breeds, and while they range in size, there is no such thing as a truly “micro”, “mini”, or “teacup” pig! Smaller breeds, such as the Göttingen pig or Vietnamese pot-belly, can reach 150lbs when fully grown. Larger breeds, commonly used in factory farming, will easily reach up to 500lbs, and can continue growing to weights in excess of 1000lbs.

Behavior

Pigs are highly social creatures and will do best with another pig for company. Because of their curiosity and intelligence, pigs need plenty of space to explore, and providing durable toys is encouraged to prevent boredom. By nature, pigs are foragers – their snouts are incredibly strong and they use them to dig up roots, bulbs, and bugs, quickly transforming green pastures (or your backyard!) into fields of well-turned soil.



The before shot - Pigs are natural foragers and use their powerful snouts to dig up the soil in search of bugs, bulbs, and roots to eat.



The after shot - not such a lush green field anymore!

Space

Because of their size, pigs need a lot of space! Their incredible strength necessitates sturdy fencing and shelters to avoid injury and prevent escape. Because pigs are poor thermoregulators, it is important that their living space is designed to help keep them cool in summer and warm in winter. In warm weather, pigs are prone to sunburn and heat stress, which can be extremely dangerous. Adequate shade must always be available. Misters, ponds, pools, and wallows will help to keep pigs cool, and mud acts as a natural sunscreen (and insect deterrent!). In cooler weather, pigs require warm, dry, and draft-free shelter. Plenty of clean straw bedding will help to keep them insulated on cold nights. Pig shelters must be properly ventilated; cold, wet conditions indoors can result in pneumonia, while hot, moist conditions can lead to skin infections.

Diet

All domestic pig breeds are prone to obesity and therefore must be kept on strict diets. We recommend feeding a pelleted diet formulated for pot-belly pigs; these tend to be higher quality and less geared toward rapid growth than commercial pig diets (we use Mazuri mini-pig pellets). Meals should be fed in two or three smaller portions throughout the day, with the total amount of pellets not exceeding 1-3% of the pig's body weight. At Charlie's Acres, we moisten our pigs' pellets with water to prevent choking (pigs eat fast!) and improve hydration.

Supplementing the pelleted diet with fresh produce (mainly greens and veggies, with limited fruit) is recommended to provide additional vitamins and minerals, and prevent constipation. See our list of pig-safe produce below! Clean, fresh drinking water should also be available at all times.

Vegetables	Fruits
<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Artichokes – remove spikes· Arugula· Asparagus· Beans (green, snap, string, wax, etc.)· Beets· Bell peppers· Bok choy· Broccoli· Brussels sprouts· Cabbage· Carrots· Cauliflowers· Celery – cut into pieces to avoid choking· Corn – no cobs or stems· Cucumber· Eggplant· Endive· Greens (beet, carrot, chard, collard, dandelion, kale, kohlrabi, mustard, spinach, turnip, watercress, etc.)· Radish· Lettuces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Apple – no leaves or seeds· Apricot – no leaves or seeds· Avocado – no pits or skin· Banana – peel okay· Berries· Cherries – no leaves or pits· Dates – no pits· Dragon fruit/pitaya· Figs· Grapes· Grapefruit· Guava· Jackfruit· Kiwi· Kumquat· Lemon – no peel· Lime – no peel· Mango – no pits or skin· Melons (cantaloupe, honeydew, watermelon, etc.)· Nectarines – no pits· Oranges – no peel

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Okra · Parsley · Parsnip · Peas (green, snap, snow, sugar, etc.) · Sprouts · Sweet potato – no leaves, stems, vines · Squash – no leaves, stems, vines · Tomato – no leaves, stems, vines · Turnip · Yams · Zucchini 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Papaya – no seeds · Passion fruit · Peach – no leaves or pits · Pears – no leaves or seeds · Persimmon · Pineapple – no rind · Plum – no leaves or pits · Pomegranate seeds · Quince · Starfruit · Tangerine – no peel
<p>DO NOT GIVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Anything moldy · Cassava · Legumes (e.g. kidney beans, lima beans, nuts) · Onions · Potatoes · Rhubarb · Pits, seeds · Leaves, stems, vines 	

Health care and maintenance

Consult your pig-savvy veterinarian to determine the correct vaccines and vaccination schedule for your pig – these may vary depending on your geographic location, and your pig’s age, health, or medical history. Your vet may consider vaccinating against diseases such as erysipelas, leptospirosis, parvovirus, tetanus, and rabies, and various parasites like lungworm or mange. Fecal samples should be tested at least once a year for internal parasites.

