

## **Sugar Gliders**

**(Information taken from an article by Lianne McLeod, DVM 10-7-10)**

Sugar gliders are small marsupials weighing 4.5 to 5 ounces. They are natives to Australia (Eastern part), Papua New Guinea and parts of Indonesia.

A sugar glider that is well cared for can live up to 15 years in captivity. They are social animals that do best if they have a same sex partner, or a female with a neutered male. Some people who have a lot of time to dedicate to their pet, have success in keeping a solitary sugar glider.

### **Habitat**

Sugar Gliders are active little animals, so need lots of room in their cage. Because they like (and need) to climb and jump, the amount of vertical space is more important than the actual square footage of the cage.

A good minimum size for a pair of sugar gliders is 24 inches deep by 24 inches wide by 36 inches tall. Larger is always better, keeping in mind that height is important for the gliders. The spacing of the wire should be no more than 1/2 inch by 1 inch. If you use a cage which is not wire mesh, make sure it has horizontal bars (provide foot holds for climbing) with spaces no more than 1/2 inch. Cages that provide a couple of platforms are nice.

Because commercial cages do not often come in the dimensions preferred for sugar gliders, many owners fashion their own cages of welded wire (available at hardware stores, and agriculture/feed stores). Glider Central ([glidercentral.net](http://glidercentral.net)) provides several links to pages with instructions on how to build cages at home. A nice idea is to make a cage that sits inside a tray (plastic or metal) that is a few inches larger than the floor space of the cage, to catch any wastes that fall outside of the cage.

The latch on the cage should be secure, as gliders will sometimes learn how to open latches and let themselves out!

A layer of shavings (never cedar; aspen or fir is best) in the bottom of the cage will help absorb wastes, and should be cleaned out once or twice a week (more often if needed, depending on how many you have).

The cage should be placed in an accessible spot in the home, but out of direct sunlight and in an area free from drafts. They do best a temperature slightly higher than room temperature, in the range of 70-90 F.

### **Nest Boxes**

Your sugar gliders need a nest box, which can be bought or home made. Many people advocate nest boxes made from porous materials, which breathe a bit and absorb moisture. Materials such as wood and unglazed clay pots (with holes in the side) fall under this category. They do have the disadvantage of absorbing urine and other wastes, so they will need to be discarded and replaced occasionally. Nest boxes of plastic are easier to clean and are an acceptable alternative. Placing the nest box against the ceiling

of the cage will prevent the gliders from sitting on and defecating on top of the box. A third option which is a favorite of many gliders is a cloth pouch. These can be affixed to the sides of the cage easily, and are washable, so you can have a spare and wash/replace them as necessary. These are also nice as they help with the taming and bonding process as you can remove the pouch, sugar gliders and all, from the cage if you wish to handle them.

Unless a cloth bag is used, some bedding material should be provided as well. A piece of cloth is often easiest and works well, but monitor and remove any loose threads.

### **Furnishings and Toys**

Sugar Gliders like to climb and jump, and you should provide lots of branches to allow them to exercise. Fresh branches are appreciated, but make sure they are free from pesticides and fertilizers, and are from non-toxic plants (see below). Also avoid branches from coniferous trees like pine and cedar due to the sticky sap produced by these trees.

Ropes and ladders can provide additional climbing opportunities.

Wooden toys, such as those made for birds and rodents make good toys for sugar gliders. Toys placed high in the cage will be most appreciated as gliders like to spend their time high up in the cage. Cloth toys are best avoided or at least regularly checked for loose threads that could entangle the gliders or be ingested.

An exercise wheel, if introduced to young gliders, may be a big hit and allow lots of opportunity for exercise. A larger wheel, with a solid surface is best, so that legs and tails do not get caught. Some people also use the clear plastic globes that you can put your pet in to let them roll around the house.

### **Food Dishes**

Plastic bird dishes that hang on the side of the cage are probably easiest. They should be fairly large, but not so large that the gliders can climb into them and soil them. Water can be provided in a bottle, but if the gliders are not trained to a water bottle, provide another clip on dish for water until you are sure your gliders are taking water from the bottle consistently.

