



Degu (Brush tailed rat)

Octodon degu

Adult Size	About 5 inches, not including the tail.	Life Span	5 to 8 years on average, up to 15.
Male/Female Differences	Sexing can be difficult, especially on young degus. On females, the anus and urethra are spaced closer together than they are on males.		
Compatibility	Female degus can be housed together in groups, keeping at most one male. Degus can be housed singly, but they need more interaction with you.		
Origin	Mountains of Chile		
Climate	Cool and dry, so most home conditions are great for degus. Air condition is great for preventing overheating.		
Day Cycle	Diurnal, awake during the day, although they often are crepuscular, playing at dusk and dawn.		
Temperature	Avoid extremes. Degus are well suited to home temperatures.		
Lighting	Normal room lighting is fine; degus do not need any special lights.		
Humidity	Drier is better, but they adapt to indoor humidity well. Avoid excessive humidity.		
Habitat/Territory	Dry and cool mountains of Chile, living in communal burrows that all members of the community dig.		
Substrate/Bedding	Provide a safe and soft bedding, the less dusty the better. Cedar bedding can be toxic and pine too dusty. Good litters are shredded or pelleted aspen or recycled paper products. Supply nesting materials and dry hays.		
Hiding Place/Den	A wooden hut sized for guinea pigs is ideal for degus, offering both shelter and a chewing toy.		

Cage Type	Degus will chew and destroy all plastics! Degu cages can be wire, which allows for plenty of ventilation, or aquariums, which are easy to clean. Degus love to run and climb, so the cage must be large enough for ropes or wood perches and a (metal!) running wheel. Use a heavy duty screen as degus will chew plastic rims and meshes.
Diet	Pelleted degu food should form the basis of the diet. Offer either alfalfa or timothy hay to aid digestion. Offer occasional broccoli, tomatoes, and cucumber skins, and wheat grass.
Supplements	Degus properly fed rarely need supplements. Calcium and vitamin C can be added to their water, but a vet should be consulted before doing so, as excessive vitamins are not healthy.
Diet Precautions	Do not feed any sugars, either processed or natural, as degus cannot digest them and are very prone to diabetes. Avoid peanuts, raisins, carrots, and fruits. Check pellet ingredients for molasses. Avoid sunflowers and other seeds, as these can cause obesity. Hard shelled nuts, in limited amounts, make great treats. Avoid rabbit pellets as this lacks vitamin C and can contain ingredients toxic to degus.
Feeding	Feed a few tablespoons twice a day. Overfeeding will cause the degus to hide and store their food.
Water Source	Water bowls tend to get filled with substrate and make poor choices for degus. Plastic water bottles will be chewed through very quickly, so either place it in a protective metal sleeve or use an external bottle. Provide fresh water daily.
Grooming	Degus take dust baths like their cousins, the chinchillas. Use the same style of dust weekly to allow them to clean themselves, and remove after they are done as they tend to soil it later.
Oral and Foot Care	Use metal safety wheels to avoid trapping and injuring feet and tails. A degu's teeth are continually growing, so they must chew. Wooden houses, wooden treats, and pumice stones keep their teeth trim.
Proper Handling	Do not pick degus up by their tails. They weigh more than gerbils and their tails are very fragile. Doing so can cause it to break off. Pick them up gently around the waist or scoop up from below.
Habitat Maintenance	Daily spot clean their litter pan or soiled areas. Weekly cleaning suffices, removing and replacing the substrate.
Health Concerns	Diabetes and the subsequent blindness. Obesity due to improper diet and overfeeding.