

THE MULTIPLE PIG FAMILY : ISSUES & ANSWERS

(from.Page.78.of.Nancy.Shepherd's.Potbellied.Pig.Parenting.Book)

I discontinued raising potbellied pigs in 2013. I now only have two of my beautiful breeding females ages, 17 and 18, **Suzy Q.** and **Vibeke**. They both have special needs. I also have three rescue pigs (**Beulah**, **Bruno** and **Myrtle**) who needed a safe refuge due to their various untenable situations (pictures below).

My current pigs



Vibeke, 18 yrs old (front) & Suzy Q, 17 years old,
They are sisters from the same breeding pair, one year apart



Beulah



Myrtle (left), & Bruno (right)

(Please Note: the following article was written many years ago)

At the time of writing below, I had 22 permanent potbellied pig residents at my 200-acre farm in mid-Missouri.

I find pigs so fascinating to study. I have been observing, both commercial (since 1975) and potbelly (since 1989). I would like to offer you my impressions, gleaned from the extensive time I've shared my life with pigs about the multiple pig family.

Pigs are herd animals so for that very reason alone one can extrapolate that pigs living together is the most natural and thus, the most satisfying situation. My pigs live in several "herd" settings, from pairs to groups up to nine in number. I often house a barrow or spayed female with a boar. This allows the boar companionship without the possibility of breeding his housemate. My pens are various in size and configuration ranging from 32 feet by 20 feet for the smallest pen with 32 feet by 40 feet being the norm. My favorite pig area is a picturesque, wooded site that is triangular in shape with lots of shade trees and plenty of roaming room for my largest group of nine who are different aged, altered animals. In all these groups, there is a definite pecking order.

With the exception of my boars, pigs are afforded a ranging time on the property at large (out of their respective pens) when the weather permits. While each group of pigs lives harmoniously, when mixed for their "yard time" experience, some altercations may occur. But since the space is so vast, the dispute usually breaks up pretty quickly with a minimum of damage. This time together in the yard is instrumental in allowing the pigs to have exposure to other pig residents. This provides for socialization experience. (I have covered extensively in my article "Creating Compatible Companions" the proper way to introduce two animals who you want to cohabitate. This yard time is less intense with the outcome simply social and not for a permanent living situation. Just the casual passing in the common yard and sharing of common space is valuable experience).

I spend time with all my pigs on an individual basis, be they yard or house pigs. I see each yard pig twice a day at feeding time. These pigs know their names because I talk to them constantly. Each one receives a special rub and quality time even if only for a short time. Of course, the house pigs get a little more attention by virtue of their location. It has **not** been my experience that my pigs are so bonded to each other in their respective herds that they do not value or ignore me as their pigstress. I find them to be well-adjusted with their herd, yet they seek me out for that quality time that we share. I'm certain that my pigs cherish our special time together.

All my experience comes to you as a breeder who has many pigs to manage. While they are all treated well, house pets they all are not. However, all my pigs, with the exception of the boars, have spent their early post-weaning weeks in the house. I venture to say that any of these past house pigs would gladly return to a pet house pig role with little adjustment.

In order to have a non-biased discussion regarding the idea of having more than one pig as a family pet, I turn to my clients and friends who have done just that. Here are some of their thoughts on the subject.

*****By Louise Baldwin, Texas*****

I have five potbellied pigs that I adopted at different times. They are in and out of the house, like our dogs. Pigs will squabble. They are extremely hierarchical, and will periodically test to see if their position can change. These squabbles are generally fairly minor in the normal course of their lives. Mine went through some pretty ugly times every time I added one. If you get two from the same litter, I would think you would not have to go through the really horrible fighting.

My pigs do not go after bystanders, although Charlotte may get pushy with folks who come into our home. If the company is distressed, I do not allow Charlotte in when they are here. Most of our friends know to call her bluff, though. None of my other pigs ever do this. In fact, they usually leave the room if we have folks over.

All five of my pigs have very different personalities, much like kids. Charlotte is my first, and the most bonded to me and my husband. She is always at our side and only wants to go outside to potty. I can hug and kiss her to my heart's content.

