🐻 Degu Care Guide

A chatty daytime rodent that's awake when you are

🎓 Some experience helps



HOME	CARE TIME	COST	LIFESPAN	CUDDLINESS
A home with no yard	Some	$15–$35/mo each	5–9 years	Some cuddles

AWAKE WHEN	HANDLING	COMPANY	KID-FRIENDLY	ALLERGIES
Awake in the daytime	Gentle, supervised handling	Needs a friend	★★★★☆	Not allergy-safe

🧾 **Setting up costs about $250–$500 up front, before the monthly costs.**

A degu is the daytime answer to the hamster problem: a smart, chatty little rodent from Chile that's wide awake during the day, loves company, and genuinely learns to know its people. Degus need a friend of their own kind, a big chew-proof cage, dust baths like a chinchilla — and one famous rule: no sugary food, ever. In return you get 5–9 years of squeaky, curious, pocket-sized personality.

Is a degu a good pet for kids?

Quick answer: Degus are great pets for most kids. They're awake in the daytime, social and chatty, but they must live in pairs or groups, need a big metal cage, overheat easily, and need a diet with no sugar.

- 👍 **Best for:** awake in the daytime — active when kids are, chatty, curious, and fun to watch together
- 👀 **Keep in mind:** must be kept in pairs or groups
- ⏳ **Lifespan:** 5–9 years
- $ **Ongoing cost:** about $15–$35/mo (setup & vet extra)

👯 **Company:** Degus are deeply social and must live in same-sex pairs or small groups — a lone degu gets lonely, loud, and stressed.

⚖️ **Check your local laws:** Degus aren't legal everywhere: California, Utah, Georgia, Alaska, and Hawaii ban them, and New Jersey and Delaware require a permit. Check your state's exotic-pet rules before falling in love. State-by-state list: whatpetshouldiget.com/guides/where-are-degus-legal.html

Is a degu right for us?

💚 Why you'll love a degu

- Awake in the daytime — active when kids are
- Genuinely social and quick to learn trust
- Chatty, curious, and fun to watch together
- Longer-lived than a hamster or gerbil

⚠️ Things to know

- Must be kept in pairs or groups
- Champion chewers — need a metal cage and no plastic
- Can never eat fruit or sugary treats
- Banned in a handful of US states

The honest answer: Yes, if your family can hold a strict no-sugar rule, buy a metal cage, and check your state's laws - degus are the daytime rodent most families are really after.

👍 Get one if...

- Your kids want a pet awake every afternoon
- You can say no to fruit forever
- You have room for two chattering degus
- You're charmed by squeaks, chirps, and warbles

👎 Think again if...

- You'd slip a degu a sugary treat
- You're in one of the states where degus are banned
- You have grabby hands at home — a degu's tail skin tears off
- You're hoping a plastic cage will hold up

How to care for your Degu

🏡 **Home**
A large multi-level metal cage with wooden platforms, a solid-surface wheel, deep bedding, and a chinchilla-style sand bath offered a few times a week.

🥗 **Food & water**
Unlimited hay and a small scoop of molasses-free degu, guinea pig or chinchilla pellets (not a muesli mix) — and strictly no fruit, honey, or sugary treats, because sugary diets put degus at risk of diabetes.

🩺 **Health**
Watch their teeth (they should be orange, not white!), give sand baths to keep fur healthy, and never grab a degu by the tail.

🤲 **Handling & play**
Sit low, let them climb on you, and reward with a bit of veggie or a pinch of dried herbs. Scoop under the body — never by the tail.

🤧 **Allergies**
Degus have fur and use dust baths, so they're not a good pick for allergy-sensitive families.

📏 The numbers that matter

⚖️ **Adult size**	About 13–17 inches long including the tail, and 170–300 g
🏠 **Cage for a pair**	At least about 39 x 20 x 39 inches (100 x 50 x 100 cm), Austria's legal minimum, with 20% more floor for each extra degu. All metal, with a solid roof, no plastic and no glass tank
🌡️ **Room temperature**	Keep them cool: the RSPCA says no higher than about 68°F (20°C). Heat stress sets in above about 86°F (30°C)
🏖️ **Sand bath**	2–3 times a week for about 20 minutes in 1.5 inches (4 cm) of chinchilla sand, then take it out
🌾 **Hay**	Unlimited: it should be most of what they eat
🥣 **Pellets**	About 1–2 tablespoons (10 g) per degu a day, molasses-free
🥬 **Fresh greens**	A small portion of leafy greens, from a couple of times a week to a little daily
🦷 **Teeth**	Healthy front teeth are yellow-orange. Check weekly; white teeth can mean illness

