

# ALL ABOUT POT BELLIED PIGS

Vicki Tobias for Heartland Farm Sanctuary, August 2016

---

## HISTORY

Pot bellied and other miniature pigs belong to the family of domestic pig called the *Sus Scrofa Domestica*. They are a direct descendent of the old world wild pig family: Order (*Artiodactyla*), Suborder (*Suina*), Family (*Suidae*), Genus (*Sus Scrofa*) the wild boar.

Spread across Eurasia, for over 40,000 years, they range from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast, and from the Mediterranean to as far North as the fringe of Siberia.

The pot bellied pigs (PBPs) most commonly found in the United States are generally associated with South East Asia and, in particular, Vietnam. It is technically not a breed but a "local type", the results of the cross-breeding four "local types" of Vietnamese pigs that share many common characteristics (pointed ears, sway back, straight tail, pot belly, size and gentle disposition) and originate in different parts of Vietnam.

PBPs were originally imported to the United States from Canada as zoo animals. They became popular household pets in the United States in the mid-1980s.

By the late 1990s, an estimated 200,000 PBPs were living in American homes.

---

## Pot bellied Pigs are...

### SOCIAL

Pigs are social. They are herd animals, called "sounders", and they bond easily with human companions. In their natural habitat they live in groups and a pecking order is established and maintained by body and verbal pig language. Because pigs are social creatures, they may become bored and restless when expected to spend long periods of time alone without either human or other animal interaction.

### COMMUNICATIVE

Pigs are talkers! Examples of vocal communication include the "grunting" a mother pig emits while feeding her young, "barking" that warns of impending danger, and "squealing" in anticipation of eating or indicating displeasure or pain. Some individual sounds:

- "Aroo", which means, "You aren't getting me what I want fast enough."
- "Ha ha ha," a quiet, hot panting that indicates acquaintanceship, a sociable "hello."

### CURIOUS

Pigs spend hours rooting in the ground (if given the opportunity) or snorting about a floor, seeking out stray tidbits of food. Their inquisitive nature can be advantageous when it comes to training. Pigs maintain a high level of attention when stimulated with new ideas and a primary motivator...FOOD!

### INTELLIGENT

Man rates the pig as the fifth most intelligent animal with man ranking first, followed by monkeys, dolphins, whales and pigs. Pigs function by instinct, intuition and memory. They learn quickly and don't forget what they master.

## **AFFECTIONATE**

Pigs are affectionate animals. They love companionship and body closeness. PBPs show affection in their own way. A pig will drop for a tummy rub in a heartbeat. They enjoy laying with you and being cuddled and scratched on. They will actually seek out a human just for this reason.

---

## **FEED ME!**

It is important that you provide your pigs with a high-fiber diet and plenty of fresh water.

Pigs are rooters and rummagers by nature, and therefore always act hungry. Supplement your pig with plenty of fresh, leafy vegetables. Iceberg lettuce is ideal because it helps the pig feel full, but has no fat and very few calories.

Fruit and starchy vegetables (peas, corn, potatoes) can be fattening, so keep those to a minimum. Freeze grapes or cucumber slices for treats. Generally, one cup of fresh fruits and vegetables is fine for most pigs.

PBPs love treats! Good treats are plain, air-popped popcorn, carrot slices, and individual pieces of dry cereal (Cheerios or Chex). Here are Percy's favorites:

- Banana
- Bell pepper
- Broccoli
- Celery
- Cucumber
- Lettuce or greens
- Melon
- Pumpkin
- Spinach

*Never* feed a pig:

- Acorns
  - Dog or cat food
  - Chocolate
  - Pitted fruits (peaches, cherries)
  - Dairy products or meat
  - Salty foods
- 

## **POT BELLIED PIG CARE**

### **SIZE**

The pot bellied pig is sturdy with short legs, a slightly swayed back, a pendulous belly, a short tail ending with a flowing switch, short and erect ears, and a snout that varies from short and stubby to long and elegant.

A pot bellied pig grows for at least two to three years. The average purebred (not crossbred), healthy, mature, three-year-old pot bellied pig weighs between 60 to 175 pounds and measures from 13 to 26 inches in height.

