

Are You the Right Pet For Me? Miniature Pigs

Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs, also known as miniature pigs, remain a popular pet in many urban areas. Miniature pigs are extremely smart animals that bond closely with their families, but pigs are not for everyone. Proper pet pig care requires an appropriate diet, suitable housing, a tolerant disposition, and access to quality veterinary care. Miniature pigs usually live between 8-15 years.

Will your pig be legal?

The United States Department of Agriculture considers all pigs to be livestock and many local governments ban the keeping of livestock within city limits. Check the regulations in your area.

Will you be able to care for a large animal?

Miniature pigs are a smaller member of the pig family. Many owners purchase mini pigs expecting them to stay small. While some pigs remain small, other individuals grow much larger than expected. Pot-bellied pigs are not a breed but a “breed type” which share common traits.

- Pot-bellied pigs are relatively small. They weigh between 80-150 lb. (36-68 kg) and stand about 16-20 inches (0.4-0.5 m) at the shoulder.
- By comparison, an adult domestic pig can weigh over 800 lb. (363 kg) and stand over 36 inches (0.9 m) at the shoulder.

Miniature pigs must be purchased from a reputable breeder, because there is no way to know if a piglet has been crossed with a “regular size” pig. Even viewing the parents may not be a fool-proof method as many pigs are bred at a very young age before they reach full size.

Miniature pigs are pigs and they do pig things

Pigs love to root and dig. In fact, many modifications of the pig skull and snout are designed for rooting. Therefore **pigs are designed to live outdoors**, ideally in a farm-type setup or in a house with regular access to the outdoors. The “indoor-outdoor pig” should have somewhere it can spend hours a day exploring and rooting the ground, like a garden area or enclosure.



Regular walks provide good exercise but are not a replacement for somewhere to dig, and apartment life is never a good option for pet pigs. Pigs restricted to the indoors will root on objects like carpet and walls, although rooting boxes and designated rooting areas can minimize destructive rooting behavior. Combining rooting behavior with their strength and intelligence, pigs can also easily break fasteners to open doors or cabinets.

Pigs can be trained, but don't like to be restrained

Pet pigs usually urinate and defecate at a single site, which is usually separate from sleeping and feeding areas. Therefore mini pigs **can be house trained**. Pigs are also **very intelligent**, and other training (like training to walk on a harness) is possible in these animals.

Prospective owners should know that even when handled extensively and trained, pigs **do not like to be picked up**. Even light holds can set off a vigorous flight response that is characterized by struggling and **loud screaming or squealing**.

Pigs are highly social

Pigs are highly social animals, and as a part of their behavioral repertoire they can demonstrate **aggression and dominance displays**. Fighting and biting often stem from territorial disputes, like defending a prized sleeping space. Dominance behavior is also more likely to be expressed—towards pigs or human beings—in large, male pigs in their home territory. Pigs may even chase human visitors out of the house! **Pot-bellied pigs are not recommended in households with small children**.

The costs of pigs

In addition to the initial price of your pig, costs related to pig care include the proper food, providing the space needed, as well as routine veterinary care, which includes vaccinations, fecal parasite testing, and the costs of surgical sterilization (spaying or neutering). Pig hooves also need to be trimmed every 3 to 4 months and males have tusks that need to be trimmed, usually once a year.

References

Bollen P, Andersen A, Ellegaard L. The behaviour and housing requirements of minipigs. *Scandinavian Journal of Laboratory Animal Sciences*, Suppl 1. 1998;25:23–26.

George L. Potbellied pig manual. 2013. Veterinary Information Network. Available at <http://www.vin.com>. Accessed April 1, 2019.

GroinGroin Association & Refuge. GroinGroin Web site. Available at <http://www.groingroin.org/>. Accessed April 2, 2019.

Meese GB. The establishment and nature of the dominance hierarchy in the domesticated pig. *Animal Behavior*. 1973;21:326.

Seibert LM, Powers LV. Miniature pigs: Managing common medical and behavior issues. Proc ExoticsCon 2018 597-636.

April 1, 2019