⚖️ **Weigh them**	Once a week. Vets suggest no more than about 250 g for females and 275 g for males
🩺 **Vet**	A checkup at least once a year, with dental checks every 3–6 months

🥦 What to feed a degu

Degus are built for tough, dry grasses, so hay is the main event, with a small scoop of pellets and a little fresh greenery. Sugar is the big danger: sugary diets and obesity put degus at risk of diabetes and cataracts, which is why fruit and sweet treats are off the menu.

✅ Every day

- Unlimited timothy or meadow hay
- About 1–2 tablespoons of degu, guinea pig or chinchilla pellets with no molasses
- Fresh water in a bottle
- Dried herbs as a treat

🍓 Now & then

- Small portions of leafy greens like dandelion, parsley or lettuce
- Tiny pieces of root veg like carrot (sugary, so very occasional)

🚫 Never feed

- Fruit and dried fruit
- Honey, molasses and sugary treats
- Muesli-style mixes
- Corn and peas
- Potatoes
- Seeds and nuts as regular food
- Rabbit, hamster or gerbil food

🩺 Health: what's normal, and when to call the vet

In a study of 300 pet degus, dental disease was the most common problem by far, affecting 60%. Weekly tooth and weight checks catch most trouble early, and degus overheat easily, so a cool room matters all year round.

💚 Healthy signs

- Busy and curious in the daytime
- Bright, clear eyes and clean ears
- Glossy fur and a clean tail
- Yellow-orange front teeth that meet neatly
- Eating hay steadily
- Normal droppings and a clean bottom

📞 Call the vet soon

- Weepy eyes or a runny nose
- Drooling or a wet mouth
- Picking at food without eating it
- Teeth turning pale, or growing at an angle
- A swollen jaw
- Fewer or smaller droppings
- Drinking and peeing much more than usual
- Cloudy eyes
- Bald patches or chewed fur

🚨 Emergency: call a vet now

- Lying flat on the stomach and very still on a warm day (heatstroke)
- A tail that has lost its skin (tail slip)
- A swollen, tight belly with breathing trouble
- Not eating, especially in an overweight degu
- Struggling to breathe

Common health problems

Dental disease. *Watch for:* Drooling, dropping food, weight loss, a swollen jaw, or teeth that turn pale or crooked. In older degus the tooth roots can grow into the nose and eye sockets. *Prevent it:* Lots of hay to chew, safe chew toys, weekly tooth checks and regular vet dental checks.

Diabetes and cataracts. *Watch for:* Drinking and peeing much more, weight changes, and cloudy eyes. Cataracts can also be inherited. *Prevent it:* No fruit, honey or sugary treats, molasses-free pellets, and keeping your degus at a healthy weight.

Tail slip. *Watch for:* The skin of the tail comes off if a degu is grabbed by the tail. It does not grow back, and the bare tail usually has to be removed by a vet. *Prevent it:* Never pick up or hold a degu by the tail, and see a vet urgently if it happens.

Heatstroke. *Watch for:* Lying flat and still, breathing fast, weak, on a warm day. *Prevent it:* Keep the cage in a cool room out of direct sun. Move a hot degu somewhere cool and call a vet immediately.

Bloat. *Watch for:* A swollen, tight belly, often in a degu that is struggling to breathe through a blocked nose. *Prevent it:* Treat runny noses early and see a vet right away for a swollen belly.

Fur chewing. *Watch for:* Bald or chewed patches, often on the back or tail. It affected about 1 in 8 degus in the large study. *Prevent it:* Company, space, a sand bath, things to dig and chew, and a vet check.

Sore feet and ringworm. *Watch for:* Red, scabby feet, or round patches of hair loss. Ringworm can spread to people. *Prevent it:* Solid floors with deep, clean bedding, and a vet visit for skin problems.

💬 What your degu is telling you

Degus are among the chattiest rodents. Scientists have identified about 15 different degu calls.

