



Beating the Heat: Heatstroke Prevention

Here are 9 quick tips on keeping your piggies cool in warm weather (~20°C plus). Guinea pigs don't cope well with extremes of temperatures, hot or cold, but they really struggle with heat in particular. Piggies cannot sweat or pant – two key cooling mechanisms that many other species enjoy – so it is up to us as their caregivers to ensure they are kept healthy, safe and comfortable. The following are just a handful of tried-and-tested methods.

1. **Dark rooms** are always cooler than ones with the strong sunlight shining in. Keep your curtains or blinds closed during hot weather. Open the windows for ventilation.
2. If your pigs live outdoors **bring them indoors** to the coolest room in the house or to a thoroughly sheltered area. **Wooden and plastic hutches are like greenhouses**, they trap heat and will be - on average - 10-15°C **hotter** than the ambient temperature outside the hutch. This is enough to kill your guinea pigs.
3. Similarly, popular hideys like plastic igloos (pigloos), wooden cabins, plastic tunnels and fleece houses **must be removed from the cage**. Any hideys remaining must be open-sided and well ventilated.
4. Don't put them out to grass until late evening. **Limiting their exposure outdoors** to very early morning or late evening means the air has had a chance to cool before/after the heat of the day.
5. **Don't be tempted to feed extra veg**. Avoid giving more than they are used to or a sudden excess of watery veg and fruit. Give them their normal veg - but after washing/rinsing it, leave it soaked in water and feed it to them wet. If you want to give extra fluids via food little and often through a hot day, then spread their usual daily veg whilst wet throughout the day, rather than giving treats of cucumber and melon as additions. You want to prevent heatstroke - but not induce bloating or diarrhoea.
6. If you have aircon, turn it on! **Don't make it too cold**: keeping the room at 20°C is sensible - slightly above the ideal but will prevent extreme fluctuations when the heat passes.
7. **Ice blocks, frozen soda bottles, and wet towels** are great to offer in the cage for pigs to lean against or lay on. Just make sure there's a layer of towel between any ice and the pig. My pigs have always loved laying against a damp towel hung on the cage wall.
8. If you don't have aircon, **you can use fans**. While there is divided opinion on their use, if you're sensible with them and create only a gentle breeze and don't position them closely and directly into the cage, they can be helpful. I would however be cautious if your pig has any respiratory illness, and instead seek out an aircon unit.
9. Fresh water is vital. **Fully replenish all water bottles twice a day and clean inside all spouts** – the bacteria in the spouts love the heat. You can keep the water cooler for longer, and reduce the risk of fire, by keeping it out of direct sunlight, and insulating the bottle with a bottle cover.

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