

## Mini Pig Care Guideline

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Before you bring your piglet home there is some essential knowledge that will help you along the way and some essential items that are going to make your transition easier. Also, when people ask you about your fantastic new pet, you will have the knowledge needed to answer the questions! This is a guide wrote based on my last 18 years of owning, caring for and breeding mini pig. We also have larger pigs and although the care is similar there are some differences.

### Let's start with some basic mini pig knowledge.

1. Mini pigs are essentially a mixed breed of pig now known as the American Miniature Pig, they are descendants of pot belly pigs that were imported from Vietnam in the 80' s and cross bred with smaller feral pigs from various regions. Full blooded Pot Belly pigs are rare these days, we have one here that came in as a rescue and resides in our sanctuary for old and unwanted pigs and he is distinctly different, if you visit and would like to see the difference please ask to visit Mr. Cosmo.
2. Mini pigs are small, dense but heavy. Although they look like they weigh 40 pounds, they probably weigh closer to 60-90 pounds, heavy enough that holding them as adults

will be unpleasant for you. They will still be the size of an old English Bulldog, 15-18" tall and 22-24" long if you keep them on a healthy diet. That being said I get asked daily if these pigs will get 200 pounds, my answer is always, "yes if you let them, the same as you and I, they are a mammal and overeating is an issue," just like in humans its an issue and causes health problems. Problems such as diabetes, heart disease, fat blindness, arthritis, and a shortened life span. It pains me greatly to see people feeding their pigs junk food, they don't need it! It also kills me when people ask, how much do your pigs weigh? Why? This usually means they have been all over the internet during their search and they have seen the scammers claiming 20-40 pound pigs! This is literally impossible unless you are starving your pig to stunt its growth! I helped found two national nonprofits, I have seen thousands of pigs as well as am involved in rescues, once these pigs are fed a healthy diet, they will be a healthy mini pig weight. I urge you to contact your local animal control if you see someone starving their pig, this is abuse.

3. I want to address the lifestyle of a mini pig. They should not be 100% house pigs, they love to be outside. They love to explore, go on walks, play in water, dig in rocks, they are pigs! Most pigs that come back are indoor pigs, they are bored so therefore they become destructive. Pigs are so smart! They rank #4 on the intelligence scale, you can't put your child in a crib and leave it there for life. If this is the life you have planned for your pig, I would wait! Indoor/Outdoor piggies are happy and can lead great lives. I do caution that most indoor pigs become obese, they have easy access to snacks and lead a sedentary lifestyle. Overall, the pig is yours and I can't tell you how to raise it, but I caution against this.

4. Pigs are prey animals! Our pigs are exposed to people daily along with dogs and other farm animals, but they are going to need time to adjust to you, your pets and surroundings. They will be scared and self-preserving, this doesn't mean your pig hasn't been handled and some pigs adjust in a day and some may take 3 days. Later I will discuss how to ease this transition. But know a prey animal will run and hide, scream and protect itself.
5. Pigs are not puppies, refer to number 4. They are completely different and because one is a prey animal and one is a predator, immediate introductions is at your discretion.

Now that we have touched on some broad but necessary knowledge, I want to dive into the care of your piglet and what you should expect to happen.

1. What do pigs eat? Pigs eat pig food and fresh veggies, they have not need for anything extra. There are many types of pig food on the market, some far better than others. We have large quantities made up for our ranch and it only comes in 80 pound bags, they are available for purchase but 80 pound would get "bugs" before you could use sit all. The costs keep increasing so ask for a price if this is an option you choose. We send you with a sample and suggest that you have pig food ready at home and use ours to transition over. We have a feed that we highly recommend, text me for the link. Its organic, high fiber (much needed in pigs) and they do exceptional on it.

2. Pigs always need water available, without it they will develop salt toxicity and will pass quickly without vet intervention. Also make sure if you have other livestock that pigs do not have access to any salt supplements.
3. You should have an area approximately 4 x 4 set up before your pig comes come. They will want an area to call their own and you will want an area to place them to get a break. In this area you should have a soft bed, water bowl, litter box with pine shavings. I like to put this area near family activities so they can get use to your home. I have a shopping page available with links for you to see what we recommend.
4. Pigs scream! In the wild when their feet are off the ground its bad news and instinct is scream. If you have people in your home sensitive to loud noises you may want to warn them that the first few days will be loud.
5. When your pigs scream you never want to put the down or give them their way or they will always scream. When I say they learn fast, they really do. That means if you give in and put that piglet down one time for screaming, you have created a situation that will be very difficult to correct. You should never put your piglet down when they are screaming.
6. Piglets naturally are clean; they do not like to use a potty by their bed or food. In your area you have set up, they will use the litter box. If they don't the first time, then pick up your pigs mess and place it in the litter box, they will get it. Most people claim that their pig has potty trained in a day. However, if you let your pig out, supervise it. They don't gain full control for a year and if they are too far from their potty box or its not accessible, they will have accidents. If you want to potty train your pig to potty outside,

then take your pig outside (they will run off until bonded, remember they are prey animals) after feeding and they will potty outside. This is also a trick to make your pig go potty, they like the freedom of going potty in the outdoors. If you don't supervise your piggy and they begin to potty in a spot in the house, it will be very hard to break them, sometimes water/vinegar will help but its best to avoid this.

