Pigs as Pets

January 2016, Primefact 241, Third edition
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Introduction

Pigs can make great pets. They have a gregarious, inquisitive nature and are responsive to training. However there are some important things to consider for responsible pig ownership.

Do your homework

There are no true breeds of miniature pigs in Australia. Small pig size is the result of selective breeding for small size. Seek out a reputable breeder. Ask to see the parents of the pig so you have an indication of potential adult size and temperament. However there are no guarantees that your pig will stay small.

Complaints received at this office have included pigs growing a lot larger than expected and one pig that became very territorial and aggressive to visitors.
Natural behaviour for pigs includes rooting with their snouts. They like to dig in the garden and can be quite destructive. Ensure that you have enough space and suitable housing for your pig before you buy.

Some people advocate the use of nose rings to minimise the rooting behaviour of pigs but this is not recommended. It causes the pig pain when it roots around and it is the pain that causes a decrease in the rooting behaviour.

Be aware that some pigs can become expert at opening doors and cupboards in search of food if you allow your pet pig inside your house. This might be funny the first time, but can be a nuisance. Keep pigs away from food storage areas such as refrigerators as the doors are easily opened.

Get your pig desexed to avoid unwanted sexual behaviours.

Pigs in the wild and domestic pigs (including pet pigs) will kill and eat small animals. Feral pigs in Australia do kill and eat baby lambs and other wildlife.

Never leave young children unsupervised alone with a pig.

**Legislation**

Under the *Stock Diseases Regulation 2009 Part 3 Division 4 Clause 37* all owners with one or more pigs, whether they are pets or for commercial purposes, must obtain a Property Identification Code (PIC) for their property. PICs are issued by Local Land Services (LLS). You can find your local LLS by phoning 1300 795 299.

Local councils do have the power to prohibit the keeping of pigs in suburban areas. Always check with council before you purchase your pet pig.

Under *Section 124 Local Government Act 1993* a council may issue an order to restrict the keeping of pigs, particularly if the area is a sensitive area such as a catchment area.

In the *Local Government (General) Regulations Schedule 2, Part 5, Division 1* there are standards for the keeping of pigs (swine) listed in sections 17 and 18.

Section 18 specifically states:

"...swine must not be kept (and swine’s dung must not be deposited) within 60 metres (or such greater distance as the council may determine in a particular case) 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”

**Prohibited pig feed**

Under the *Stock Diseases Regulation 2009 Part 6 Clause 71* it is illegal to feed meat or meat products or anything that has been in contact with meat to pigs. This includes table scraps and bakery waste that contains meat such as pies or pizzas. This is called ‘swill feeding’ and it is illegal in all states and territories of Australia. This regulation is an important component of Australia’s biosecurity plan to keep exotic diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease out of Australia.

Milk, milk products, or milk by-products either of Australian provenance or legally imported for stockfeed use into Australia can be fed to pigs. **Note**: waste milk from dairy farms should not be fed to pigs because of the risk of antibiotic residues.

**Feeding**

Pigs are omnivorous and will eat most feedstuffs including grains, eggs, dairy products, fruits and vegetables. The purchase of pig pellets is recommended as these will be formulated with the necessary protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals for a healthy pig.

Very young pigs should be fed at least twice per day with high quality feed such as grain based porridge or moistened pig pellets. Addition of milk powder will improve palatability. Vegetables such as diced carrot and broccoli; fruits such as banana and apple; dairy products such as cheese; and bread or biscuits can be fed as treats.

Cool fresh water for drinking should be available at all times.

Establish a routine from the beginning and you will avoid most problems.
Housing
The comfortable temperature range for pigs changes as they mature. Very young pigs do best in a temperature range of 28 to 30°C. Adult pigs are most comfortable with a temperature range of 18 to 22°C.

Provide a sheltered sleep area with a thick bed of straw so the pig can burrow in for warmth in winter. In very cold areas you could provide a dog coat for your pig.

In summer you need to provide a shaded wallow so pigs can wet themselves for cooling. Pigs do not sweat and suffer heat stress when the temperature is above 30°C.

Diseases
Pigs can carry several zoonotic diseases. These are diseases that are transferable from animals to humans and include leptospirosis, brucellosis (Brucella suis) and Streptococcus suis infection. Pigs are also susceptible to internal and external parasites. You should discuss an appropriate vaccination and worming/treatment protocol with your private veterinarian.

*Brucella suis* is common in feral pigs in Queensland and has been detected in feral pigs in northern New South Wales (NSW). Prevention is to avoid contact with feral pigs. Brucellosis (*Brucella suis*) has been detected in dogs that have been pig-hunting in northern NSW, and dogs that have been fed raw feral pig meat.

Pigs can become infected with the human influenza virus. Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 was first diagnosed in pigs in NSW in 2009. This virus became a seasonal virus in the human population. Infection in pigs did not show systemic clinical signs typical of ‘classical’ Swine Influenza, which is exotic to Australia.

More information
Primefact 637: Swill Feeding
Primefact 814: Zoonoses – animal diseases transmissible to humans.
Primefact 1263: Zoonotic disease risk – feral pigs.


*Pig Bites Baby! Stories from Australia’s first newspaper* edited by Michael Connor Published by Duffy & Snellgrove Sydney 2003. *(In the early Sydney colony a pig killed a baby)*