

Pigs as pets

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Do your homework

Pigs are intelligent, inquisitive animals and can be fun to have as a pet, especially during the piglet stage of their life.

However there are a few things you need to consider **before** you purchase your pet pig.

Council Regulations

Not all local councils allow the keeping of pigs. Check with your council before purchasing any pigs – even pet pigs (Local Government Act 1993 Section 124 applies).

Do you have enough room? Schedule 2 of the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 states that ‘. . . swine must not be kept (and swine’s dung must not be deposited) within 60 m of a dwelling, shop, office, factory, church or other place of public worship, workshop, school or public place in a city, town, village or other urban part of an area.’ This means you need to own more than 1.5 hectares of land.

Finding a suitable pig

Look for a reputable breeder of pet pigs. It is almost impossible to know how large a piglet will grow unless you are able to view the parents – even then the progeny may outgrow their parents. Reputable breeders will gladly show the piglet’s parents to genuine potential customers. There are no true miniature or pot belly pigs in Australia.

Commercial breeds of pigs are quite large at maturity and can weigh 250–300 kg. Pigs are strong and muscular. Unless you have grown up with pigs and are experienced with their behaviour patterns and handling, it is a bad idea to get a commercial pig as a pet.

It is illegal to keep feral pigs as pets. Do not be tempted to accept any piglet of unknown origins no matter how cute!

Pig behaviour considerations

Only buy neutered or castrated pigs as pets. Neutered or castrated pigs are safest with children and you are not bothered with unwanted behaviours when the pigs reach sexual maturity. If your piglet is not neutered or castrated, or you are unsure, consult your veterinarian.

Pigs are very inquisitive by nature. Rooting (or nosing around, digging up the ground) and chewing are natural behaviours of pigs. If you like perfectly manicured gardens, lawns and paddocks, owning a pig may not be a good idea. Pigs can be quite destructive due to their rooting and chewing behaviours.

Housing your pig

Keeping animals in the house is a personal choice. Despite the fact that it is claimed that pigs can be house trained, they can become easily bored and in your absence can cause quite a lot of damage. It is recommended that a sturdy shelter be constructed outside for the housing of your pet pig at night and when you are absent. This is as much for your pig’s protection as for your own peace of mind.

Other considerations

If your place of employment is a commercial piggery or poultry hatchery you should not have a pet pig for biosecurity/disease prevention reasons. This condition is written into some employment contracts.

Caring for your pet pig

Bringing your pig home

It is a good idea to request some form of documentation such as PigPass or some other form of proof of sale and keep this in your files. Make sure it includes the name and address of the breeder or vendor, the date purchased and any other relevant information such as vaccination history or identifying brands or tags.

Ideally your pet piglet will be at least 6 to 8 weeks old and eating solid food when first



brought home. Ask the breeder what they are feeding when you pick up your piglet – they may give you enough for a couple of feeds. This will assist with an easy transition for the piglet to its new home.

Feeding

Pigs are monogastric and omnivorous. They will eat just about everything but you should restrict their diet to grains such as wheat, barley or oats preferably rolled, cracked or soaked in water to facilitate good digestion, fruit and vegetables such as apples, tomatoes, carrots, potatoes, broccoli etc. Feeding a small amount of beans, peas or lupins (rolled cracked or soaked) will ensure the pig gets enough protein.

Alternatively you can purchase commercially produced pig pellets which will contain all their nutrient needs. Ask at good pet stores or animal feed merchants. Introduce any new feed gradually.

Pigs will graze pasture so if you have the area, provision of daily grazing will help to keep feed costs down. Mixed pastures containing lucerne, clovers and grasses such as rye, cocksfoot and barnyard are good.

Swill feeding

The feeding of swill to pigs is illegal. Swill is defined as any food waste or scraps that contains meat or has been in contact with meat.

The Stock Diseases (General) Regulation 1997 states:

It is illegal to feed the following substances to pigs:

1. *Any food waste containing meat or that has been in contact with meat.*
2. *Any part of a carcass of any animal or bird*
3. *Any household, commercial or industrial waste with the exception of:*
 - *Bakery wast that does not contain any meat (**no** pies, sausage roll or meat-containing pizza)*
 - *Fruit, vegetable, cereal or other plant waste*
 - *Vegetable oil.*

If caught feeding swill to a pig, you will face prosecution. The reason for this law is that meat and processed meat products such as salami can carry exotic animal diseases. These are diseases that are not currently in Australia, such as foot and mouth disease and swine fever.