7. Find a vet to treat pigs, we have established a list of pig vets in California, some may have stopped or be full, but start asking for referrals, when you have an emergency is not a good time to find a vet.
8. If you buy a neutered male, the work is done but plan on getting your female spayed, if not they will get cranky and territorial when they cycle, which is every 21 days. Not all females get cranky, but some do.
9. Plan on spending time with your piglet or get a second piglet, they are herd animals, you are their herd. If you can't be there at least some time during each day they will need some interaction. Remember they are smart, this means they need enrichment in their life.

#### What to expect your first few days.

1. Remember they are prey animals? Expect them to be shy and expect to spend time holding them and feeding out of your hand.
2. Expect them to scream. But do not under any circumstance put them down when they scream, or they will always scream. Swaddling in a blanket will help.

3. Expect a decreased appetite, they may not eat alone, they are use to eating in a herd. Leave the feed with them and water, always have water. You can try to encourage them to eat by placing your dogs food next to their food (not in same pen) they will naturally not want to share. Also hold your pig and place small pieces in your pigs mouth (through the side of their mouth), this lets them know what you want them to do.
4. You will want to feed  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup twice a day as they age you will gradually increase the feed until they are around 2 years, at this time our pigs are getting 1 cup twice a day for life, supplement with veggies after they are 12 weeks old. I just use what is on hand, I don't make fancy special salads daily.
5. Don't believe everything you see and hear on social media or Google. I have people text me daily about things they say on Google (like start veggies early) and they end up with sick pigs.
6. If you are going to put your piggy down, place it in its own enclosed area. If your pig runs from you and you chase it, you are now the predator. You have broken any trust build and will be spending a long time rebuilding it.
7. Positive reinforcement should bet the only discipline you are using. It will build trust, if you spank your pig, you are a predator in the pigs eyes. But if you reward them when they are being good, they will aim to please you.
8. No one way is the right way, you will need to see what works for your pig and your lifestyle, this guide is here to help but you can develop your own ways.

## Your pigs health.

1. I get asked about vaccinations multiple times a day, I am not here to give vet advice, this needs to be discussed with your vet. The bare minimum we would do is for CD and T, respiratory issues, and erysipelas, all these can be bought at our local feed store. Check your area and please consult your local vet.
2. Deworming needs to happen every 6 months to avoid mites, but you can also take a fecal sample to your vet and they will let you know if you need to deworm. When your piglet leaves here they have had 2-3 doses of ivermectin and no other vaccinations because depending on your area these will change. You will need to rotate Ivermectin and Safeguard to fully de-worm your pig, or if you are like me you give both on the same schedule to avoid any issues, however we have over 100 pigs and prefer to avoid it all. Ivermectin comes in an injectable liquid but can be given in a double dose orally over food. Keep it in the fridge for longer life and be warned the Government is trying to remove it from the shelf and allow only vets to prescribe. Safeguard is for goats and pigs, you can usually find in pellet form or liquid.
3. They have naturally dry skin but using the feed we recommend has had excellent results compared to many feeds on the store shelf. Avoid coconut oil if possible, I know that social media thinks it's a cure all, if you don't mind grease marks on your floor, couches and your pigs skin, go for it! I have found no advantage of using coconut oil on my pig. If

you want to put some over the feed remember its adding calories and a Vitamin E capsule will work just as well and benefit the heart. Just my two cents there.

4. Pigs need their hooves cared for, you can train your pig young to let their feet be handled, remember positive reinforcement. Many vets will trim hooves or my favorite: place concrete or concrete pavers outside and let them file down naturally.
5. Tusks need to be tended to if you have a male pig, un-neutered males will still get tusks, they may never protrude outside the lip or they might. Females have smaller tusks and I do nothing with those. I do have intact boars (male pigs for breeding) and I have to watch their tusks, they can swipe you and cause stitches however we don't sell intact males.
6. Pig rust is a condition where your pigs skin is rust colored. This is usually because the feed you are using is lower quality and has corn as the main ingredient, please ask for your favorite feed. Since our clients have switched to this most have said all skin issues, eye crust and such is gone!
7. Pig sniffles! Pigs get allergies, I keep children's Benadryl on hand, a slight runny nose or sneezing and I start immediately. Its usually 1cc per pound, but I usually don't go over 15 cc for an adult pig, so use your best judgement or consult with a vet.
8. Pig diarrhea! Yuck, a new food, nervous, too much food, or anything that can disrupt the gut can and will give your pig diarrhea. I use generic Imodium and crush up the caplet and sprinkle on feed, 3 times in a day (give a small mid-day meal) and usually its stopping by the next morning. Don't wait days because they dehydrate easy.
9. Sunscreen on pink piggy ears is much appreciated if they get sunburned use Aloe Vera.



