Degu adoption – information sheet

Thank you for considering adopting an animal from Marias Animal Shelter. We believe every animal should have a happy, comfortable, and safe home where all their welfare needs are met.

Unfortunately, outdated information and incorrect assumptions surrounding the care of small animals is extremely common, which is why so many animals come to us. We have created this sheet to provide all the relevant information you need to consider before rehoming from us.

When we rehome animals, our goal is to find them the most suitable environment in which they can thrive, not simply survive. We assess each potential adopter and their set up to ensure adopted animals will be taken care of properly to prevent any future issues, for pet or owner.

Why are our standards in place?

Rescue centres are often seen to have high standards that must be met to adopt an animal. These standards may differ from what some people believe to be suitable, however, our standards are in place to ensure that the animals we rehome live happy and healthy lives. We have over 20 years' experience rescuing, rehoming, and caring for small animals. We work closely with vets and rodentologists, constantly updating our knowledge in line with best practice and academic research.

Please note that knowledge and advice on animal care and welfare is constantly changing. The advice and recommendations we provide are carefully researched and reviewed regularly. Staying up to date with the latest information is crucial to providing the best animal care. **Please remember, simply having owned an animal in the past may not necessarily mean you have all the up-to-date information you need for current or future pets.**

Do you adopt to homes with children?

Yes. However, degus are not children's pets. An animal is not a child's responsibility; the whole family should be providing a lifetime home. Children can get involved, but the animal should not be for them. If you do have children, you must ensure that the animal receives thoughtful, calm, and gentle interaction; older children are typically more suitable. Instead of 'cuddling' we recommend supervised interaction at the animal's level for the most positive experience (for human and animal!). Please note, we may ask the age of your children and provide further advice to ensure the welfare of our animals.

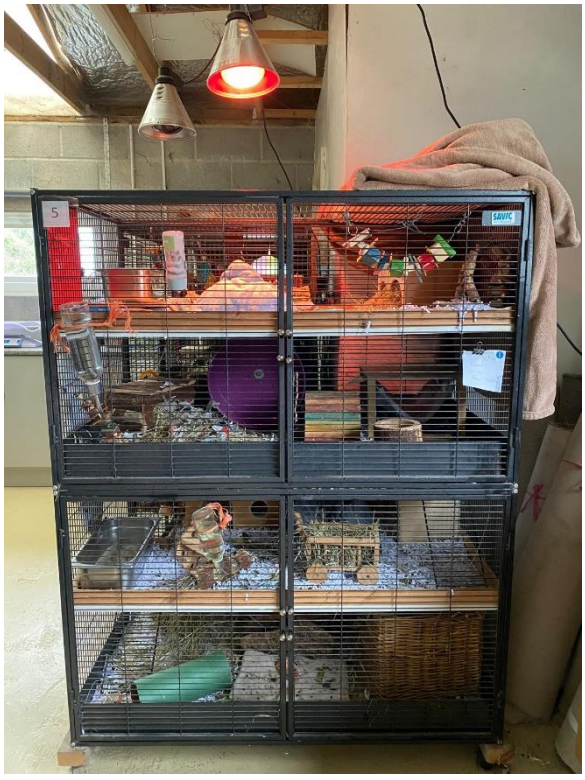
Wanting to adopt from us?

1. **Read this information sheet carefully!**
   Please take care to check this information sheet before asking us questions, although we are happy to advise and answer questions, many of the answers can be found on this sheet.

2. **Follow the instructions on the bottom of this information sheet. Thank you.**

***Housing details*:** We are aware that housing can differ in shape or design. We review all housing photographs before adoption and may provide recommendations as necessary. If you are unsure, *please get in touch ideally before purchasing anything* as this means any alterations are cheaper and easier for you. The most important consideration for us is that your pets have ample space and stimulation so you can enjoy them to their fullest and avoid common problems!

