

PIGS 101: SO YOU THINK YOU WANT A PIG?



Welcome!

Who has been to Nevins before?

Who has already done some research on owning a pig?

WHAT WE WILL BE COVERING

- The Promoted Image
- Our Reality
- So You Still Want a Pig?
 - Basic Care
 - Housing
 - Behavioral
 - Where to Get a Pig



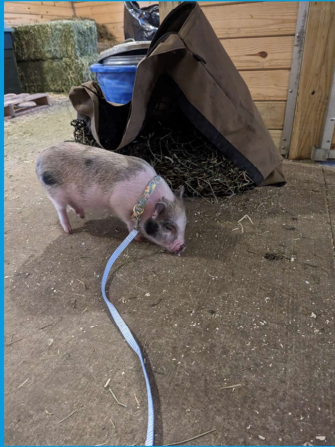
First, we will go over the image/misinformation we're probably all familiar with and perhaps what spurred you to want a pig.

Then we will move into what sparked us to do this educational series.

And lastly, we'll go over a *very* high level overview of what you need to know to welcome a pig into your home.

I encourage you all to stay after to get a chance to ask some questions and tour our pig barn to meet some of our available piggies!

THE PROMOTED IMAGE



Does this image or something similar look familiar?

This is Guppy... she came to us through an owner who could no longer care for her. She was about 4 months old at intake and very vocal. We estimate her to get to 60-75 lbs.

“MICRO”, “MINI”, “NANO”, “TEACUP”



- Defining the term
- Media and misinformation
- Breeders

These are the images you’ll get when you search any of the above “pig” terms, but they do not actually mean much. The term “mini” pig is a generally accepted term for any breed small than those breeds typically bred for consumption, but it is not an actual breed. Some breeds that count as “minis” are potbellies, julianas, and kunekunes.

The internet and media is littered with cute pictures of piglets and misinformation about demeanor and care that we’ll aim to clear up today.

Breeders, who often use these boutique/misleading terms, cash-in on these adorable images and charge up to \$2,500 to sell and ship piglets directly to owners with little counseling and no opportunity to meet the animal beforehand.

“THEY’RE JUST LIKE DOGS, RIGHT?”

- Dogs have been domesticated for thousand of years
- Variety of breeds/traits in dogs
- A completely different set of behaviors



Dogs have been selectively bred for thousands of years to become “man’s best friend” and reach domesticity.

There are a variety of breeds to hand select traits you want in a dog, where pigs still act on very primal instincts of fight/flight. Our “pet” pigs are not so far departed from wild boars in their behavior and needs unlike a Chihuahua versus a coyote.

People are usually very familiar with a dog bark or growl but do not know pig body language or vocalizations. A pig squealing can be quite the unnerving noise to hear for the first time!

Additionally, body language and vocalization that may appear similar have vastly different meanings across species. Such as tail wagging, barking, approaching, etc..

“LAZY, GARBAGE DISPOSAL”

- Each animal is an individual
- It is true – they’ll eat just about everything – but that doesn’t mean they should
- Extremely intelligent problem solvers (and trouble makers)



Many expect pigs to be lazy but most are quite active!

We also get a lot folks asking if they can feed their leftovers or stale bread, etc., to our pigs which they *will* eat, but shouldn’t. Pigs have a very slow metabolism which allows them to gain weight quite easily so they have strict dietary needs!

Pigs are also far more intelligent than most anticipate which makes them great problem solvers and, in some cases, trouble makers.

So now that we’ve made it through some of the misconceptions, let’s face the facts.

OUR REALITY



The majority of pigs that come to Nevins are due to getting larger than expected. Many are overweight due to improper feeding, have overgrown hooves due to the struggle of finding a vet to trim, and with a variety of behaviors that make them more challenging to house.

"WHY DO YOU WANT TO SURRENDER YOUR PIG?"

"I was told s/he would stay X pounds..."

- The term "mini" is relative
- Pigs grow until they are 4 years of age
- Weight is not all built equally

"My pig is..."

