



Pet Kare Clinic

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“Happy Pets, Happy People”

Sugar Glider Care Sheet

Provided by the International Sugar Glider Association
Midwest Bird & Exotic Animal Hospital

I. INTRODUCTION

A. What are they?

Sugar Gliders are small arboreal marsupials from Australia and New Guinea. Like other marsupials, the females carry their young (joey) in a pouch. Adults weight 4-6 ounces and measure about 12” from their nose to the tip of their tail. At least half of this length is tail! Sugar Gliders have a thin membrane that stretches from their wrists to their ankles. This allows them to glide from branch to branch like the American Flying Squirrel. They use their tails as a rudder while they travel and gather insects in flight. Their gliding distances have been documented up to 150 feet!

II. ADOPTION

A. Pets

Sugar Gliders make wonderful pets for the young and the young at heart! They adapt well to humans and develop strong relational bonds with their owners. They are communal animals that need and crave attention from you, the owner, or another Sugar Glider. How close your newly adopted pet bonds to you will depend on the time you spend together. A minimum of 2 hours a day is recommended but more time is always better. Sugar Gliders can live up to 12 years, possibly longer. With proper food, shelter, and companionship your pet can live a long and happy life.

B. Handling

Sugar Gliders are fragile creatures but they can be easily handled. Make sure that the Sugar Glider is used to being held and does not nip before you let a child handle them. Sugar Gliders are nocturnal making them easier to handle early in the morning just before they go to sleep or before they normally get up at night. If you work with them daily they will become familiar with your scent and more trusting. Soon they will become your best friend. They love to be cuddled and pet. You can carry them around the house in a loose shirt pocket or on a shoulder. Make sure they have a place to crawl into if they feel insecure or just need to rest. It has been suggested that you carry your Sugar Glider around in your pants pockets. I would strongly advise against this. You may forget about them and sit down wrong, seriously injuring your pet.

C. Other people & pets

The long and short of it is that Sugar Gliders make wonderful pets. They seem to relate well to others with little or no difficulty. Problems typically arise from other people or animals and their willingness to accept the Sugar Glider. Of course this is also related to the amount of time you spend with your pet and how you both react to others.

III. HOUSING

A. Cage requirements

Before you buy any cage, you should consider the following: food placement, bedding, shelter, and exercise area. Make sure food holders are large enough to keep food in but too small for your pet to sit in and possibly soil the food as they eat. Always replace perishable items on a daily basis as spoiled food attracts bugs and can make your pet ill. Sugar Gliders also need a nest box to sleep in during the day and protect them from the sun. This is important since prolonged exposure to sunlight can kill a Sugar Glider. If you mount the nest box up high in the cage, make sure there is room for your pet to climb on top of it. It is possible for them to tear their thin gliding membrane by rubbing their elbows on the roof. For good bedding materials, choose dry moss, cotton, leaves from a live branch, or even wood shavings. Whatever you use, make sure that it is natural and doesn't pose a threat to your pet. Your Sugar Glider should have a cage that will allow plenty of room for exercise. The wire spacing should be no more than 1"x 1/2" wide. This is to keep babies in. Overall the cage should be at least 20" x 20" x 36". There should be a wire bottom to allow dropping to fall through. Keep them away from drafts or heating/air-conditioning vents to prevent them from catching colds. The best temperature range is 60-90 degrees F. If you have a door on the cage that lifts open, make sure you put a latch on it. Your pet will figure out how to open it and so can little children.

B. Climb/play things

Sugar Gliders have a natural need to climb and chew on live tree branches. They are useful for exercise and keeping their nails trimmed. Be careful which branches you choose. Toxic branches include Almond, Apricot, Black Walnut, Cherry, and Peach. You can go to your local pet store and find bird toys or other small animal toys that your pet can climb, push, or carry around. For the best reaction, place new things high in the cage. Do not use cloth materials. They may eat loose threads or become entangled in them.

IV. NUTRITION

A. Nutritional requirements

Gliders require a solid 75% fruit/vegetable and 25% protein diet. You need to keep their fat intake to minimum. It can result in health problems later on and in any babies. Canned fruit is NOT an option because it contains preservatives and refined sugar which are harmful.

