



Pygmy goats are low maintenance, but like companionship from other animals

Time magazine recently published its list of Top Ten Miniature Animals, which included such interesting suggestions as the dwarf caiman (a type of crocodile), pygmy marmosets (monkey), and Barbados thread snakes (four inches long and as thin as spaghetti).

The big buzz at the moment, however, is pigs. A fully grown pig can weigh in excess of 1,000lbs with an appetite to match, but a micro pig can be tiny in comparison. There are several breeds to choose from. The Vietnamese Potbellied Pig is the most popular, measuring about 14in high and weighing up to 50lbs. The Juliani Pig can range from 10-16in, and weigh 15-50lbs. The Yucatan breed comes in two sizes, with the larger breed weighing upwards of 200lbs, so it is important to check.

Originally from the jungles of Vietnam and China, these mini versions were first seen as pets in the US during the 1980s, when they sold at an eye-watering £15,000 each. More recently, the Beckhams are said to have paid £1,400 for a pair of 'teacup' pigs.

The little pigs can have interesting personalities, with individual mannerisms, so can these pigs make good pets? Kent breeder, Little Oinkers, says that providing a commitment is made to the animal, as with a dog, micro pigs make 'excellent pets'.

Discipline is essential. Like

It's a small world

What do the Beckhams, Paris Hilton and Mickey Rourke all have in common? The answer is they've all bought miniature pets. Denise Smith explores the fashion for the micro animals you could pop in your handbag – well almost

dogs they can be easily house trained and also to be walked on a lead. However, pigs are highly intelligent – so a little extra time will teach the animal right from wrong, all the better to fit in with its owner's lifestyle.

The best place for any pig to live is outdoors, and the same goes for micro pigs. A little house of its own with a carpet of barley straw, together with a fenced in area covered with woodchips for it to root around, is piggy bliss.

Specially developed micro pig feed is available, but they also enjoy fresh fruit and vegetables and fresh water should be constantly available. Pigs will eat anything, so if they are allowed indoors, anything not meant for them, or that would be harmful (small toys, pills, etc), should be kept well out of their reach.

As with cats and dogs, micro pigs need to be regularly treated for worms, either with

a vaccination or a regular worming and parasite food supplement. Pigs can also get sunburned in the summer so precautions need to be taken.

On a cautionary note, like puppies, delightful little porkers do grow into pigs, albeit smaller ones. Following cases of animals sold as 'micro' pigs growing into 100kg monsters, it is wise to buy from a reputable breeder.

Of course, micro pets are not new; the Chihuahua (a miniature dog) was first recognised by the American Kennel Club in 1904, but historians variously believe they date back to 19th century Mexico, 15th century Malta, or even as far back as the 9th century Toltec civilization.

At 6-9in high, and weighing in at between 2-6lbs, they are often dismissed as 'silly little lap dogs'. But the British Chihuahua Club describes them as 'big dogs that happen to be wrapped in a small parcel'.

They are said to be good companions; brave, loyal and extremely lively.

Chihuahuas may be mini dogs, but they can live up to 15 years or more, providing they are cared for properly. Elaine Lowe from Birchington, who has been a German shepherd breeder for more than 20 years, has just branched out into Chihuahuas. "They aren't handbag dogs," she says. "They need to have a walk every day."

Because of their size they are ideal for smaller homes, even flats, and although they are not fussy pets, they do like to be kept warm and they can be picky eaters.

The UK Kennel Club only recognises two varieties of Chihuahua, the long coat, and the smooth coat (or short haired). They come in a variety of colours (fawn, red, cream, chocolate, blue and black) and markings (solid, spotted or splashed).

Chihuahuas are prone to a number of health disorders. They are born with a soft spot in their skulls, which normally fills in with age. This means they need particular care when they are puppies. They are also prone to hypoglycaemia, eye infections and dental problems.

Another popular miniature pet is the pygmy goat, which is hardy and good natured. The Ashford-based goat breeder Sally Batt says: "Pygmy goats make excellent pets. Castrated males (wethers) are ideal for anyone not wishing to breed."

