



# ASSOCIATION OF SUGAR GLIDER VETERINARIANS™

## **Cages and Cage Setup**

Hi, my name is Dr. David Brust, and I've been a practicing exotic veterinarian for the last 25 years. I'm the author of "*Sugar Gliders: A Complete Veterinary Care Guide*" – and I'm also the president of the Association of Sugar Glider Veterinarians.

The purpose of this video series is to cut through all the internet misinformation out there, and teach owners like you the best - veterinary-approved - ways to raise and care for sugar gliders.

Now, just to make sure we're all on the same page here, sugar gliders are also commonly known as "sugar bears" and "honey gliders" – and with that in mind, the goal of this video is to give you the facts about how to pick out the best cage – and where to put it.

First off, picking the right cage for your sugar gliders should largely be determined by the age of your sugar glider, and how much space you have. For example, the cage you see here is ideal for young sugar gliders, and can also house up to 2 adults with no problem. It's made of a special wire mesh that is covered in a plastic PVC coating. The holes are ½ inch x 1 inch and they allow the sugar glider to grasp the bars either horizontally or vertically. This kind of coated mesh is important – especially for young joeys – because they have tender little feet and can tear their paws by sliding down the kind of long vertical bars you normally find on bird cages.

Again, this is an ideal cage for young sugar gliders – especially ones in the bonding phase of their life who are about 8-12 weeks old. Veterinary studies have shown that young gliders actually do much better in smaller, "starter" cages like this. One reason is that they are significantly more active in a cage this size because they can jump all around and play without a fear of falling. Sugar gliders have an instinctual fear of falling, and whenever they can't firmly grasp their surroundings, or be confident that they can jump to another object, they will become significantly less active.

Reducing stress and increasing activity levels are very important for young sugar gliders - and one of the biggest benefits of a cage like this is that it can really help speed up the whole bonding process. This is because the owner can easily pick up the glider anywhere in the cage without it being able to escape their reach. By placing a heat rock & nesting cloth like this just inside the cage door, it's easy (even for young kids) to be able to reach in and get the baby out without having to chase it all around.

Now, like I said before, a cage of roughly this size is fine for up to 2 adult gliders – especially if you have them out playing with you a lot - but whenever possible, as they

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get older you should always try to get them the biggest cage you can afford. Once a glider gets to be around 4-6 months old, they can do just fine in a larger cage like this – and that’s what most people use.

Now, when picking out a larger cage, the two most important things to consider are the coating on the bars – and the spacing between them. As far as bar spacing goes, it needs to be no more than ½ inch – or the animal will be able to escape. Sugar gliders can really flatten themselves out – so you want to make sure the spacing is right. Also, safety latches on all the doors are important, because these little guys have “hands” that can open just about anything. ☺

Actually, the hardest part of shopping for a large sugar glider cage like this is just telling them apart. Nowadays, almost all large aviary cages are made overseas – and they all look identical. The problem is, they are pretty much impossible to tell apart – especially on websites – and almost all of them are made of “pot metal” covered with cheap coatings like paint, powder-coating, or galvanization that can begin to flake off very quickly.

The thing is, once the coating starts to flake off, a sugar glider can get zinc poisoning from the bare bars and die – so getting a quality cage that has the right coating can literally be a matter of life and death for these little guys.

Now, I don’t like to waste money- and I always try to get the best deals I can – but trust me when I tell you that your animals’ cage is not the right place to try and save a couple bucks. The best cages definitely do cost a little more, but they have a high-quality epoxy coating that is actually bonded to the bars – and a good cage can last your entire pet’s life. This cage is what’s called a Jung-L-Gym™ cage – from Pocket Pets - and it’s the type of cage that I use for all my personal pet gliders.

Ok, once you’ve picked out the right cage, the next question is where’s the best place to put it. There are five important things to keep in mind when picking out the right cage location, and they are: 1) temperature, 2) lighting, 3) toxins, 4) noise, and 5) companionship.

From a health standpoint, sugar gliders are most comfortable in a room that stays somewhere between 75 and 80 degrees. Since many homes are set cooler than that, you should always have a supplemental heat source inside the cage so your animals can stay warm if they ever get cold. You can use things like heat lamps, but the easiest and most common thing is just to put one or two heat rocks like this inside a cage this size. A heat rock basically works like a “furnace” in their home - and if the animal is cold, they’ll usually just go snuggle up next to it in their nesting cloth.

Now, you should be aware that there is a lot of lot of misinformation out on the internet about heat rocks and sugar gliders – saying that they get burned or electrocuted by them – but it’s just not true. Tens of thousands of sugar glider owners across the country have been using heat rocks in their sugar glider’s cages for many years now – and as a vet who

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works with these animals every day – I can tell you for a fact that I’ve never seen a single documented case where a sugar glider has ever been burned or electrocuted by a heat rock. It’s just complete nonsense – and heat rocks are just fine. We cover how to set your heat rock up in another video about how to pick up your baby, so make sure to check that video out as well.

Now, having said all that, another important consideration for cage location is lighting. Although direct sunlight in itself won’t necessarily harm a sugar glider – it’s best not to put their cage right next to a window or in a place that will get a lot of direct sunlight. The reason is primarily because areas like this tend to get really hot during the day – and then much cooler at night – so you want to try and keep the cage in an area where the temperature is more stable.

The potential exposure to toxins is another important thing to factor in when picking a place for your glider cage - because even small amounts of normal household toxins can kill a sugar glider. We talk about this a lot in another video on common household hazards, but for now the main thing is just to avoid placing the animal’s cage in the kitchen. More than any other room in the house, the kitchen area is probably the worst place to keep any small animal – largely because of all the fumes, sprays, cleaners, hot surfaces and other things that can hurt or kill a pet. Therefore, it’s usually a good idea to keep the cage at least 20 feet away from the kitchen.

That being said, another important thing you’ll want to keep in mind when you are picking out a place for your cage is potential noise – especially at night. We talk about this a lot more on another video in this series, but the simple fact is that a healthy sugar glider typically doesn’t make much more – or less – noise than most other house pets. They are capable of making several different sounds, like chattering - and even barking – but again, in most situations a healthy, happy sugar glider itself won’t make an extraordinary amount of noise.

Having said that, what they will do is make noises with anything you put in their cage. Now we also talk about this more on another video about toys, but most of the sounds that you’ll hear coming from a sugar glider’s cage at night are usually coming from their toys. Therefore, since sugar gliders do like to stay up all night and play, the best thing is just to take any bells or noisy parts off their toys when you first get them. Also, it’s important to make sure that the exercise wheel you get is very quiet. Cheap exercise wheels can make a lot of noise, so be sure to get a good one. ☺

The last thing to consider when picking a cage location is the social nature of the animal itself. As we talk about on a lot of other videos, sugar gliders are extremely social creatures, and they like to be right in the middle of all the action. Therefore, most people keep their glider cage in their living room – or wherever the family tends to congregate the most. In my home, our glider cage is right in the main living area – so that way we end up spending a lot of time together. By the way, another benefit of putting their cage in a high-traffic area is simply that it’s entertaining. Sugar gliders are incredibly intelligent, playful little acrobats, and no matter how much we watch them, it never gets

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old seeing how creative they can be while they are jumping around and playing tricks on each other. 😊

Well, that's about it for the basics of cages and cage setup. We also talk more about other important cage considerations in the videos on bonding, toys and diet, so you might want to check them out as well. 😊

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