10. Wintertime housing. My favorite is an extra large dog loo and keep it stuffed with straw, if you put your hand in there its always toasty warm. Straw is hollow and holds heat. In the warm months I put a light layer for them to spread as they please.
11. Mud is a favorite of pigs, it is a natural sunscreen, fly deterrent and all around heat control for your pig. I understand that not everyone wants a mud pit in their yard, try a kiddie pool, your pig will appreciate it.
12. Pigs can swim but if you have a pool, you will need to teach your pig at an appropriate age where the steps are to get out. They swim well (supervise them please) but will get exhausted or panic and drown. I have performed pig CPR more than once and saved pigs who were no longer breathing due to choking. I suggest that you look up dog CPR is the same!
13. Pigs are curious, have poison controls number on file. Also have some activated charcoal in your first aid kit and your vets number on hand. Hydrogen Peroxide is good as well, if needed it will induce vomiting. Keep your medicines, cleaning products, and other toxins up high or locked.
14. I can't stress enough that Joe or myself are not vets, if your pig stops eating, has extending diarrhea, a cough that increases, rapid breathing or a temperature please don't text us, you need a vet, that's way above my pay scale.
15. First aid kits for pigs is a good idea. Mine has grown over the year but here is a basic list:
  - a. Childrens Tylenol as pain killer and fever reducer
  - b. Childrens Benadryl for allergies and to calm them down
  - c. Thermometer

- d. Ice pack
- e. Ace Bandage
- f. Activated Charcoal, to absorb toxins
- g. Hydrogen peroxide, to induce vomiting
- h. Vet number and Poison control
- i. Mineral oil, for bloat
- j. Childrens suppository or enema
- k. Neosporin for small cuts
- l. If you have a good relationship with your vet they will give you Benamine and an antibiotic to keep at home
- m. Ivermectin and Safeguard for deworming at 6 months and beyond
- n. Latex gloves for the unmentionable
- o. Immodium (generic capsules are my go to) for diarrhea
- p. Aloe Vera for sunburns
- q. CPR chart if you need one
- r. Dramamine for car sickness
- s. TUMS for bellies
- t. The sky is the limit, I put this all in a tackle box and have it ready

16. Bathing your pig is a chore if your pig doesn't like baths. Start young, use positive reinforcement and your piggy will learn to love their bath without screaming. Many people use Cheerios to encourage good behavior and some put Peanut butter on the side of the tub, try different ideas and see what works for your pig. I use tear free

shampoo for puppies or babies, some companies use pig shampoos, I have never found anything special about them and they end up in the trash.

17. Its not necessary to groom your pig but they love it. A firm brush really relaxes them.

This is also a good time to desensitize their hooves to be handled if needed.

### A few words on training

The more you train with and work with your pig, the more successful your ownership experience will be. If you expect to sit back and just let your pig learn on its own, it won't happen, and you will be disappointed. Why? It comes back to your pig's intelligence, like all pets, they need enrichment and training is enrichment.

1. You should harness train your pig, I like the figure 8 adjustable harness while they are growing. After they slow down, around a year, Brenda at [piggear.com](http://piggear.com) makes wonderful custom harnesses. How do you harness train?
  - a. You will always hear me be an advocate of positive reinforcement. That means when you place a pig on a harness and they pull (which they will) as soon as they relax, you reward them (you have about 2 seconds) and gradually build up.
  - b. Do not takes months and months letting your pig adjust to the smell or feel, they absolutely know the smell and feel and if they convince you that they need months to do this, they are training you!!

c. Place the harness on your piggy, reward when they don't pull by releasing pressure. Work with them in about 15-minute increments. Within a few days your piggy will be harness trained and walking. Please note, dog parks are not great places for pigs to play. Dogs have an instinct to chase pigs. We have had a few clients with sad endings because they insisted the dog park was the place for their pig.

i. Note, collars are not for pigs, ever! I have seen too many caught on fences, trachea's crushed and other instances where the pig has ended up in the emergency room because he/she had a collar on. It's harnesses only for these guys.

2. Potty training is quick and easy. Your pig is naturally clean, they will not use their bed or kitchen area as a toilet. Give them a litter tray with pine shavings within an enclosed area and most likely they will use it immediately. If they have an accident, that's to be expected since they are babies, but pick it up and place it in the litter box and show your piglet, they will understand.

Note, if you use the pine pellets for horse stalls, you MUST wet them down and let them become sawdust consistency. Piglets will eat the pellets that look like food, and it will cause a blockage and death due to ruptured intestines.

3. Tricks! The sky is the limit, just show the piglet what you want to happen and reward the positive baby steps until your piglet knows the trick.

4. We cannot emphasize enough that these animals are very intelligent, they want to be a part of your family, they want to please you, and they need enrichment/

training. Over the years the most successful piggy families are the families who invested time into their pet! They do NOT do well with rehoming or returning to the farm.