## **SENSES**

PBPs have a keen sense of smell. Pigs can smell odors that are up to twenty-five feet below ground. They are used to unearth culinary delicacies like truffles, as well as sniff out drugs for law enforcement purposes. While a pig has excellent hearing capability, they do not see very well.

## **LIFE EXPECTANCY**

Since pot bellied pigs have only been in the United States since 1986, it is difficult to determine an average life span. Estimates, however, range **between 15 and 30 years**. A pot bellied pig who is allowed to exercise regularly, not overfed, and examined and vaccinated annually by a veterinarian should live to a ripe old age.

## **GROOMING**

A PBPs hooves and tusks need to be trimmed on a regular basis.

All pigs have naturally dry skin. It's not necessary to bathe a pig on a regular basis. However, it is fine to give him a bath when they get dirty. A good brushing will help, too.

## **NUTRITION**

Pigs love to eat! Overweight pigs can suffer from heart problems, blindness and arthritis. Obesity is the number one cause of health complications and death in pot bellied pigs. This is preventable by feeding a proper diet.

## **HEALTH**

A healthy pig will be active and enjoy walking and roaming and sometimes running and playing with other pigs.

Male pigs can be prone to urinary tract infections and other disorders. Make sure all male pigs have plenty of fresh water available at all times and that they drink it.

Some pigs are prone to eye problems, so check your pig's eyes for irritation or stuck eyelashes, or eyelashes that may curve into the eye and cause irritation.

---

## **WHERE I LIVE**

Like many animals, a pot bellied pig needs shelter.

### **INDOORS**

A PBP needs a soft bed of blankets or pillows, a "place" of their own to nest when they are feeling insecure or want to be left alone. This can be a quiet room, a closet, or a large animal crate in a corner.

PBPs require certain nutrients found in soil, so allowing them time to root around outside is essential to good health, even if they live indoors. Rooting is a natural behavior, and pigs should have the proper space to root freely.

### **OUTDOORS**

Lots of pigs enjoy being inside but (just like most humans) they require some outside time to root, be a pig, and soak up the sun and vitamin D.

Outdoor pigs need a sturdy, rainproof shed, barn or doghouse. In cold climates, it must also be wind proof and have enough room for plenty of straw and blankets to keep the pig warm. Ideally, outdoor pigs should be kept in small groups for extra body warmth.

Any pig shelter should include hay and blankets for snuggling, especially during winter months. Pigs love to nest and root.

When outside, pigs need shade, shelter and a pool or water source, like a mud hole. Pigs have tiny sweat glands located on the top of their snout so the only way they can cool down is to take a dip in water. They need plenty of water available at all times to prevent overheating. Pigs with fair skin should also have sunscreen applied before going outside!

### **Wisconsin Winters (brrrrrr!)**

Wind chill makes days colder than actual temperature readings. Pot bellied pigs are not protected by hair or fur. Be attentive to a PBP's body temperature and limit the time a pig spends outdoors.

A pig is just as likely to get dehydrated in the winter as in the summer. Be sure and provide them plenty of fresh water. Snow is not a satisfactory substitute for water.

### **LEARN AND PLAY**

In nature pigs will root for at least 40 percent of their day; this activates their minds and bodies.

PBPs can be potty-trained and learn to go in a particular spot. So smart!

A pig may need a ramp to assist in stair climbing.

PBPs are smart and trainable but you must earn their respect and trust. Once that is established, training begins.

Use a "sorting board" (otherwise known as a "pig board") to direct a PBP and to establish control.

Pigs are social animals and usually love to interact with each other and with people.

PBPs are herd animals by instinct and, as such, will face off to establish their hierarchy.

Whether indoor or outdoor, all pigs love toys, especially toys with treats.

---

### **So you want to take me home?**

Please take time to learn all about me before making that decision. Did you know that 95% of pot bellied pigs end up in shelters or euthanized in their first year? Don't let me become part of that statistic.

Keep in mind that, inherently, I root. I LOVE to dig and explore.