Small animals cannot leave the enclosures we choose to put them in and so we always recommend providing as much space as possible in order to keep them happy and healthy. It's so important that degus have space to exercise and perform **natural behaviours such as running, jumping, digging, foraging and more.** Degus are very active throughout the day and so confinement in a small cage causes a range of problems including boredom, stress, depression, bar-biting and aggression towards companions or yourself.



Good enclosures for degus feature multiple levels to explore, solid flooring and wire sides as they will chew through wood, Perspex or plastic quickly. Degus at the shelter live in enclosures which are approx. 150cm high x 115cm wide x 67cm deep. We would ask for similar dimensions to ensure their wellbeing as any smaller than this is highly likely to cause you problems.

Depending on your space and set up, some people choose to offer a safe room to free roam or an additional play pen area. This is generally enriching, stimulating and can offer extra space to bond with your pet, however, in some cases this can be stressful depending on the space and individuals. If unsure, please feel free to ask us. Watching your pets body language will also help – if they spend a lot of time washing themselves or hiding this is a likely indicator of stress.

Housing furniture: make sure to provide lots of hiding places. Degus usually share a bedding/nest area as they are social animals who live in big groups underground in the wild. However, it's important that they can spend time apart if they wish, so a variety of different hiding areas is best to protect their wellbeing and prevent fighting.

Shelves and hides made from safe woods such as kiln dried untreated pine and poplar make excellent additions, enabling a range of natural behaviours. Branches from safe woods (willow, apple, hazel) make for great nibbling or climbing, and ceramic pots, tubes, cardboard boxes or soft pet beds make excellent places to hide.

Housing location: Degus thrive at normal room temperatures ranging from 18-21 degrees. They can tolerate lower and higher temperatures but can be susceptible to heat stroke if they get too hot and respiratory issues if they are cold or kept in draughty areas. For these reasons, we ask that they are kept indoors in an area that is secure and has a stable temperature.

House plants, soft furnishings and electrical wiring MUST be out of reach to prevent injury or illness. Also be aware that if allowed them to free roam any furniture or carpet may become soiled or nibbled during playtime! **Please do not to expose degus to cooking fumes, perfumes, essential oils, aerosols, or similar as these can be toxic or cause respiratory issues.**

Please remember that being approached by dogs/cats can be extremely stressful as degus are prey animals. We recommend keeping other animals housed in a separate room. **DO NOT place degus near speakers, TV's, computers or similar as they have very sensitive hearing.**

Bedding: Soft paper bedding is great for digging, burrowing and absorbing urine. Brands include Kaytee, Carefresh, Megazorb, Back2Nature etc. You can use hemp or polar fleece cage liners but fleece should be removed if your degus chew them as it can cause problems if it gets stuck in the digestive tract or wrapped around limbs. At the shelter, we use newspaper as a base with shredded paper, quality hay, fleece and soft bedding on top which we've found to be economic and effective.

Sawdust should never be used as bedding as the fine particles and oils/phenols contained in the wood can irritate internal organs. Commercially sold **wood shavings are also unsuitable** as it strips the oils from their feet and skin, with dust and fine particles also causing respiratory issues. For this reason, we are unable to rehome to an environment where these will be used.

***Companionship*: Degus can live an average of 7-10 years, and should live in compatible pairs or groups where possible since they are social animals**. We've found same sex pairs or a neutered male with females works well.

Fights are uncommon but can occur due to living space which is too small, high value food items which create competition or the introduction of new smells. Correct set ups, scatter feeding and avoiding mixing furniture/bedding/scent between different groups can reduce these risks. Please seek advice and support if individuals are seen fighting or regularly separate – would you want to live with someone who constantly stresses or scares you? Neutering is sometimes suggested to reduce aggression/fighting between males, however, it's not always successful and so generally not recommended for this purpose. We can advise on bonding if needed.

