



Small Mammal Enrichment

In the wild, small herbivores spend much of their day grazing, foraging for food items, and modifying their dens. This behavior stimulates them mentally and physically as well as provides them opportunities to naturally wear down their constantly growing teeth.

Foraging in your Home:

- **Choose wisely.** Look into what your pet would do naturally. Burrowing creatures like hamsters and gerbils love opportunities to burrow and shred material for bedding. Guinea pigs like “pastures” of hay that they can graze in as well as searching for fresh food and balanced grain items in their enclosure. The goal is to give them activities that best mimic their natural foraging activities.
- **Be safe.** Make sure that you choose toys that are of appropriate size for your pet that they will not become entrapped in. Also be careful to avoid small bars or loose strings as tails and feet can be entrapped and seriously injured in these. Avoid toys made of unsafe woods, with thin easily chewed plastic, and excessive amounts of glue.
- **Get creative.** While there are many excellent stores and companies that prefabricate toys and hides for small herbivores, you can also make your own at home! Try combining items like cardboard boxes, paper bags, paper cups, toilet paper rolls, untreated safe woods/baskets, newspaper and masking tape. You can also mix items like wood blocks or paper with food items so they have to pick around or chew through them to get to their food. This is a fun and varied activity for both the pet and your family!
- **Challenge them.** As you provide puzzles for them more consistently, you may find that your pet is getting through the toys you give them more quickly. Try hanging toys up or nesting them within a larger container to add an extra level of difficulty!

Enrichment Resources:

- RSPCA on Rabbit Enrichment (links for environmental and dietary enrichment on page)
 - <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rabbits/behaviour/enrichment>
- Best Friends Society on Rabbit Enrichment
 - <http://bestfriends.org/stories-blog-videos/latest-news/enrichment-activities-rabbits>
- University of Michigan Approved Guinea Pig (and a few other creatures) Enrichment Items
 - <https://az.research.umich.edu/sites/default/files/media/embedded/Approved%20Enrichment%20Items%20-%20Guinea%20Pig.pdf>
 - <https://az.research.umich.edu/sites/default/files/media/embedded/Approved%20Enrichment%20Items%20-%20Gerbil.pdf>
- Woodgreen Animal Charity on Hamster and Gerbil Enrichment
 - <https://woodgreen.org.uk/pet-advice/article/hamster-and-gerbil-hotels>

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