

Caring for Sugar Gliders

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- Sugar gliders are hardy and don't have a lot of health problems.
- Because of their social nature, sugar gliders should always be kept in pairs or small groups.

Sugar gliders have quickly become a popular pet in the United States because of their many good characteristics: they are clean, attractive, and relatively quiet. Their housing and dietary requirements are reasonable. Sugar gliders are hardy and don't have a lot of health problems. However, before deciding to own a sugar glider, be sure you understand how much commitment and time are required.

Biological Facts

- Sugar gliders are tree-dwelling, nocturnal (active at night) marsupials (mammals with a pouch) from Australia and New Guinea.
- Sugar gliders live in large family groups (colonies) of 15 to 30 individuals.
- A thin membrane between their wrists and ankles allows them to glide through the air for distances up to 150 ft (45.7 m).
- An average adult weighs 4 to 6 oz (113.4 to 170.1 g) and is about 12 inches (30.5 cm) in length.
- Their captive life span is 12 to 14 years of age.
- They are sexually mature by 9 to 12 months of age.
- Males have a scrotal sac (reproductive organ) that looks like a little pom-pom on the abdomen. They also have a bifurcated (forked) penis. At maturity, unneutered males develop oily bald spots (scent glands) on their forehead and chest; neutering prevents this.
- The female pouch (marsupium) on the abdomen has a u-shaped opening, holds the joeys (babies) as they develop, and contains two teats for nursing.

- In the wild, the sugar glider's diet during the spring and summer consists almost entirely of insects and other prey; during the fall and winter, the diet consists of eucalyptus sap, acacia gum, nectar, and manna (sap that oozes from wounds on trees).

Behavior

- Sugar gliders are extremely social, so they prefer to be kept in pairs or small groups.
- Solitary sugar gliders require a lot of attention from their owners and are prone to behavioral problems due to loneliness.
- The best time to adopt and socialize joeys is when they have been out of the pouch for 7 to 12 weeks.
- Sugar gliders are very vocal: they bark or chatter for attention and make a sound called *crabbing* when they are excited.
- Scent marking allows group members to recognize each other.
- Unneutered males mark their cages with urine. Neutering reduces this behavior.
- Sugar gliders breed readily in captivity.

Diet

- Sugar gliders can be fed Bourbon's modified leadbeaters mixture (BML; *see the recipe below*) or a commercial diet for insectivores/carnivores (e.g., cat food kibble).
- They need fresh (not canned or dried) fruits and vegetables, such as chopped apple, mango, grapes, carrot, and sweet potato.
- The diet should be mostly insectivorous, including gut-loaded (pre-fed) crickets, mealworms, wax worms, and moths.
- Sugar gliders require a diet of about 50% protein, which can be supplied by insects; lean, boiled chicken or turkey; scrambled eggs; cottage cheese; or yogurt.
- Fresh foods and insects can be dusted with mineral supplements recommended by your veterinarian.

Caring for Your New Pet

- Recommend daily diet for one sugar glider:
 - 1 tablespoon BML
 - 1 tablespoon chopped fruits
 - 1 tablespoon chopped vegetables
 - 3 tablespoons insects

Environment

- Because of their social nature, sugar gliders should always be kept in pairs or small groups. Fighting is rare; same- or mixed-sex groups are usually fine.
- The cage should be as large as possible (minimum size: 2 cubic ft).
- Wire caging is best, with holes no larger than 0.5 to 0.75 square inches.
- They require nontoxic branches (manzanita, apple, citrus) for perching, chewing, and exercise.
- Near the top of the enclosure, they need a pouch or nest box for resting and hiding.
- Aspen or paper bedding should be used. Cedar and pine should be avoided because they can cause respiratory problems.
- The environment should be 70°F to 90°F (21.1°C to 32.2°C) and free of drafts. It should not be in bright sunlight.
- The cage and bedding should be kept very clean to help prevent odor and behavioral problems such as self-barbering (pulling out or chewing their own hair) and self-mutilation (biting themselves).

Preventive Care

- Sugar gliders require a routine physical examination every 6 to 12 months. Consult a veterinarian with experience in treating exotic pets if you have any questions or concerns about your sugar glider's health.
- An annual fecal examination should be performed to check for parasites.
- Your veterinarian may recommend blood tests.
- Their toenails require regular trimming.

Bourbon's Modified Leadbeaters Mixture

- 0.5 cup honey (do not use honeycomb, raw, or unfiltered honey)
- 1 hard-boiled or scrambled egg with the shell
- 0.25 cup apple juice (not frozen or for human infants)
- 1 (4 oz) bottle premixed Gerber juice with yogurt (mixed fruit or banana)
- 1 teaspoon Rep-Cal Herptivite vitamin supplement or a comparable supplement
- 2 teaspoons Rep-Cal Calcium supplement (non-phosphorous with vitamin D₃) or a comparable supplement
- 2 (2.5 oz) jars stage 1 or 2 Heinz, Gerber, or Beechnut chicken baby food
- 0.25 cup wheat germ
- 0.5 cup dry baby cereal (Heinz or Gerber, mixed or oatmeal)

Blend the first three ingredients together until well mixed. Add the remaining ingredients, and blend well. Pour into ice-cube trays, and freeze (one cube is approximately 2 tablespoons). This is good for 1 month.

- Neutering males prevents the development of prominent scent glands.
- No vaccinations are required.

Common Medical Disorders

- Malnutrition and its consequences (e.g., hindlimb paralysis, tremors, rickets [deformed bones], cataracts [clouding of the eye lens], blindness)
- Stress-related diseases (e.g., self-mutilation, self-barbering, pacing, eating disorders, cannibalism [eating] of young, abnormal aggression)
- Pneumonia
- Diarrhea
- Internal parasites