Water: We recommend providing both a water bowl and water bottle; bowls are more natural, accessible, and preferred by most small animals. However, they can become soiled or tip over hence the need to provide a backup bottle. A non-tip design or ceramic bowl is best. We suggest this because small animals usually drink less than they should out of a bottle as it's more difficult to use, so we find offering this choice reduces associated health problems.

Bathing: Degus should not get wet under any circumstances as it can cause serious health problems. Please do not bathe them!

Instead, provide a sand bath using rodent bathing sand available in pet shops or online. You can use specially designed metal baths or a heavy-bottomed ceramic, glass or metal bowl/tin as long as the degus can jump in and our easily. Aim for at least 30cm wide and 10cm deep to allow them room to turn over in the sand.

Exercise: As well as building an enriching cage for your degus, they must have an exercise wheel at a minimum diameter of 30cm. Where you have 3+ degus it is recommended to have more wheels to prevent fighting over the same one. These should be metal due to the fact that degus will chew through wooden ones very quickly. Plastic is not appropriate as it is unsafe for them to chew on.

Diet: Degus primarily feed on plants, bushes, seeds, bark, stems and leaves in the wild. Foraging for these will take up much of their day and provide exercise so it's great to scatter and hide food around their enclosure. Just be aware this makes it more difficult to see what is being eaten or left.

Finding a healthy diet for domestic degus can be difficult. Dried forage should be the main part of their diet, made up of herbs, leaves and flowers. We import from www.hansemanns-team.de/ or you could blend your own using forage typically sold for rabbits and guinea pigs (online) with seed mixes also available from specialist rodent shops. Hay should make up around 10-20% of the diet but make sure it is good quality otherwise it is not palatable. Hay should be slightly green, sweet smelling and fairly fresh. Where possible, fresh food (veggies) can be given in small amounts for maximum nutrition, but avoid giving fruit and root veg regularly.

Degus should not be fed muesli as this encourages selective feeding and can cause obesity and dental disease. Pellets contain vital nutrients that degus require which cannot always be provided in a forage-only diet, e.g. Vitamin D. The best pellets nutritionally are Science Selective or Beapher Care Plus. Remember to limit the amount fed and follow packet guidelines to ensure enough forage and hay is eaten alongside.

We cannot stress how important it is that degus have constant access to fibre in the form of forage and hay. This is essential to keep teeth and guts healthy. Without this, degus can develop serious gut and dental problems including ongoing dental disease and tooth root issues which are expensive to treat often fatal.

Good daily habits: we recommend offering a pea-flake or other healthy treat to your degus by hand on a daily basis, then watching them eat it fully. This can help build trust and enjoyable interactions for you both, and means you can check each individual is bright and eating. (For nervous individuals you can build up to this by placing a treat in the enclosure and standing nearby, gradually moving your hand closer until they begin to

trust you more and take it from your hand. This may take time but we've had much success with even the most timid of degus!) We think this is an essential activity because otherwise it's incredibly difficult to tell if there are problems until it's too late. Things to look for: once they know the routine, degus typically come racing up, eager to take the treat. Problems which warrant veterinary investigation include: dropping the treat or showing little interest in things which are normally enjoyed, wiping the mouth area with a front paw repetitively, taking excessively long to eat it, wetness around the mouth, only able to nibble the edges and not eat the whole thing. These are often a sign of teeth issues and require a vet.

To prevent health issues like diabetes, cataracts or dental disease it's worth limiting sweet/fatty treats like oats, roots and nuts to occasional treats only.