- "Aggressive"
- "Not getting along with other family members/pets"
- "Destroying the house"
- Behavior accounts for 25% of pig surrenders

One of our top reasons for surrender is the pig grows far larger than anticipated. As we've already touched upon, the term mini is relative. If we think of a miniature horse compared to a standard horse, we are comparing 300 pound to 1200 pounds. When we're talking mini pigs, we are looking at the down-sized version of our 800-900 pound livestock pigs which still means they can be up to 200 pounds.

Pigs also grow for the first four years of their life – and can gain weight all throughout their life if their diet isn't monitored. So if you get a 10 pound piglet from a breeder who promises it will stay under 15 pounds – this is clearly an illogical expectation. Babe, one of the pigs at Nevins is a prime example of this.

Lastly, pigs are very dense animals. So even pigs who appear small in stature can weigh close to 100 pounds which makes them able to cause more damage and more difficult to handle than a dog of the same dimensions.

Another common reason for surrender relate to behavior. Pigs, like any other animal, need to stay busy and get enrichment or else they will start exhibiting destructive or aggressive behavior.

Socialization is also very important to create a happy, well-integrated pig. It is also very

important everyone in your family is on board with getting a pig. They are also animals that are highly dependent on social/family units. Very few pigs are friendly with strangers or in new environments.

But our number one reason for our number one call is...

THE REASON FOR > 50% OF SURRENDERS?

Housing!



“My town/housing doesn’t allow it...”

- Pigs fall into “farm animals” in some town’s zoning laws
- Some landlords aren’t crazy about pigs/Pigs aren’t easy to move
- Homes are not always equipped for pig’s needs/size

Housing! Over half of our pig related surrender calls have to do with something surrounding housing.

A little considered fact is that pigs fall into “farm animals” in some town’s zoning laws, including Methuen. Therefore you should check in with your town before taking a pig home.

Additionally, without stable housing it’s difficult to find pig-friendly rentals. Along with the fact that pigs aren’t the easiest pet to move with.

Lastly, the appropriateness of the house or environment is very important to consider. Your home may be appropriate for a 13 pound animal but doesn’t work for a 130 pound animal. Pigs also **need** an outdoor space where they can roam which not everyone can provide. It is very important to make sure pigs have outdoor spaces, even if you see house pigs.

SO YOU STILL WANT A PIG?



So you've made it this far and still gung-ho about sharing your life with a pig?

Cool! Sebastian and Viviana (two Nevins alumni) are excited for you to add a pig to your family.

Here is some of what you need to know prior to bringing home your porcine pal!

BASIC CARE

Dietary Needs

- Controlling concentrates
- Monitoring weight
- Foraging/enrichment treats



Photo: <https://americanminipigassociation.com/enrichment/diy-food-dispenser-mini-pig-enrichment/>

Medical Care

- Skin care
- Hoof/tusk trims
- Securing a veterinarian
 - Rabies vaccinations
 - Spay/Neuter

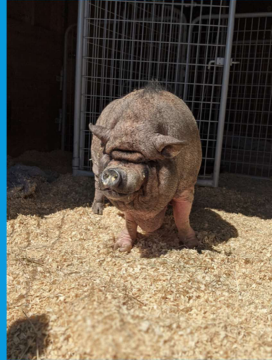
Pigs require very little grain. For example, most of our potbellied pigs eat 2-2.5% of their body weight per day split between 2 meals. We adjust their diets based on their body condition – the ideal being able to feel ribs through the fat using gentle hand pressure. As mentioned earlier, pigs can very easily gain weight so it's important to monitor closely and make adjustments as needed. Pigs also require the ability to forage and exhibit natural behavior by searching for goodies in the grass and dirt. They enjoy grazing and rooting freely. They can also get toys/puzzles to encourage this behavior while getting appropriate treats when manipulating them. Just to give you an idea, our pigs get ~6 hours of outdoor time daily (winter) 24/7 out in summer and still get daily enrichment to keep them happy. This isn't required if they're getting more socialization but is telling on how busy they can be!

