



Introduction to Sugar Glider Care

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Sugar gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*) are native to parts of Australia and New Guinea. They are marsupials, and they are nocturnal (active at night). In the wild, they have a very specialized diet feeding on saps, gums, barks, and some insects.

Sugar gliders have special care requirements compared with other small pets.

Housing

A sugar glider enclosure should be at least 20x20x30 inches high. This is adequate for 2 sugar gliders. Sugar gliders love to climb so the taller the cage, the better. Commercial bird cages can work well, as long as the cage bars are no wider than 1/2 inch. The Midwest Critter Nation cage is a good choice. Make sure that the cage is placed in an area reached by natural sunlight, but do not place it in direct sun. The temperature of the cage should be an average room temperature of approximately 65-75 degrees.

Sugar gliders are nocturnal and require nesting boxes/hammocks to curl up in and sleep during the day. They like an enclosed space, so a wooden birdhouse with an opening no smaller than 1.5 inches in diameter works well. You can also offer fleece/cloth pouches that act as sleeping bags. Bedding substrate, such as recycled paper, is not typically needed but can be used if it is non-toxic to ingest.

The enclosure should contain climbing branches, perches, ladders, and swings. These are often available at pet stores in the bird section. Wood that is safe for small birds is also safe for sugar gliders. Be sure to remove any wooden cage accessories which have become soiled. Be sure that toys and accessories do not contain small parts which can be removed and swallowed.

Sugar gliders also enjoy solid exercise wheels (does not have bars).



Diet

The sugar glider's diet is highly specialized and difficult to simulate in captivity. In the past, sugar gliders have suffered a variety of nutritional deficiencies in captivity. The ideal diet for sugar gliders is still being investigated.

The current recommendations by exotic animal veterinarians include:

- High-quality pellets designed for sugar gliders (Nutrimax and Glider Chow are reputable)
- Blenderized diet (1 ice cube per night, see below for recipe)
- One teaspoon per glider of fresh fruits chopped per night
- A few insects (like mealworms) per week
- Bee pollen as a treat, in small quantities, as too much can lead to obesity

To make the blenderized diet, follow the recipe below:

- 1/4 cup organic apple juice
- 1/2 cup organic honey
- 1 organic hard-boiled egg, with shell removed
- 4 oz Stonyfield Organic plain yogurt
- 1 tsp Rep-Cal Herpivite Vitamin Supplement (Blue Label)
- 2 tsp Rep-Cal Calcium Supplement Non-Phosphorous with Vitamin D3 (Pink Label)
- 2 jars chicken baby food
- 1/4 cup wheat germ
- 1/2 cup dry baby cereal (mixed or oatmeal)
- 1/4 Oxbow Carnivore Care diet (available in hospital)

Place in a blender and mix until smooth. Divide into ice cube trays and use one cube daily. Thaw the cube and offer in a small, shallow dish. If your glider will not eat well on its own, you may need to syringe feed. This is the mainstay of your glider's diet.

Offer fresh fruits and vegetables daily. If your glider will not eat fresh fruits and vegetables, you can add them to the blenderized diet:

- 1 small peeled organic apple
- 1/4 cup organic blueberries
- 1/4 cup organic grapes (green or red)
- 1/4 cup organic cantaloupe
- 1/4 cup organic broccoli
- 1/2 cup organic spinach
- 1/4 cup organic peas

Fresh water should be available at all times, in a water bowl or bottle. Sugar gliders are sensitive to harmful bacteria so it is important to wash your pet's dishes daily.

Behavior

Part of what makes a sugar glider so endearing is its need for bonding and attention. They are very playful and social animals. In many cases, it makes sense to have more than one glider if your schedule does not allow for ample daily interaction over the entire course of your glider's life. Companionship is actually crucial to your sugar glider's health. When a sugar glider is left alone for days at a time, she may become depressed. A depressed sugar glider is susceptible to illness and even self-mutilating behaviors. If you are looking for a reliable, everyday buddy for years to come, a sugar glider may be a great pet for you. Some people like to go about safe activities with their sugar gliders happily nestled in their sweatshirt pockets.

Signs of Illness

Call us if you notice any of the following signs of disease:

- Sneezing
- Runny nose/eyes
- itching
- decreased appetite
- hair loss
- diarrhea
- Self-mutilation
- Weakness/lethargy
- Lumps/bumps

Preventive Care

Your sugar glider should have an annual wellness examination. Signs of illness can be very subtle and sugar gliders can become very sick, very quickly. Routine healthcare will help to catch disease in the early stages when treatment is more likely to be successful. A fecal exam (a test run from a stool sample) should be performed annually to check for intestinal parasites.