

Introduction to Sugar Gliders

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Sugar gliders (*Petaurus breviceps*) are native to parts of Australia and New Guinea. They are marsupials and are nocturnal. In the wild, they have a very specialized diet feeding on saps, gums, barks and some insects.

Diet:

As mentioned above, the diet of sugar gliders is highly specialized and difficult to simulate in captivity. In the past, sugar gliders have suffered a variety of nutritional deficiencies in captivity. An ideal diet is still being investigated.

The current recommendations by exotic animal veterinarians are:

- High quality pellets designed for sugar gliders (nutrimax or glider chow are two reputable diets)
- Blenderized diet (1 ice cube per night, see below for recipe)
- One teaspoon per glider of fresh fruits chopped per night
- A few insects (like mealworms) per week and some bee pollen is fine for treats but can lead to obesity so remember these are just treats

To make the blenderized diet, follow the recipe below

- 1/4 cup organic apple juice
- 1/2 cup organic honey
- 1 organic hard-boiled egg, with shell removed
- 4 oz. Stonyfield organic plain yogurt
- 1 tsp. Rep-Cal Herpivite Vitamin Supplement (Blue Label)
- 2 tsps. Rep-Cal Calcium Supplement Non-Phosphorous with Vit. D3 (Pink Label)
- 2 jars of chicken baby food
- 1/4 cup wheat germ
- 1/2 cup dry baby cereal (mixed or oatmeal)
- 1/4 cup of carnivore care diet (provided from us)

Place in blender and mix until smooth. Divide into ice cubes trays and use one cube daily. Thaw the cube and offer in a small shallow dish. If your glider will not eat well on their own then you may have to syringe feed. This is the mainstay of the diet but you will also have to offer a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables daily. If your glider will not eat fresh fruits and vegetables you can add them to the blenderized diet:

1 small peeled organic apple
1/4 cup organic blueberries
1/4 cup organic grapes (green or red)
1/4 cup organic cantaloupe
1/4 cup organic broccoli
1/2 cup organic spinach
1/4 cup organic peas

Housing:

The cage should be no smaller than average 20x20x30 inches high. This size of cage is adequate for one or two sugar gliders. A tall cage is better than a short long one because sugar gliders love to climb. Commercial birdcages often meet these specifications. The wire on the cage should be no bigger than one inch by one half inch. If the cage has straight bars with no crosshatching, then the bars should be no more than one quarter inch apart ("budgie bars"). Screen door mesh does not appear to work well for homemade cages since sugar gliders usually get their claws stuck in it. Make sure the cage is placed in an area where sunlight can penetrate, but do not place cage in direct sunlight. Temperature of the cage should be kept between 65F and 75F, which is conveniently similar to the range commonly found in most homes. Nesting boxes are important since sugar gliders are nocturnal and need a place to curl up and sleep during the day. Nesting boxes can be made of wood, wicker, or plastic. The entrance hole should be no smaller than one and a half inches in diameter. A wooden birdhouse, plastic hamster house, or rubber storage container make great nesting boxes.

Alternatively, a cloth pouch with a slit in the front can be tied to the side of the cage as a "sleeping bag". Bedding is usually not needed, however, plain shredded paper (not magazine or newspaper) is acceptable. A variety of food and water bowls or bottles can be used. It is important that the dishes be sanitized daily to prevent buildup of harmful bacteria. Climbing branches should be provided. Make sure that you use nontoxic species of wood. If a type of wood is safe for small birds than it is safe for sugar gliders. Once the sugar glider has stripped off all the bark or they have become soiled, replace them with new ones. Sugar gliders enjoy playing with bird toys such as swings, perches, ladders, and bells. Make sure toys are well assembled and do not have small pieces that can be pulled off and swallowed. Sugar gliders also enjoy solid exercise wheels or exercise balls.

*Taken from Purdue University Veterinary School Website at
<http://www.vet.purdue.edu/vth/documents/Sugar%20Gliders.pdf>*

Health Care:

Sugar gliders should have a physical examination every year. Often, the signs of illness can be very subtle and sugar gliders can become very sick, very quickly. Therefore, it is important to have routine health care to try to catch diseases early. Fecal samples should also be checked yearly to monitor for intestinal parasites.

A medical examination should be performed anytime your sugar glider has any change in behavior, diarrhea, decrease in appetite, weight loss, lameness, coughing, sneezing or shaking / shivering. The sooner we can evaluate your glider, then more likely we will be able to get them back to health!

For more information: http://www.asgv.org/pet_owners/introduction2.php

For supplies: www.exoticnutrition.com for supplies