Pigs have very little hair to protect them from the elements so in the summer they require protection from the sun in the form of sunscreen or a wallow. Wallows are shallow mud pits which allow a pig to protect themselves from harmful UV rays as well as stay cool since they **cannot** sweat. We also utilize sun shades during the summer to make sure the pigs have adequate shade. Throughout the year, they also benefit from lotion or oil treatments on their skin to keep it moisturized and healthy. Their hooves and tusks require regular trimming which can be done by a vet. You'll want to secure a vet to help you with all of your pig's needs. Some small animal vets, like your dog or cat's, work on pigs but often

require you to transport to them. Large animal vets work on pigs and come out to your house but charge a house/farm call which can be costly.

In addition to regular maintenance, pigs also need a regular rabies vaccine and should be spayed or neutered even if they will not be in contact with other pigs. All of the pigs adopted from Nevins will be up to date on their vaccines and be spayed/neutered prior to adoption (unless there is a medical reason not to).

LET'S TALK DIET ONE MORE TIME...



Abby is a great example of the typical overweight pig. She came from an owner who did love her, but would allow her to eat whatever she wanted (her favorite being munchkins). It took several months of a strict diet, encouraging her to move around to get her to lose enough weight for her spay surgery. By the end of her time at Nevins, Abby had lost 97 lbs!! She was more active, friendlier, and showing behaviors that we look for in our pigs. While it is easy to spoil the animals you love, it is important to keep your pig on a healthy diet.

HOUSING



- Most pigs are not made for indoor living
- Building a secure enclosure
- Having a suitable shelter
- Creating an enriching environment

Since it's our number one reason for surrender, it's also one of our necessary slides!

Most pigs are not made to be a house pig so you should be prepared to also create an outdoor living space.

They require more secure fencing than other animals since they are quite strong and dig up the ground. This means they either need a ground electric wire to keep them away from the fence-line, a buried fence, or landscaping timbers or some other kind of immobile barrier to prevent rooting up the fence.

Outdoors they'll need a suitable shelter for sun/heat protection as well as an enclosed space to stay warm in winter.

And lastly, the space should be enriching. Whether that is plants for them to forage, toys and puzzles to play with, other terrains and areas to explore, or some combination of all... pigs need to stay busy! Even their food delivery can be enriching such as our pig's rooting boxes.

FENCING



Since keeping pigs contained can be such a hard job, let's look at some options for enclosures.

At Nevins we use a combination of measures to make sure the pigs are properly housed.

Stock fencing (the larger grid fence) is great for keeping pigs in. However, they are great diggers. Be sure to bury the bottom to keep them from going under. You can also use landscaping timbers along the base to discourage digging at the fence line. Another option some folks use is a line of hotwire (electric wire) to string along the base to keep the pigs from going too close.

BEHAVIORAL NEEDS

- On average, pigs are 3x smarter than dogs
- Ability to exhibit natural behavior is the easiest way to avoid issues
- A busy pig is a happy pig
 - Puzzles
 - Toys
 - Training (not just the fun stuff)



Pigs need training and manners too as they are on average three times smarter than dogs. This means for better, or worse, pigs pick up behaviors very quickly! Pigs tend to be pushy around food (fitting at least one stereotype we've given them) and can quickly escalate if they learn they can get food faster if they bark or charge or display other inappropriate behavior. For example, our very own Emma went home for a week and was fed every time she "asked for it" – she immediately took on the habit of screaming to get food, an unfortunate behavior we were able to correct with more training!

Like mentioned before, allowing pigs to exhibit natural behavior is also the easiest way to avoid issues.

A busy pig is a happy pig! Puzzles, toys, and other ways to get them working is necessary for pigs.