Female pigs reach sexual maturity around five or six months of age, and males reach sexual maturity between seven and ten months. Reproductive hormones make both sexes extremely difficult and potentially dangerous to deal with. Additionally, female pigs are at high risk for reproductive cancers. Therefore, we strongly recommend spaying or neutering your pet pig.

Consult your local veterinarian but spay and neuter surgeries can generally be performed on pigs at around three or fourth months of age. The older and larger the pig, the riskier the surgery, and the more difficult the recovery time, so spay or neuter early!

Perform regular health checks on your pig! Start when your pig is young, so they get used to being handled and having all parts of their body touched. Most pigs will happily submit to a health check if it comes with a belly rub, but less compliant pigs may require restraint – ask your vet to show you how to safely “flop” your pig. At Charlie’s Acres we check our pigs, nose to tail, once a month.

Here’s what we look for:

Nose - Discharge, foreign bodies, sores

Mouth - Cracked/missing teeth, overgrown tusks, odors, sores

Eyes - Discharge, foreign bodies, swelling

Ears - Discharge (wax is normal!), foreign bodies, odors

Abdomen - Lumps/masses, fluid build-up, sensitivity, tautness, discharge/heat/swelling around teats

Legs - Heat, swelling, joint stiffness, sores

Hooves - Cracks, heat, debris between toes, sores/wounds, odors, overgrown hooves

Penis/vulva - Discharge, lumps/masses, discoloration, swelling, odors

Butt/tail - Cleanliness, lumps/masses, discoloration

Common ailments

Because farm pigs are bred to grow very large very quickly, they often experience hoof and joint issues. Keeping your pig at a healthy weight through proper diet and exercise will help reduce hoof and joint problems. Arthritis and lameness are especially common in older or overweight pigs; symptoms can be treated with glucosamine or other dietary supplements as recommended by your veterinarian. Hooves can become overgrown, or cracked and infected. Check your pig's feet regularly and trim hooves as needed – have your vet do this or ask them to teach you how. Cracks should be treated according to your veterinarian's instructions. See below for an example of a hoof crack.



Dry, flaky skin is common in pigs. Certain oils rubbed onto the skin or added to the diet (in moderation) can help relieve dryness; at Charlie's Acres, we freeze coconut oil into cubes as a favorite treat, or use it in a homemade skin conditioning spray! If your pig is excessively itchy, and their skin is crusty or scabby, they should be checked for mange. Pigs, especially those with light skin, are susceptible to skin cancer. Make sure to apply sunscreen or mud – or better yet, provide a mud wallow for your pig – to help avoid sunburn.

Pot-belly pigs, especially overweight individuals, are prone to entropion, a condition in which the eyelid folds inward so that the lashes are in contact with the eyeball. This causes considerable discomfort and irritation of the cornea, and can lead to conjunctivitis or blindness. Consult your vet to determine the best course of action.

Pigs are prone to becoming dangerously overheated. Signs of heat stress may include flushed skin, lethargy, open-mouthed breathing or panting, increased respiratory rate, muscle tremors, weakness, and seizures. Make sure your pig always has access to shade and cool drinking water. If you can, provide fans, misters, and pools. If you see signs of heat stress, act quickly, but do not pour or spray cold water on your pig, as this can induce shock. Try to move the pig into a shaded area with food or other positive reinforcement, avoiding further stress. If the pig won't move, construct a shaded area using a sheet or tarp, and direct a fan toward the animal if possible. Apply wet towels to begin the cooling process and protect the skin, especially if the pig is still in direct sunlight. Rub ice packs (wrapped in paper towels or cloth to prevent skin damage) over the pig's body and apply anywhere large blood vessels lie close to the skin's surface (e.g. ears, "armpit" and ankle areas). Offer cool juice or water with added electrolytes. Monitor your pig until their behavior and temperature return to normal. Always consult your vet; depending on severity, your pig may require antibiotics to help them recover from heat stress.