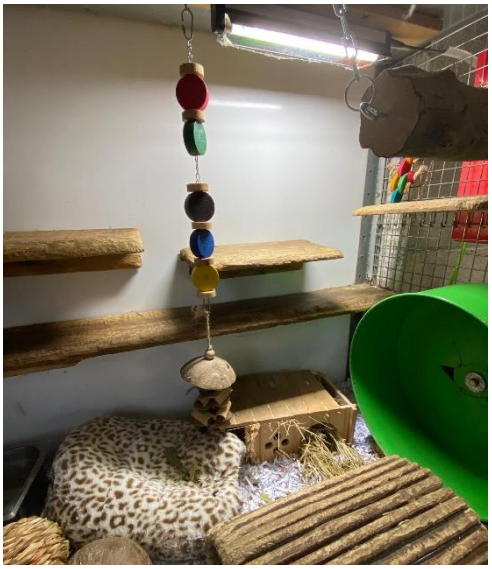
Health and wellbeing: It is recommended to weigh your degus regularly (e.g. once a month). Although their weight can typically range from 170g-300g individually, a weight loss or increase of 10% or more can signify a health concern that needs to be investigated.

What is gut stasis: is a serious and potentially life-threatening condition where the movement of food through the digestive tracts has slowed or stopped moving. Common symptoms include reduced appetite, small poops, lethargy, hunched body position, not moving around as normal, coat looking 'fluffed up', or other signs of illness like heavy or rapid breathing. If you suspect your pet is not eating or eating less than usual, please book an essential vet visit. Or you can always call the shelter for advice.

We do not recommend hay racks as legs and heads can easily become trapped.

Age-related housing adjustments: Like humans, degus get arthritis. This can start as they get older (around 5+ but we have seen problems around 2-3 years depending on how they're cared for). If you notice slow, stiff movements, reluctance to climb/jump, hunched postures, looking 'fluffed up' regularly or anything else out of the ordinary, please visit a degu-savvy vet as your pet may need a check-up / pain relief. As they get older, adjust your enclosure to use more ramps and ensure food/water is within comfortable reach (eg they don't have to jump to get it). Think of it like a bungalow for old people!

The UVB debate: Wild degus are exposed to natural sunlight which helps them absorb Vitamin D. When kept inside, this process is interrupted which influences the way the body absorbs vitamin D and processes calcium. As a result, domestic degus often have teeth, eye and bone related issues. We use UVB lights to replicate natural lighting and have seen huge improvements as a result. To read more www.arcadiabird.com/rodents/ or search related terms. We use 2.4% arcadia shade dweller arboreal T5 12" UV-B lamps. Note: if using, mount them horizontally around 12" above degus to allow basking beneath (mounting vertically can cause eye damage). Ensure the bulbs are on a timer or turned off overnight. UVB degrades over time so replace the bulbs every 6-12 months (the light will still work and be visible to humans but the useful



ultraviolet wavelengths (UVB) has diminished). Make sure wires are out of reach as they will be chewed!

Health: Degus can suffer from a range of health issues such as infections, abscesses, dental disease, muscle strains, injury from falls or fighting. You should observe them regularly for signs of unusual behaviour. Degus will often hide illness so it can be hard to notice when they are unwell. A reliable sign to look for is a 'scruffy coat'. In the wild, their coat is essential to survival, so when they are not maintaining their coat condition through good grooming you know something is wrong – it could be they are uncomfortable for whatever reason and not looking after themselves sufficiently. Like when you get ill you care less what your hair looks like – it's a sign you're not feeling good!

There is very little reliable online information relating to degu health however "Degumania" on Facebook has a number of files relating to common illnesses which can be referenced - but this should NOT replace qualified veterinary care.

Exotic vets: Degus are classed as exotic animals. Regular vets are not trained in exotic animals as routine so you need to find a specialist / exotic vet. You should register with an appropriate practice before getting your degus as they can be hard to find in an emergency.

If you suspect your degu is ill, always seek veterinary attention urgently.

Handling: being a prey species the only time degus would be picked up in the wild is when they are going to be eaten, so **being handled is very stressful and should be minimised**. Any loud noises or sudden movements will scare your pet. We strongly recommend interacting with your pet on their level with minimal picking up as your pet will learn to trust you and your interactions will be more positive.

If you do have to pick them up, we recommend using a cardboard tube (like the tubes bathing sand comes in!) **and covering both ends with your hand, keeping the degu safely inside**. This is the least stressful way of catching and moving them for you and them!