Charlie is my beautiful boy. He prefers to be outside most of the time, though he does like to come in some in the evening. He loves to be scratched and rubbed, though he will jump up if he feels like he is being (or might be) confined. He is VERY whiney, will loudly complain if he doesn't get what he wants (like his meals on time). Charlotte is terrified of Charlie since he grew his tusks. He used to be afraid of her before that.

Sweet.Pea is extremely shy. She is very bonded to Charlie and is almost always at his side. We have to approach Sweetie very slowly and carefully, or she will shy away. She does not tolerate being around other people at all. We try to get her to come inside for a little attention each evening, but she is very slow and nervous about coming in.

Glory is my “badass”. She will not start fights, but she is not taking guff off of anyone. She likes to get attention but wants to be the instigator. She seems to pull away if it gets too lovey. She will sleep and hang out with any of the other pigs.

Donna Jean is our baby, the one we call our “little princess”. She is very cuddly with us, but does not get along with the other pigs. She is not inside as much as Charlotte, but much more than the other pigs.

All of this is to say each of these animals is an individual with his/her own personality. We love all of our pigs and feel that five is just the right number — for now.

*****By Alice Butler, Texas*****

Two pigs are better than one for a host of reasons. I do think that with children involved two would be a better option than one. There are people who have had problems with children and pigs. I believe that the children came after the pig was grown and the pig was defending its family, as he saw it. With two pigs the chances of that aggression rearing its head is almost totally reduced. My sister has a seven-month-old baby and he loves the pigs to death. My sister and I have a brother/sister pig pair, Boggie and Garbo.

Two pigs in my opinion are better than one in any case. If you get them at the same time, then you will avoid fighting to establish dominance. The pair will still want and need your love and attention. They will do their “piggy” things with each other and won’t try to treat you as if you are a pig.

*****By Catherine Spangler, Illinois*****

The boys are doing GREAT!!! Toby and Tito come when called, sit, circle and lay on command. They aren’t having any problems going down or coming up the ramp to their yard. In fact, they mostly do all of their business outside and just play and tear up the paper in their litter box. Anyway, the litter box will be a thing of the past soon.

Their personalities are so different. Toby is coming out of his shell. His most favorite thing in the whole world to do is ROOT. He roots in the grass, he roots in blankets, he roots on Tito, he roots on ME! It’s really funny. Toby falls down on his side when you barely touch him and lays there indefinitely as long as someone is touching him.

Tito is much friskier. He is the first to go up and down the ramp. He heads up all investigations. Tito is into ramming Toby and aggravating him. He wears the harness well and lets us lead him a little better than Toby. He is very talkative and gets really miffed easily. We are so glad we made the decision to adopt our brother piglets - they are such pals.

*****By John Vincent, Colorado*****

I have eight pigs who live in the house and each pig has a best friend. Each pig came into the house one at a time, and after the initial scuffles, they became friends with the established pigs. Bacon was first into the house, and when Porkchop came to live with us, Bacon was furious. It seemed as if Bacon wanted to kill Porkchop. But after a few days, the scuffles ended, and the friendship began. Now Bacon and Porkchop are very good friends; they play together, and they sleep together. Bacon’s friendship with Porkchop never affected his relationship with me - Bacon is still **my** friend. It became obvious that even though Bacon and I were friends, and even though we lived with other animals (dogs and cats), Bacon was especially happy to have a pig friend. This was confirmed as we got more pigs and these pigs would pair up: Hambone with Zoro, Hoover with Top Hog, and Hamlet with Hamburger. Pigs like pigs and I think it’s best to have two of each type of animal just like in nature.

The hard part to believe is that, in the long run, a second pig takes up no more space and no more work than one. It’s no harder to take two scoops of food, or cut one carrot into two pieces, or set two bowls on the floor instead of one. Two pigs keep each other company and occupied. With a second pig, they become more interested in training, are more stable and well-adjusted. Most importantly, they get more time to act like pigs.