

## Considerations Before Breeding Degus

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Spring has arrived, and it's about the time of year when many types of animals start to nest and nurse their babies. Baby degu are particularly cute, they are born with a velvety fur coat and can open their eyes and walk about straight away- all be it a little shakily! Degu mums give birth to an average of 6 little pups in a litter, although it can be as few as one pup, or as much as 12! Considering that mother degus only have 8 teats this can be quite a challenge for them! Wild degus nest together in groups, and usually all the pregnant females give birth about the same time. This creates a big group of babies that the mothers take turns to care for, and even the father helps out with cleaning and warming the babies- very respectable. It takes 90 days, that's 3 months, for a pup to grow inside mum before they are born, which is a long time for any rodent. This is because degu pups are born quite advanced in terms of development, unlike rat or mouse pups. Degu pups will suckle from mum for about 6 weeks, until changes in their stomachs mean they can fully digest solid foods, and they no longer need to rely on mum's milk to keep them going (this is called 'weaning'). Degu pups that are weaned are called juveniles, and juvenile degus continue to grow and develop until they are about one year old, when they become fully adult.



Although you might be taken in by the cuteness of a baby degu (let's face it, who wouldn't be?), don't be tempted to just jump straight in and have a go at breeding degus for yourself. Breeding degus is actually a **lot** of hard work, and there are many unexpected things that can go wrong! Check out the following surprises:

- Did you know that if you don't remove the male degu from the mother *as soon* as she has given birth, he can mate with her again and cause a second pregnancy? The last thing mum needs is to put extra energy into forming a second litter while she's still caring for her first! This can be really dangerous for her health.
- Did you know that pregnant degus sometimes get into trouble during labour and need an emergency trip to the vet for a c-

section? This is really expensive!

- Did you know that you need to separate *all* the males from *all* the females as soon as they are weaned? If you leave this even a day later than 6 weeks old, you risk pregnancies in all the female pups- and that's an awful lot of degus (not to mention being very dangerous for pups so young to be pregnant). This means twice the number of cages!
- Did you know that you need to be really careful not to breed from degus with genetic problems such as teeth trouble, diabetes or cataracts?
- Did you know that there are a million and one other things that can go wrong when breeding- for example we have a degu named Hopper who got into trouble when he was a tiny pup and had to have his leg amputated?

As a general rule, you should only think about breeding degus if you've got at least a couple of years' experience owning degus, and then only if you've done a lot of reading about everything involved, including the bad bits. And only if you're really, really sure that you can find loving, forever homes for all of the pups- after all, you're responsible for bringing them into the world.

Have a happy Easter!

Find out more about degus by visiting Degutopia's website:

<http://www.degutopia.co.uk>



~Dedicated to the health and well-being of degus everywhere~