I need lots and lots of care in both indoor and outdoor environments to flourish. At minimum, I need shelter, access to food and water, toys and stimulating activity, healthcare and, most importantly, your companionship.

Don't believe the myth that pot bellied pigs will stay small if underfed. It's simply not true. A full grown pot bellied pig can weigh anywhere from 100 to 250 pounds and not be overweight. Likewise, an average full grown pot bellied pig is anywhere from 16-26 inches tall at their shoulders.

Do you live in an area that's zoned to have a pot bellied pig as a pet? Whether you rent or own a home, many neighborhoods do not allow pigs as pets. If caught, you'll have to surrender me to a rescue organization at minimum and possibly face a fine or other penalty.

Are you willing to piggy-proof your home? We love to open cabinets, drawers and refrigerators. We love to scratch against hard surfaces like furniture and walls. When we're young, we'll try to eat just about anything within reach. Can you keep us safe?

Do you have adequate time and resources for training and socializing activities? I'm an intelligent creature who needs stimulation and interaction, guidance and feedback in order to thrive as a happy and healthy member of your family.

Do you have access to veterinary care that specializes in pigs? I'll require regular visits to the vet for general health care issues including immunizations, dental care, and common seasonal ailments.

I love to eat! Are you able to provide the proper type and amount of food to maintain my good health? Contrary to popular belief, I don't eat "slop" or leftovers.

Do you have children or other pets? How will they react and adjust to my presence?

You may not be able to take me on your vacations. Who will care for me while you are gone? If I do travel with you, remember you will need to check with the USDA within your state and the states you are going into or through. Each state has different requirements for entering and leaving with swine (and the USDA still designates all potbellies as swine). Pot bellied pigs fall under the same restrictions as other pigs.

Finally, don't forget that I'm a long-term commitment. I may live another 15-20 years. Do you have the energy and compassion to care for me for my entire life?

---

## **Need help?**

### **I'm considering or already have a pot bellied pig.**

1. Pig Placement Network - <http://www.pigplacementnetwork.org/>
2. Northwest Miniature Pig Association - [http://www.nwpetpigs.org/pig\\_info/index.html](http://www.nwpetpigs.org/pig_info/index.html)
3. Pigs4Ever - [http://www.pigs4ever.com/pot\\_belly\\_pig\\_information/](http://www.pigs4ever.com/pot_belly_pig_information/)
4. Forgotten Angels Rescue and Education Center - <http://www.farec.org/pigs.htm>
5. Best Friends Animal Sanctuary - <http://bestfriends.org/resources/potbellied-pig-information> and <http://bestfriends.org/resources/teacup-pigs>
6. Mini-pig Info - <http://www.minipiginfo.com/>
7. Pig Harmony - <http://www.pigharmony.com/home.html>
8. North American Pet Pig Association - <http://petpigs.com/>

### **I have a pot bellied pig and need to rehome them.**

1. Pig Placement Network - <http://www.pigplacementnetwork.org/>
2. Ross Mill Farm - <http://www.rossmillfarm.com/>
3. Lil Orphan Hammies - <http://www.lilorphanhammies.org/mission>
4. Pig Placement Network – Surrender Options and Process - <http://www.pigplacementnetwork.org/surrender/>
5. Mini-pig Info – Pig Rescues and Sanctuaries List - <http://www.minipiginfo.com/pig-rescues-and-how-you-can-help.html>

**Content Resources:**

1. Best Friends: <http://bestfriends.org/resources/other-animals/potbellied-pig-information>
2. Farm Sanctuary: <http://www.farmsanctuary.org/learn/the-someone-project/pigs/>
3. PPN: <http://www.pigplacementnetwork.org/information/ppnlibrary/>
4. <http://farec.org/pigs.htm>
5. <http://potbellypigs.com/>
6. <http://www.rossmillfarm.com/>
7. <http://www.animalplanet.com/tv-shows/pets-101/videos/pet-pigs/>
8. North American Pet Pig Association: <http://petpigs.com/>
9. Animal sounds in different languages: <https://www.esl-languages.com/en/study-abroad/coffee-time/animal-sounds/index.htm>