### **Diet**

Sugar gliders in the wild feed on eucalyptus gum, sap, insects, nectar, and honeydew (an excretory product of nectar eating insects). They will also eat bird eggs, lizards, small birds and other small prey items. This diet is pretty difficult to replicate in captivity. So a variety have food have been fed, in an attempt to somewhat mimic their natural intake and to see what makes them thrive in captivity.

### **Dr. Johnson-Delaney Recommendations**

Dr. Cathy Johnson-Delaney is an experienced exotic animal veterinarian and respected author and speaker. Her feeding recommendations are based on studies of the natural diets of sugar gliders designed in consultation with Australian zookeepers and

veterinarians. The suggested amounts are per sugar glider, per day, fed in the evening. The amount should be adjusted depending on activity, size, reproduction, etc.

- 1 Tablespoon Leadbeater's Mix (recipe follows)
- 1 Tablespoon zoo quality insectivore diet (e.g. Reliable Protein Products Insectivore Diet) , or insects. If using insects, variety is important (crickets, meal worms, wax worms, moths, spiders, etc), and the insects should be fed high quality food such as commercial cricket food, and dusted with a complete vitamin/mineral supplement.
- treat: small amount of fruits, chopped together so the gliders can't just pick out their favorites.

- **Leadbeater's Mix Recipe**

- 150 ml Warm water

- 150 ml Honey

- 1 Shelled, boiled egg

- 25 grams high protein baby cereal

- 1 tsp vitamin/mineral supplement

- Mix warm water and honey. Blend egg, then gradually add water/honey mixture. Then blend in vitamin powder until smooth, and then blend in baby cereal until smooth. Keep refrigerated until served.

### **General Diet Advice**

The recommendations for feeding are many and varied. Important considerations are maintaining a calcium phosphorus ratio that is in the range of 1-2:1 calcium to phosphorus, and avoiding fats and refined sugars. If you decide to change a diet, you must do it gradually and make sure that the gliders do not get stressed by the change and are in fact adapting to the new diet. If you maintain multiple gliders in the same cage, careful attention must be paid to make sure all the gliders are consuming an appropriate amount and combination of foods.

Note: never feed chocolate as it is toxic!

The BML sugar glider diet is a version of the original Leadbeater's Diet, a well-known complete diet used to feed sugar gliders in captivity. It is a widely accepted and known diet for sugar gliders.

The BML sugar glider diet should not be used in conjunction with other formulated diets, such as Brisky's Sugar Glider food, and if anything is changed or substituted your glider will probably not eat it.

After preparing this diet, you have a real time saver on your hands since you have pre-made cubes to feed your glider.

### **Ingredients:**

- 1/4 cup regular apple juice
- 1/2 cup regular honey
- 1 hard-boiled egg, with shell removed
- 4 oz. of premixed Mixed Fruit Yogurt Gerber Juice
- 1 tsp. Rep-Cal Herpivite Vitamin Supplement (Blue Label)
- 2 tsps. Rep-Cal Calcium Supplement Non-Phosphorous with Vit. D3 (Pink Label)

- 2 1/2 oz. jars of chicken baby food
- 1/4 cup wheat germ
- 1/2 cup dry baby cereal (mixed or oatmeal)

**Preparation:**

Blend the honey, egg, and apple juice in a blender until smooth. Turn off the blender and add the Gerber juice and Rep-cal Herpivite Vitamin Supplement. Blend until smooth and then turn off blender. Add the Rep-cal Calcium Supplement, the chicken baby food, wheat germ, and dry baby cereal. One last time, blend until smooth, and pour into ice cube trays, filling each compartment only halfway and place into the freezer.

A full ice cube equals about 2 Tbs. and this diet should be served in 1 Tb. increments, along with 1 Tb. fresh or frozen fruit and 1 Tb. fresh and frozen vegetables each evening. This is why you only fill the ice cube tray compartments halfway with the diet.

Simply place the cube and fruits and veggies in the food dish a few hours earlier than feeding time to allow the fruits and veggies to thaw and the cube to melt a bit. Remove it in the morning to avoid any food spoilage and make sure the fruits and veggies are cut up very small.

Small snacks may be offered mid-day with this diet if your sugar glider is extra hungry.