Or, cup your hands around their whole body and lift them from beneath, but be aware they are VERY wriggly, quick and will jump from your hands! Alternatively, you can encourage them to walk up your arm or over your hands. **NEVER grab or hold a degu by their tail.** Their tail is likely to fall off (deglove) as they to try get away. This is a serious injury leaving the bone exposed and will likely require a vet visit. Always minimise the length of handling or stressful events and avoid sneaking up on your pet or chasing them around a large area. Degus can bite if they feel threatened or cornered and their bites can be deep and very strong since their teeth are designed to crack open nut shells. Some people

wear gloves when handling but we prefer moving degus inside tubes as described above, or restraining them in a small blanket only when absolutely necessary is more effective.

We must stress that degus do not typically enjoy being 'cuddled'. They most prefer climbing onto your arm, or climbing over you if you sit in a playpen with them. They sometimes enjoy chin tickles though!

Never use a harness and lead to take small animals for a walk. This is typically highly stressful for a prey animal.

Behaviour: Degus are naturally inquisitive, and each has a unique personality. To keep them stimulated provide plenty of toys, tunnels and opportunities to explore and dig. Swapping items in and out or adding new ones keeps up interest and stimulation. Hiding food, forage or herbs among hay is also great for keeping degus busy and a dig box provides added enrichment. Safe bedding can be used to make a dig box, as well as hay and forage.

Useful Links

Listed below are some useful links, simply click on them to open or copy them into your browser.

www.bluecross.org.uk/advice/degu/degu-care
www.forum.degus-international-community.org/
www.worldofdegus.com
Enclosures: www.savic.be/product/small-animals

Cosypet RC03
Pet Planet - Rat & Ferret cage
Aventura (Little Pet Warehouse)
Little Zoo Venturer (The Pet Express)
Liberta Explorer (My Degu)
Trekker (Sky Pet)

Our Services

Can't find good quality hay? We sell two types of quality palatable eating hay:
Nature's Own 5-a-day hay, £3 per 1kg bag.
Sweet Green hay, £6 per 3.5kg bag.

Don't have a carrier? Don't worry, we sell them for £10. Simply enquire with us to arrange.

Worried about nail clipping? We offer a nail trimming service for £15 per animal, or grooming at £15 per 15 mins. Simply book an appointment and bring your degus to the shelter.

Going away? We offer a boarding service!
Board your degus with us for £12 per night per enclosure (£15 for trios). We provide xxx Please enquire with the dates you are looking for to arrange.

What to do next - adoption instructions

Please note: We charge an adoption donation of £25 per degu. We are a registered charity, and this fee does not cover our costs. Any additional donation is very gratefully received.

Thank you for adopting from us.

Steps to adopt:

1. Read this information sheet thoroughly! Please take care to check this information sheet before asking us questions, we are more than happy to advise but most answers can be found on here.

2. Send us a picture of your housing and set up so that we can see the size, design, and contents. Email these pictures to mariasanimalshelter@hotmail.com. Please note that telling us what you intend to provide is not adequate; we must see a picture of your existing set up.

3. We will reply to your email as soon as we have reviewed your housing and set up. Please note that due to the busy demands of our work it may take up to several days for us to respond.

4. We may provide some recommendations or suggest adjustments to your housing before we rehome to you. Please do not think us rude, the only reason we do this is to ensure the best welfare for the animal(s) in question.

5. Visit our website for animals currently available for adoption at www.mariasanimalshelter.com and let us know which individual you are interested in.

6. Arrange a collection appointment with us. We politely ask that your adoption donation is paid prior to collection of your animal(s).

Payment details

We prefer payment via bank transfer if possible.

BACS: Marias Animal Shelter, Lloyds Bank; Sort code: 30-88-22; Account number: 18735760

If this is not possible, we do accept cash payment on collection. We are very grateful for your payment which goes towards the running of the shelter.

Thank you!