

Is a Hedgehog the Right Pet for You?

Before making any impulse decisions or bringing any animal home, you should first see if the animal will fit well with your personality and lifestyle, as well as you with the animal's. With hedgehogs, there are many crucial points that potential owners must understand before taking on the responsibility of getting a new pet. Purchasing or adopting an animal should be a life commitment, not a "get rid of it when you're done" type of decision.

Your Other Pets: First and foremost you should be sure you have enough time and space for a hedgehog. If you have other pets, think about how well you take care of them. Do you sometimes let cages sit for a few days longer than necessary before cleaning? Do you handle them as often as you should? If you aren't taking the best care of the pets you have already, getting a hedgehog is not a good idea. In addition, the smell of some pets is extremely stressful to hedgehogs. The smell of dogs or ferrets might be a constant nightmare for a timid hedgehog. If you have curious cats that you can't block off from the cage, they might also terrorize your hedgehog and get up to trouble.

Night Shift: Hedgehogs are nocturnal. Rarely will a hedgehog come out during the day, and make a habit out of it. Hedgehogs naturally get up at night, and sleep during the day. Some are grumpy when woken up during the day when they

want to sleep. You should make sure that you are comfortable with not seeing your pet "out and about". Parents who are looking for an interesting animal for their younger children, may want to look into other small animals that are active during the day. Children can quickly become bored with a pet that isn't awake when they are, and the novelty will wear off eventually. Also, if you are keeping the hedgehog in your bedroom or near where you sleep, consider the noises the hedgehog may make.

Even though some people claim that they have changed their hedgehog's schedules so that they come out during the day, it's an awful idea that should never be done. Altering light schedules, feeding only during the day, forcing the hedgehog to stay awake so they are tired at night, are all very cruel techniques to make a hedgehog something they are not. Doing so can cause extreme stress, lower the hedgehog's immune system, cause them to be constantly sick, attempt hibernation, and potentially die.

Temperature: To keep hedgehogs from attempting hibernation, they must be kept at warm temperatures. The entire cage should be kept at 73°-78°F (23°-25°C) constantly, avoiding fluctuation as much as possible. You will need a space heater, ceramic heat emitter, or other type of heating setup to keep the cage at this temperature. Hibernation very dangerous (fatal if not caught early enough),

can lower your hedgegie's immune system, as well as make additional attempts more likely.

Self Defense: It's best to visit a reputable breeder or someone who owns hedgehogs and handle one, to see what the quills are like. Hedgehogs rely on their coat of quills for protection from predators. They are sharper than you might think! Make sure you are not allergic to the hedgehog, especially when the quills penetrate the skin. This will be unavoidable during ownership and you definitely don't want to be stuck with a pet you are unable to handle.

Solitary Animals: Hedgehogs do not need or crave companions. Males should never be housed together, they are territorial and almost never get along. Even supervised playtime is dangerous. Male-female pairings, unless one is altered, is also unacceptable. The female would constantly become and the parents will kill and eat the babies. This is horrible for her reproductive system and can make her very sick, not to mention it risks her life every time she gives birth. Opposite-sex playtime, as with males, is a very bad idea. It only takes moments for an "oops" mating to take place. Do not ever put two opposite sex hedgehogs in the same cage, carrier, or playpen unless you are planning on breeding, are an experienced hedgehog owner, have pedigrees on your animals, have a large amount of money saved for emergency procedures, and have a mentor to help you. Female-female pairing can work, under the right circumstances. Mothers and



Young females that are raised together are most likely to get along.

daughters, as well as sisters, usually get along best. Introducing a new female to an existing one may work out, but sometimes they will harm or kill one another. Never assume because two hedgehogs got along for one day, or even weeks, that they won't harm each other if housed together. Hedgies that have gotten along for years, can suddenly turn on each other and can kill the other. Likewise it's common for girls to get along outside of the cage, but fight when they have to share a cage. If you want an animal you can house multiple of together, a hedgehog is probably not for you.

Expenses: Another major thing to consider before looking into getting any pet, is if you can afford one. Hedgehogs can be very expensive to keep, and vet bills can quickly add up. You should always have money saved for vet bills (a few hundred is sufficient) and be prepared to spend it. The initial cost of getting a hedgehog can be quite high as well, with the supplies adding up to around \$300 and the hedgehog \$100- \$300. You should never assume you won't have to pay for vet care. If you don't want to spend money on vet bills, a hedgehog is definitely not for you.

Veterinary Care: Along with the above, you need to make sure you have a good vet before acquiring a hedgehog. Call around to see if there is an experienced exotic vet or other small animal clinic. Not all clinics that say they will see hedgehogs will actually be able to help with anything at all. Good vets are hard to find and unfortunately, many veterinarians still rely on dangerous, outdated material.

Illegal States: In some places, hedgehogs are not legal to own. If you live in any of the below states (updated February 2012) you are prohibited from owning a hedgehog. For the animal's sake, please do not try to keep one. When found, they are confiscated and oftentimes euthanized, and there's a good chance you'll be fined. It is also difficult to find vet care in those places.

In some areas hedgehogs are legal to own, but require a permit. Please check for any local laws before getting a hedgehog.

Illegal States:	Arizona California Georgia Hawaii Pennsylvania
Other Places:	Fairfax County, VA The 5 Boroughs of NY Washington, DC

Checklist:

- I have enough time and attention for a hedgehog and have a place to keep the cage away from other pets.
- I understand that hedgehogs are nocturnal and I can't change this.
- I understand the entire cage must be kept at 73-78°F (23-25° C) constantly.
- I understand that I will be poked by my hedgehog.
- I understand that hedgehogs are solitary and should not be housed together.
- I understand hedgehogs are expensive and I have money saved for emergencies.
- I understand that hedgehogs require vet care and that I already have a veterinary clinic chosen.
- I understand that some hedgehogs are grumpy and never become friendly.
- I understand that hedgehogs do defecate and urinate on people, sometimes frequently.
- I have time to spend each day taking care of and handling a hedgehog.
- I live in a place where I can legally own a hedgehog.

If the points above haven't turned you away, and you answered yes truthfully to everything on the checklist, a hedgehog might be a great fit for you!