

# ARE POTBELLIED PIGS GOOD PETS?



Potbellied pigs are very "special" animals. Potbellies are like two-year-old children—intelligent, curious, mischievous, and, sometimes manipulative. They are sensitive creatures that can be playful, and even almost humorous. Many owners bond to their pigs as if they were their own children. Many owners sleep with their pigs, travel with their oinkers, dress them in costumes, and share every aspect of their lives with them. Potbellies love to have

their bellies scratched, and snuggle with their owners. In the intelligence scale, they are only two species away from the intelligence of humans!

Unfortunately, their intelligence and ability to learn quickly is often detrimental. The porker can quickly learn to open refrigerator doors and cupboards in its eternal quest for food. Pigs can learn to scream, to wake their owners for breakfast, beg for food, and raid pantries. They can be demanding, overly sensitive, or even neurotic. A potbellied pig's personality is complex and intriguing. Because of this, they need a lot of discipline and monitoring. Very often, a bored pig may root and knock over house hold objects.

Pigs are not good pets if left alone with no mental stimulation. In their eternal quest for treats, they can get aggressive with young children. The good news is that pigs are very trainable. First, a pig must be taught that it can trust its owner. Firm, gentle discipline works well. Because of their love for food, positive reinforcement is very effective. Negative physical reinforcement absolutely does not work. Pigs have a great memory, and respond well to commands. They are capable of learning to slam dunk a basketball, play a piano, or golf, play soccer, jump through hoops, dance, ride a skateboard and a scooter, and dozens of other feats. Housebreaking comes very easily to pigs.

Potbellied pigs average anywhere between 125 - 175 lbs. at three years of age. Unfortunately, sometimes they are advertised by breeders as being around 50 lbs. at maturity. What some buyers don't realize, is that as the pig grows beyond the age of one year, it is often too large and heavy to lift and ride in a car to go to the Vets. This problem can be overcome, if the owner is dedicated, by training a pig to climb a ramp into the car. All pigs must be neutered or spayed to be good pets.

Potbellies are herd animals with a strong pecking order. If spoiled, they often become territorial and aggressive towards humans, especially house guests. The pigs have an instinctual urge to be "Top Hog" and defend their territory. Pigs need lots of subtle, daily discipline. They also need to know their boundaries in the home. If they are well trained and disciplined, they usually do not exhibit this aggression. The potbellies must be taught the word "NO" and to respect humans.

Porkers need to spend time outdoors, in a fenced yard, secure from hostile dogs. This helps reduce their territorial nature and keeps them from becoming bored. Pigs root by instinct, however; this can often be slightly curtailed. They do not get fleas, but can get mange. Mange is easily treatable.

All in all, pigs have the potential to be the BEST pet, or the very WORST pet. It really depends upon the expectations and efforts of the owners. Pigs are not small, or easily transportable, and do not belong in apartments, generally. They can be convoluted, or even aggressive. They get bored easily, and will sometimes knock over waste paper baskets and household objects... And, OF COURSE, pigs will do ANYTHING for food ! That's what being a pig is all about!

But, if you do not expect a pig to be anything other than a pig, a potbelly can be a marvelous lifetime companion. They are adorable, loving, affectionate creatures with incredible intelligence. Most of us wouldn't trade ours for anything in the world!