

Life With Your First Sugar Glider

These sugar glider facts will help you decide if this special, unique and sometimes challenging animal is the right pet for you.



Sugar gliders all have their own personalities. Via [David K/Flickr](#)

By Patricia Knight

There is no doubt that **sugar gliders** are among the most unique small animals — and they certainly are cute! They are also a bit more challenging than other small pets and may prove too much for petkeepers who are not prepared to meet their needs. Let's take a look at what those needs are so that everyone considering a glider can get started on the right foot and make the right decision about bringing one into his or her home.

First Experiences With Gliders

Like many other pets, sugar gliders all have their own personalities. “One of the first things I learned was to respect them for their individuality,” said Tamra Rothenburger, founder and executive director of **Arizona Sugar Glider Rescue**. “Honestly, it has been over four years, and I still learn from them every day.”

Megan Pritchett, co-founder of **Sugar Exotics**, was drawn to their ability to bond. She had an interesting first experience with gliders after she and her sister each adopted a glider from the same exact breeder. Her sister's glider was quite docile one day after being brought home, while hers was “timid and vicious,” as she describes. “I did learn that after working with her, for well over a month, she became a very sweet and lovable girl.” She adds that a glider that starts out unfriendly will eventually turn around — it just takes time.

Sugar Glider Pros

One of the benefits to caring for a sugar glider is their ability to bond. Pritchett goes on to say that if you spend time with them, “they grow very attached to their owners, as much as a dog would.”

Cathy Hart, owner of **Hartland Sugar Gliders**, agrees. “The best thing about gliders is they love their owners.”

Rothenburger mentions another plus to sugar gliders that is often associated with larger pets: their ability to provide some form of therapy when you are under stress. “You can just stop and take some time with them,” she said. “During this time, your only focus should be them, and after a while, they are the only thing that matters.” She adds that this can make you feel better than even hours in therapy.

Sugar Glider Challenges

As perfect as they sound so far, gliders do come with some challenges. Edwin Margulies runs **Lucky Glider Rescue & Sanctuary** with his wife Gail. One event he mentions demonstrates just how unique sugar gliders are. He describes a “dog-and-pony show” in which a vendor placed a glider in someone's hand, and had the person step away and then hold the glider in the air. “The vendor would call for the glider, and the glider would jump out of the hand of the prospect and fly (glide) over to the vendor's shoulder.”

Of course, this can lead to impulse buys on the part of new glider owners, and Margulies brings to light some of the problems this can cause. “Young gliders who are sold by these impulse-buy vendors so young — 8 weeks — are terrified and often bite and fuss.”

Even if a glider is not bought on impulse, there are other concerns. One example is they require a particular diet every night. Pritchett mentions that some people do pre-cut food, doing this up to a month in advance, though this is not her feeding routine. “I'm one of the few [who cuts] everything up nightly,” she said. “Along with fruits and vegetables, you also have to prepare a protein mixture — of your choice.”

Also, gliders should not be kept alone. “Lone gliders easily become depressed and self-mutilate. They need a cagemate.” Margulies said. Yes, that's right: a little sugar glider may self-mutilate! Margulies adds that happy gliders will bond to humans better, yet another reason to avoid keeping them alone.

Rothenburger echoes the importance of interaction, saying that without proper interaction, they may become “aggressive, depressed and even damage themselves.”

Margulies mentions some other issues, as well. 1) A frightened or stressed glider will bite — and can bite deep; 2) Dogs and cats may maim and eat gliders; and 3) Gliders cannot be left alone if you go away for a weekend.

A couple of other needs are a large habitat and toys. Rothenburger notes they are “highly intelligent and love to play with toys.”

Life Span And Health

If you do decide to get a glider, know that these animals can live up to 15 years. Unfortunately, many do not make it this long, and many die younger because of maltreatment and poor diet, Margulies said. “Many have come to us in terrible shape, including metabolic bone disease and other maladies associated with malnourishment.”

Getting A Glider

There is definitely more involved in keeping a sugar glider than other small pets, but their uniqueness and bonding ability may just be worth it for you. If all of this sounds doable and you think a sugar glider may be the right pet for you, just make sure to do plenty of research before taking the final plunge.

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