

Caring for small animals through winter

It is vital to consider how to keep small pets safe and comfortable throughout the different seasons. In this issue we will look at caring for small animals, such as guinea pigs and rabbits, that are kept outside throughout the cold weather.

Tips on winter care

There are several things to consider during the cold weather, but in particular that outdoor caged pets need daily attention morning and evening. Whilst it is good for children to learn to take responsibility for the daily care of their pets, parents or carers do need to ensure that this is done properly. *Remember, small pets can suffer in cold weather or even freeze to death.*



Location of outdoor hutch

- 🐾 You may be able to move the hutch to a place that is well sheltered from the wind and rain. Ideally it would be near to the house, so that you can easily keep an eye on the occupants and attend to them without getting wet and cold yourself!
- 🐾 The wired part of the hutch needs to be covered with a weatherproof drape each night, and removed each morning to allow them to see out.
- 🐾 *Never move the living quarters into a garage or outbuilding that houses vehicles as the fumes could kill small animals.*

Bedding

- 🐾 Even through the winter months it is important to keep hutches and cages scrupulously clean, with plenty of warm, dry bedding. It is best to use dust-extracted hay and bagged bedding to reduce problems from dust and parasites.
- 🐾 A fresh layer of bedding should be put in the hutch each day, together with a really generous amount of hay for them to chew and to burrow into.

Daily care

It is vital to attend to small pets each and every day to:

- 🐾 Check for signs of ill health.
- 🐾 Give fresh food and a new supply of their dried food, and a generous supply of hay, plus fresh water.
- 🐾 Remove and replace any soiled bedding.
- 🐾 Offer companionship, especially to animals who live alone.



Indoor cage

If you want to bring your animals indoors during the cold weather, here are a few things to consider:

- 🐾 Ensure that the small animals remain safe from other pets or the unwanted attention of small children.
- 🐾 Rabbits and guinea pigs have sensitive hearing so they need to be kept somewhere quiet.
- 🐾 As with outdoor hutches, they will need a private place in their cage, somewhere to hide in, such as a pet-safe play-tube or wooden tunnel.
- 🐾 Your pets will still need daily exercise, which can be supervised 'floor time', but you must protect them from other pets and small children, and ensure that there are no gaps to get into such as behind a fridge or cooker, and no exposed wires to chew – as they are likely to do both!