Training is also a way to keep their minds busy and prevent stereotypic behaviors or aggression. It is also very important to train behaviors, and not just fun tricks. Some of our favorite behaviors to train our pigs are: "back" (where the pig is taught to take a few steps away from the handler), touch (show here is when the pig is taught to move to a target), and allowing manipulation of their feet, ears, mouth, etc.. All of these behaviors are extremely valuable is working with your pig throughout its life. They can also be used to

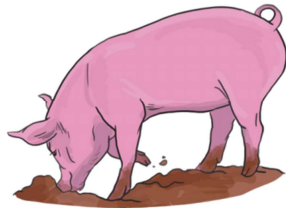
shape bigger behaviors like loading into a crate or car from transport.

And if you need help? Please reach out to Nevins and our staff are happy to help create plans to fit your needs.

PIG BODY LANGUAGE

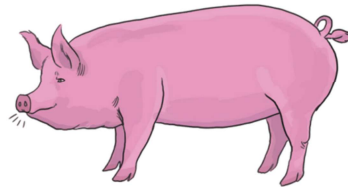
Happy/relaxed pig body language

①



Engaging in natural pig behaviours such as rooting, foraging, and sniffing.

②



Relaxed body language, ears pointing up, tail up and curled, relaxed eyes, and making low grunting noises.

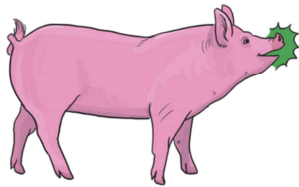
Learning pig body language is extremely important. Pigs do not communicate in the same ways as other animals. It can also be confusing as pigs will use similar body language when happy and upset. It is always important to pair their body language to the environment so you interpret it correctly. To understand what a pig is telling you, here are some common body language to look for in a pig.

-Relaxed pigs – above description, and will sometimes have hackles raised, especially if they are enjoying stimulation like scratching.

PIG BODY LANGUAGE

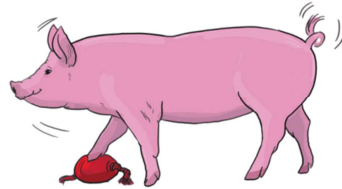
Excited/playful pig body language

1



Making playful grunting or 'barking' noises, and tail up and curled, or slightly straight and wagging.

2



Displaying playful behaviours such as running or zooming, playing with a toy, or jumping and hopping.

PIG BODY LANGUAGE

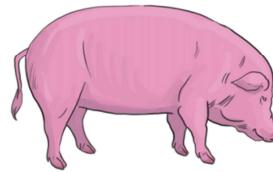
Angry/unhappy pig body language

①



High pitched squeals, eyes narrowed, snout scrunched up, oears back or moving back and forward, and flicking tail.

②



Head hanging low, ears low and down, tail hanging limply, and standing still.

PIG VOCALIZATIONS



<https://www.minipiginfo.com/mini-pig-sounds-101.html>



Pigs have a wide variety of vocalizations that can share how they are feeling. These go from happy noises, lonely, scared, hungry, warning, demanding, and so on. Let's listen to a couple noises to hear the differences.

<https://www.minipiginfo.com/mini-pig-sounds-101.html>

WHERE CAN I GET A PIG?

- Saving the stigma

- Size guarantee

- Time to meet and interact

- Lifetime support

Adopt!



So after all that you're saying, "Okay. Where do I get mine!?"

Well, you can get one right here! Zero apology for the shameless plug... You can also go to other rescues or look online at the *Pig Placement Network replace with Eastern Snout where people post their pigs looking for homes. Here are some of the benefits of adopting...

You're not supporting the lie breeders enforce.

Our pigs, and most other organization's, are up-to-date on vaccines and testing and have been spayed or neutered.

You get a better idea of size and personality as you get to meet the animal and interact rather than having the pig shipped to you blindly.

And with the MSPCA, you get a lifetime of support. It doesn't matter if you have a question the day after bringing them home or years down the road, we are here to foster a lifelong relationship between you and your new family member and with us!

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?



It is always good to know what you want your life to be like with your pig. Do you want your pig to come into the house? Are you okay if your pig wants to live outside 24/7? Is it okay if your pig is more shy and prefers to be nearby instead of cuddle?

Figure out those expectations so we can help match you with the right pig for you!