B. Suggested food items

Sugar Gliders are fond of many different types of food. Some that they particularly enjoy, but are not limited to, are as follows: Apples, applesauce (baby food formula only, it contains vitamins), apricots, bananas, berries, bread, cantaloupe, carrots, cherries, corn, dates, dried fruit, eggs (boiled/raw), figs, grapes, honey, honeydew, insects (mealworms, crickets), meats (low fat turkey, boiled and skinless chicken, & feeder mice), melons, nuts (assorted raw & unsalted), papaya, peaches (NOT the pits, they are toxic), peanut butter, pears, pineapple, plums, pure fruit juices, raisins, strawberries, sunflower seeds, and sweet potatoes.

Sugar Gliders can be peculiar about what they eat. They may be willing to accept a certain food for a few days and then refuse it after a week. The following week they may eat the food item again. The bottom line is that they each have their own personality and tastes. It will just take time to find out what they like. You also need to make sure you give your pet FRESH WATER every day. Some people suggest feeding once a day at dusk, while others will feed twice a day. Which method you choose should be dependent on your particular Sugar Glider. Are they still hungry in the morning? Feed them a small amount in the morning or give them more in the evening.

DO NOT GIVE your Sugar Glider CHOCOLATE!! As with other animals, during digestion a toxin can be created. It may be harmful to Sugar Gliders as well, and certainly not worth the risk!

V. BONDING

A. Welcome home

So you decided to get a Sugar Glider and have just brought them home, now what? Where do you begin? Everything is going to be strange and new to your Sugar Glider. He has just been whisked away from everything he knew and thrown into a brand new situation. Keeping this in mind, I would suggest you place them in their new house/cage and let them alone for a day. They will have to become used to all of the new sounds, sights, smells, and food that are now part of their home. During this time, it is recommended you try to hand feed your pet some treats he may enjoy (i.e. grapes, nuts or other things). This will help him get used to seeing your face. Make sure only one person handles them for the first few days. Then, when the Sugar Glider is more relaxed, introduce new members of the care taking family. You can even play games by letting your Sugar Glider jump to each person. At this point, the bonding process has begun.

B. The bonding process

Bonding with your Sugar Glider is the easiest part of owning one. It takes some times so be patient and do not force anything. The time frame for bonding can take anywhere from immediately to a few months. One thing I founds that helps is to carry your new pet around in a shirt pocket all day. You can give small treats to help speed things up (called "Pocket Training"). During the day you can pet and bond with your Sugar Glider even if he is asleep. He will get used to your scent and touch at the same time. If you do carry him in your shirt pocket be careful not to lean against anything that could possibly injure your pet. Sugar Gliders tend to bond closer to their main caretaker. They can and will accept other people but tend to stay with their main handler. Mine have allowed me to hand them over to someone else and as soon as I started walking away, they jumped right back to me. I have even noticed that mine will react differently depending on the mood I'm in. They seem to be able to sense how I'm feeling. When I have been upset, they tend to stay in my shirt more than normal, occasionally coming out to get me to play. When I'm sad, they come up and tend to want to love on me and let me pet them more. If I am anxious about another person, they do not want to go to that person. I'm not sure if this is true of all Sugar Gliders, but mine seem to know what kind of mood I'm in and how to cheer me up.

C. Training

Yes, you can train your Sugar Glider in a couple different ways, to a certain extend. First of all, decide if you want a pet that stays on you at all times or, one that will freely roam you house. Once you have made this decision, you can begin training. If you want a personal Glider, you need to teach them to stay on your person. As you carry them around they may jump off. Gently pick them up and put them back on you or in a pocket until they settle down. It is ok to let them jump from person to person but not on the floor where they can run away from you. If you want one as a house pet, start in one small room and let him explore. Try to lure him back with treats and then let him continue to check out the room. After you have mastered the small room and feel comfortable calling him back, move on to a larger area. After awhile your pet will run off and explore, climb curtains, jump on you, and then take off again to play! I do not suggest in any way that these animals should have complete freedom in your house. They do need to be SUPERVISED AT ALL TIMES when out of their cage.

NOTE: Make sure that your toilet lid and any other water holding devise is closed! I know of some Sugar Gliders that have drowned in an open toilet by jumping in and not being able to get out!