

Your Potbellied Pig's Environment

Potbellied pigs can do well as either indoor pets or outdoor pets – or a combination of the two. If you decide to have an indoor pig, you'll need to be committed to providing plenty of mental stimulation and physical exercise for your pig. Also, pigs can become territorial, so it's important for you to remain the "alpha pig." If you're timid in this regard, the pig may display aggressive behavior in an effort to become the dominant force in the household.

Pigs who live full-time outdoors need a warm, draft-free shelter in winter; in the warm months, they require shade and a mud hole or pool in which to cool off. They also need companionship, so an outdoor pig should have at least one friend to live with. Pigs are typically social animals who need interaction with others to be happy.



For Outdoor Pigs

Housing for outdoor pigs should be insulated for warmth in winter and coolness in summer. The house must be large enough so the pig can turn around easily and get comfy. The house should be low enough that it keeps the pig's body heat near the pig. The roof should have an overhang and be able to withstand the rain.

In very cold climates, consider including some type of safe heating source. Heaters made for dog houses or electric radiators can be used if they're sectioned off with fencing to prevent the pig from getting access to the heater.

If the pig isn't too large, a dog igloo ("dogloo") with door flaps can work well as housing. For added insulation in the winter, toss an insulated horse blanket or two (or big rugs or tarps) over the dogloo. Use straw for bedding, unless the pig has allergies or fat folds around his eyes. If either is true, use blankets. It's a good idea to have an access door to remove old straw and add new straw. Straw should be checked frequently for mold and replaced as it breaks down.

The more area that outdoor pigs have to roam around in, the happier they are. A nice spacious pig enclosure means fewer behavioral issues between pigs – and between pigs and people. The fencing needs to be tall enough (at least 4 feet high) so that the pigs will not be tempted to climb over it. The fencing can be made of various materials; one option is metal horse fencing. Wood fencing is not recommended because it requires maintenance and pigs who are determined to get out may damage it.

It is often necessary to add "dig proof" fencing at the bottom of the vertical fencing to prevent the pigs from rooting their way out, although not all pigs will try to escape. Dig a trench out at the bottom of the fencing and install the dig-proof section (about 1 foot in width) so that it is slanted downward. Secure it to the bottom of the vertical fencing with wire, being careful to not leave sharp edges exposed. Once it's installed, cover the trench with the dirt you dug out.

One necessity in hot weather is shade, whether it's from trees or from installed shade cloth. Another option for shade is a hoop house. You can add shade cloth over it in the summer; in the winter, switch the shade cloth to heavy plastic for a greenhouse effect. If the enclosure is fairly bare, try adding shrubbery for texture, depth and interest.

Finally, your pigs' enclosure should include some scratching implements. Pigs need to be able to scratch themselves to remove dead skin. Trees, shrubs and logs are all great for this purpose. Also, scrub brushes and push brooms can be installed in the enclosure for the pigs to itch themselves on.

Mud Hole or Pool

To keep pigs happy, they need access to water, in the form of a pool or a mud hole. A mud hole is best, because pigs use the mud to cool down, and as a sunscreen and insect repellent. Plus, it's a whole lot of fun to roll around in! Pig pools, the second choice, typically have soft sides to make it easy for the pigs to climb in and out. The third choice is kiddie pools. You may be tempted to buy one because they are less expensive than pig pools, but many pigs do not like climbing in and out over the hard edges.

Regardless of which type of water reservoir you choose, be sure to change the water often and watch for algae. If algae becomes an issue, simply relocate the mud hole or pool to an area that receives more shade. In hot weather, a mud hole or pool is a necessity for pigs because they do not sweat and need the mud or water to cool down.

For Indoor Pigs

To feel secure, indoor pigs need a small, quiet area to themselves. Furnish your pig's space with a large dog bed and cotton blankets for bedding. (The blankets should be 100-percent cotton, in case the pig eats bits of them.) If necessary, the area should be safe from dogs.

Indoor pigs also need some outside time. A great setup for an indoor pig is to install a doggie (piggy) door that leads from the house to an outside enclosure. Again, the bigger the enclosure, the happier the pig. But, if your pig has the whole inside of the house to roam, the outdoor enclosure does not need to be as large as that of pigs who live outside. The enclosure should have everything that an enclosure for outdoor pigs includes, such as trees or shade cloth, a mud hole or pool, and scratching tools.

Another great way to get outdoor time for your indoor piggy is to harness the pig and train her to go for walks on a lead. Training takes time, but pigs are smart: They can be trained to do anything that dogs can be trained to do.

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