If an exotic disease outbreak occurred, a quarantine area would be established and travel outside of that area would be prohibited until the

outbreak was eradicated. The eradication process involves euthanasing all susceptible animals within the quarantine area. This would include any pets.

Observation of the No Swill law protects Australian agriculture and your pet!

Shelter

Pigs are susceptible to both heat and cold stress. White or pale coloured pigs can also suffer sunburn. It is important therefore that the shelter you provide is adequate for their needs.

A small garden shed (2–3 m²) or A-frame hutch with a generous bed of straw is adequate. Locate the water trough or drinker nozzle away from the bed area. Pigs like to play in water in hot weather or when bored. A small yard (3–5 m²) adjacent to their shed allows them some exercise and protection when you are absent. Provision of a small sand pit within this yard with buried treats (carrot, sweet potato etc) will also keep them occupied.

In hot weather, provision of shade and some form of cooling is essential, such as cool damp ground, a wallow or small pond, periodic sprinkling of water or even frozen water in old drink bottles for the pigs to lie against. Pigs don't sweat so they need special consideration in very hot weather. In cold weather, plenty of straw bedding or blankets for them to burrow under will suffice. Young pigs may benefit from an external heat source such as a heat lamp or a dog coat.

Pigs are generally considered clean animals. They will defecate away from their sleeping and feeding areas if they can, often frequenting the same area. The odour of pig manure is offensive to some people, so keep on the good side of your neighbours by keeping the pig's pen and yard area clean at all times. The manure and old or soiled bedding can be composted or buried. It makes excellent garden fertiliser. Some odours can be neutralised with garden lime.

Pig health

Young pigs may be susceptible to coliform scours, enzootic pneumonia and swine dysentery if kept in unsanitary and cold conditions. Well fed and sheltered pigs will generally remain healthy. Vaccinations are available to prevent the other major diseases of pigs which include erysipelas, parvovirus, mycoplasma pneumonia and leptospirosis. Parvovirus causes reproductive failure in pigs and will not be a problem for castrated animals.

A regular vaccination program is recommended especially for leptospirosis which can be contagious to humans, causing flu-like symptoms with varying degrees of severity. Erysipelas can occur in an acute form causing septicaemia and rapid death in the pig, or in the chronic form to

cause arthritis in the pig. It is also transferable to humans. For previously unvaccinated animals, the vaccinations should be given once then again in one months' time, and thereafter every 6 to 12 months.

Consult with your local veterinarian, but be aware that many veterinarians have minimal experience dealing with (pet) pigs.

Pig disposal

Sometimes situations change and you may need to get rid of your pet pig. There are several options but first you should contact the Rural Lands Protection Board (RLPB) for your area.

The Sydney Basin comes under the jurisdiction of the Moss Vale RLPB and there is an office in Camden. Other districts will find their local RLPB listed in the phone book. The ranger will issue a permit to allow the pig to be legally sent to a saleyard. Saleyards with regular pig auctions are Camden and McGraths Hill in the Sydney Basin and Forbes and Gunnedah further west in NSW.

At the saleyards it is a legal requirement that all pigs in excess of 25 kg must be branded with a registered swine brand before sale. If you do not have your own registered brand, the RLPB ranger will brand your pig with a crown brand; details such as the date, crown brand number, the number of pigs branded, and your name and address will be recorded. There is a small fee for this service.

If you find a new home for your pet through newspaper advertisements or other means you

should provide a PigPass document to accompany your pig. Your local RLPB will provide you with the form.

You could also contact the breeder or the person from whom you bought your pet pig. They may have a list of people waiting for a pet pig and they may help you to find your pig a new home. If the situation is desperate, contact the RSPCA or local animal shelter for help.

For the disposal of a dead pig you really only have two options. You could hire a backhoe or similar and dig a grave at least 1 m deep or you could contact your local council tip. Some council tips accept dead animals for a fee.

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ISSN 1832-6668

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Job number 6868