Why guinea pigs make great pets
By Lisa Bloch

Marin Humane has many adorable animals for adoption, not just dogs and cats. We also have bunnies, birds, turtles, rats and one of the cutest critters around — guinea pigs.

Guinea pigs make great pets, especially for kids. Less fragile than rabbits and less skittish than hamsters, they’re happily swaddled in baby blankets, tenderly coo, and are generally adored by their guardians.

Here are nine reasons to consider adopting a guinea pig:

• **They love companionship.** Guinea pigs are social, herd animals that are almost always happier in pairs. They’ll still bond with you and by having two, they have a buddy when you’re not around.

• **They don’t need a lot of supplies.** The basic setup is hay (choose a brand like Timothy hay which helps their digestive system), pellets, a tunnel to hide in, and a good-sized cage.

• **They set a good example by eating their veggies.** Guinea pigs cannot produce vitamin C, so feeding them lots of high-quality greens and veggies high in vitamin C is critical for them to stay healthy.

• **They love to exercise.** Give them an hour of play time in a safe space outside their cage and your guinea pigs will stay in great shape — mentally and physically. A small room to explore, such as a bathroom or long hallway, keeps them from getting bored.

• **They don’t care for expensive toys.** A nice little paper tube serves as a tunnel and place to hide. (Those big exercise balls are a no-no; they can cause spinal injuries and foot and ankle injuries.)

• **They don’t need a brush or a comb.** Unless you have a long-haired variety, such as a Sheltie, a guinea pig’s hair is easy to manage and they can style it themselves.

• **They don’t need baths.** Guinea pigs are naturally clean animals and can easily contract colds and pneumonia if bathed.

• **They love being indoors.** We don’t recommend outside play time as guinea pigs can be easy prey for others, pick up parasites and poisons, or escape from the yard.

• **They have a delightful way of communicating.** They’ll greet you when you come home and when you open the fridge, it’s a cue for them that something good is coming their way. They speak in squeaks, shortles, grunts, purrs, rumbles, cooing, and chirps.

Carina DeVera has had guinea pigs since she was 5 years old.

“To this day, I’m charmed by their adorable little ‘wheeks’ when they beg for food,” she says. “They are extremely curious and endlessly entertaining to watch.”

Like any pet, guinea pigs do need annual checkups. They generally live five to seven years so yearly checkups are a must to inspect their teeth, heart, and skin.
Lastly, we strongly discourage people from buying guinea pigs from pet stores. They usually come from inhumane breeders and are often not sexed correctly, so you may end up with a breeding pair, which means you’ll have way too many guinea pigs on your hands in no time.

Looking to adopt a guinea pig or already have one? Join us for the Bay Area Pignic from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Aug. 26 at Marin Humane’s Novato campus located at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd. This super kid-friendly event features a guinea pig costume contest (cutest thing ever), free health checks, raffles, and more. It’s only $5 to enter and proceeds go toward the animals. Visit marinhumane.org/events for more information.

Lisa Bloch is the marketing and communications director for Marin Humane, which contributes Tails of Marin articles and welcomes animal-related questions and stories about the people and animals in our community. Go to marinhumane.org, find us on social media @marinhumane or email lbloch@marinhumane.org.