Warbling
A long, musical chatter. Usually excitement or pleasure.

Foot drumming
Thumping the back feet. A warning of danger.

Boxing and lunging
Standing up and pushing at each other. Sorting out who's boss; watch it doesn't turn into real fighting.

Sand bathing
Rolling and flipping in the sand. It keeps their fur clean and is a social activity.

Chewing everything
Their teeth never stop growing, so chewing is a must.

Wheeping
A sharp alarm call. Something has startled them.

Tail beating
Fast tail thumping when very excited.

Grooming each other
Bonding and friendship.

Digging and stashing
Burrowing and hiding food. Natural, so give them deep bedding.

✅ Before you bring a degu home

Degus are chatty, social daytime rodents that must live in same-sex pairs or groups. They live 5–9 years, love company, and have one golden rule: no sugar, ever.

🏠 Room at home

A degu pair needs a large multi-level metal cage — plan for something chinchilla-sized — in a cool room away from direct sun, plus safe supervised playtime out of the cage.

🛒 Supplies to get first

Get a big metal cage with wooden shelves, a solid-surface wheel, hay and degu pellets, a sand-bath house and chinchilla sand, water bottle, and plenty of chew toys.

🩺 Finding a vet

Find an exotics vet who sees degus before you need one. Watch for tooth trouble and diabetes — the no-sugar diet prevents most of it.

💰 Money & emergencies

Exotic-pet insurance for degus is rare; a small vet fund is more practical. Feeding them right (no fruit or sugary treats!) is the best insurance there is.

🔎 Choosing a healthy degu

Look for a healthy degu with bright eyes, clean ears, glossy fur and level, orange teeth, and ask how it has been fed. Degus need company: same-sex pairs or groups of up to four or five work well, or one neutered male with a few females. Introduce new degus slowly, in side-by-side cages, over one to two weeks.

- Bright, clear eyes and clean ears
- Glossy fur and a clean tail
- Yellow-orange front teeth that meet neatly
- A clean bottom
- Alert and active in the daytime
- A same-sex companion, or a plan for one

🗒️ Your routine — tick them off

☀️ Every day

- ☐ Fresh hay, pellets, and water
- ☐ Daytime hangout and playtime
- ☐ A quick health glance — bright eyes, orange teeth
- ☐ Spot-check the bedding and clean as needed

📅 Every week

- ☐ Sand bath 2–3 times a week for about 20 minutes
- ☐ Weigh them and check their teeth
- ☐ Clean the cage floor and swap bedding
- ☐ Rotate chew toys

🌙 Now & then

- ☐ Deep-clean the cage
- ☐ Vet dental check every 3–6 months
- ☐ Check tail and fur health

💰 **Monthly cost:** Medium: the big cage is the main cost; hay, pellets, and sand are cheap. Remember you're buying for two!

🤩 Fun facts

- Degus 'talk' all day with more than a dozen different squeaks, chirps, and warbles.
- A healthy degu has orange front teeth — white teeth are actually a warning sign!
- Unlike hamsters, degus are awake in the daytime and sleep at night, just like you.

📚 Where this comes from

Vets, charities & official guidance

- Degus as pets — PDSA (pdsa.org.uk)
- Degu care and wellbeing — Blue Cross (bluecross.org.uk)
- What to feed a pet degu — RSPCA (rspca.org.uk)
- Degu health and welfare tips — RSPCA (rspca.org.uk)
- Basic information for degus — LafeberVet (lafeber.com)
- Degu environment — RSPCA (rspca.org.uk)

Keeper & species-community guides

- Caring for a degu — PetMD (petmd.com)
- A VN's guide to degus, part two: common health issues — Vet Times (vettimes.com)
- Disorders in 300 pet degus (Jekl et al., 2011) — Journal of Small Animal Practice (europepmc.org)
- Vocalisations of the degu (Long, 2007) — Bioacoustics (bioacoustics.info)
- Octodon degus — Animal Diversity Web, University of Michigan (animaldiversity.org)

This guide is general care information for families, not veterinary advice. Every pet is different: if yours seems unwell, call a vet.
Sources checked August 2026; this guide matches the web page as of Nov 21, 2026.
More on the website (the full care guide, questions families ask, types and breeds, and the "Am I ready?" check):
whatpetshouldiget.com/pets/degu.html