These little goats need company and should never be



Competition among British Falabella breeders is intense



Micro pigs make great pets, but buy from a reputable breeder

The Looking Glass Stud, www.miniaturehorseinformation.com

kept alone. They require a little more space than pigs. An 8ft by 6ft shed with a bench and a hay rack will accommodate two, with a well-fenced area to allow them fresh air and space to exercise – these goats should not be tethered.

Goats can live for up to 15 years and thrive on a fairly basic diet of hay and fresh water, plus a supplement of 2-8oz of concentrate a day. These little animals browse rather than graze, so unfortunately they won't keep the lawn short. They do, however, enjoy additional bits of fruit and veg, and even twigs and leaves, so they do need to be housed well away from the vegetable patch.

Pygmy goats do, of course, need tending. They require a yellow mineral 'lick' in their shed, their hooves need regular trimming and they should be wormed twice a year. They

is pure bred and not a cross-breed, which so often is falsely advertised as a pygmy."

A completely adorable micro pet is the miniature horse – a perfectly scaled down version of a normal one, measuring no more than 37in. They can be any colour or pattern, show horse or family pet, and enjoy jumping, driving and even being ridden by a small child.

Harry Arnold has been breeding miniature horses in Kent for the past 20 years, most recently at his farm near Wye. He became fascinated by the Falabella breed when he saw them on a ranch in Argentina.

He says: "I was riding a full-sized horse across this vast ranch when we came across these tiny little horses in the shade under some trees. They looked incredible. They are not dwarf animals and they are nothing like Shetlands, which are ponies, they are proper

will also need vaccinations.

If you buy a goat, you will need to register with your local DEFRA office, even if you only have two goats living in your back garden. They will also need to have an ear-tag. Goats need an official licence to be moved from one property to another.

Sally recommends buying pygmy goats from a reputable breeder with registered stock. She says: "This will ensure the animal

horses in perfect miniature. Even their hooves are tiny."

Back in the UK, Harry quickly found a breeder and bought his first mare. The horses are popular with Japanese buyers, who are renowned for their love of all things miniature, and with countries where agricultural land is in short supply.


Miniature horses naturally need less space than conventional horses, but they need the same type of care. Living in a field is quite acceptable, but it is important to ensure the fence rails are close together so they can't squeeze through or roll under. If they are housed in a stall, then they need daily exercise. They also like company so could be teamed up with another horse or even a goat.

Feeding is the same as for normal size horses, mainly hay, except they eat less. Overfeeding can cause colic, founder, or even obesity. Supplements are available, but

should only be given on the instructions of a vet.

Although they don't wear shoes, these little horses need their hooves trimmed regularly. Like other pets, worming is important, but they also need an annual vaccination for tetanus, rhino, and flu. Their teeth also need special care.

Miniature horses make wonderful pets. Harry says: "They might be small but they are full of spirit – and the foals are adorable, smaller than a Labrador and all fluffy. When they are born, usually in spring, they are smaller than some of the daffodils." Harry has foals due in the next few months.

There are a number of micro pets available, but there seem to be two valuable points to bear in mind before buying. Firstly, read up on your chosen pet so you know what you are in for. And second, buy from a reputable breeder; otherwise you could be in for a surprise. 

Useful info

Micro pig

Micro pigs UK: www.micropigsuk.co.uk
www.miniaturepigsguide.com
 Breeder: Kelly Oliver, Little Oinkers, Maidstone
 Tel: 0758 3336009, email: littleoinkers@hotmail.co.uk

Pygmy Goat

Pygmy Goat Club: www.pygmygoatclub.org
 Pygmy goat breeder: Mrs Sally Batt, Ashford
 Tel: 01233 770473, email: DandSBatt@btinternet.com

Chihuahua

www.the-british-chihuahua-club.org.uk
 Breeder: Elaine Lowe, Birchington – Tel: 01843 846572

Miniature horses

The British Miniature Horse Society: www.bmhs.co.uk/
 Breeder: Harry Arnold, – Tel: 07710 613933