

House Rabbit Connection, Inc.
a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) corporation

House Rabbit Connection's Rabbit Care Guide



An Overview of Indoor Rabbit Care

- Diet and health
- Cage set up
- Litter box training
- Bonding with another rabbit
- And much more!



Who Are We?

The House Rabbit Connection, Inc. (HRC), incorporated in Massachusetts in 1997, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It was founded by a committed group of individuals dedicated to the plight of abandoned rabbits. The organization now has over 240 members in 14 states. The mission of HRC includes three primary goals:



- (1) To take in adoptable, abandoned rabbits, primarily from an MSPCA shelter, provide temporary foster care, get them spayed and neutered, and find permanent, quality indoor homes for them.
- (2) To educate the public and assist humane societies and shelters in teaching rabbit care to the public.
- (3) To reduce, primarily by public education, the number of rabbits discarded at shelters or turned loose when no longer wanted.

HRC is made up entirely of volunteers—individuals who dedicate time, money, and energy to move HRC toward its goals. These individuals share a love of rabbits and the belief that rabbits should not be relegated to hutches in the backyard. Instead, rabbits should be inside the home, free to explore rabbit-proofed rooms, living in roomy cages (or cage free), playing with toys, and interacting with all members of the household (human and non-human).

HRC educates the public and its members through:

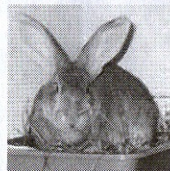
- Frequent educational events at local pet supply stores and animal-related events
- Semiannual Rabbit Fests at the MSPCA in Springfield
- Our quarterly newsletter, *In Pursuit of Hoppiness*
- School outreach
- Distribution of rabbit care information packets
- Our Web site (www.hopline.com), HopLine (413-525-9222) and email (info@hopline.com)

The HopLine phone and email service are contacted approximately 350 times per year. Callers and e-mailers are from more than 42 states.

The most rewarding results of HRC efforts relate to the hundreds of abandoned (and often neglected) rabbits that have been rescued and placed in permanent, loving homes since HRC's inception. Adoptable rabbits are taken from shelters, examined by one of the rabbit-savvy vets who work regularly with HRC, spayed/neutered if necessary, placed in a loving foster home where they are socialized, litter-trained, and prepared for a loving, permanent, indoor adoptive home. By adopting a rescued rabbit, individuals are giving a bunny a new "leap on life."

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PO Box 83
Springfield, MA 01101
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We have taken care in the preparation of this guide, but the information it contains is not intended as a substitute for the expertise and judgment of a qualified veterinary professional. You should consult your veterinarian about all health-care issues.

Why a Rabbit?

People who share their homes with rabbits quickly discover the value and potential of these charming animals as dear friends and cherished companions.

There are many reasons why you might consider sharing your home with a rabbit. First, rabbits are extremely intelligent. They quickly catch onto the household routines and interact well with humans, dogs, cats, guinea pigs and birds. They respond to their names and to other human language. Once a rabbit settles into



Chip

his/her new home, he/she will come running for a pet, a kiss or a treat. Most rabbits savor being stroked, brushed and talked to. Some rabbits even enjoy being held. Each rabbit is a unique individual.



Baxter

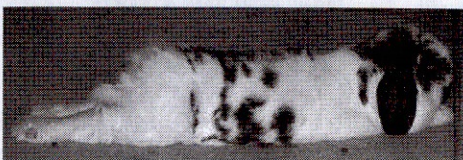
Rabbits are clean and rarely, if ever, need bathing. They groom themselves thoroughly and constantly, instinctively wanting to keep themselves immaculate and scent-free. Though even litter box-trained rabbits may drop a pellet here or there on occasion, rabbit poop does not have an offensive smell, and it sweeps up easily. Wood stove pellets in the litter box absorb the smell of a rabbit's urine. Many rabbits even enjoy the privilege of sleeping in the beds of their humans due to their extreme cleanliness!

Rabbits are clean and rarely, if ever, need bathing. They groom themselves thoroughly and constantly, instinctively wanting to keep themselves immaculate and scent-free. Though even litter box-trained



Cannoli and Strudel

Finally, rabbits are entertaining, keeping their humans amused with bunny dances (also known as binkies), sprints through rooms and hallways, purposeful "flops" onto the floor for a nap or to signal happiness, and long, luxurious stretches and yawns upon awakening. Rabbits enjoy playing with toys that they can toss, roll and flip, and they immerse themselves in time-consuming projects such as carving doors and windows into cardboard boxes. Bonded pairs of rabbits interact constantly with each other as they cuddle side by side or indulge in games of chase and tag.



Oliver

If you have a relatively quiet home with no small children, perhaps you might investigate why so many have chosen to adopt shelter rabbits as companions. Call the House Rabbit Connection today if you'd like to discuss whether a house rabbit might be the right companion for you!

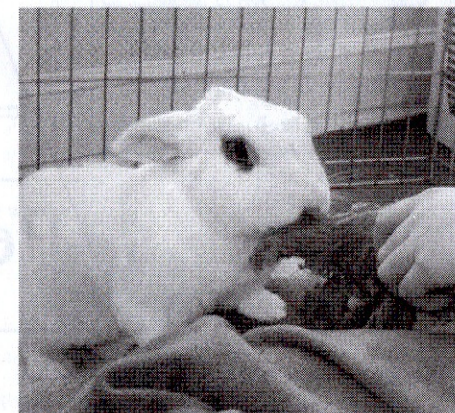
Vegetable and Fruit Lists

Vegetables— at least three per day

- Alfalfa, radish & clover sprouts
- Basil
- * Beet greens (tops)
- Bok choy
- * Broccoli (mostly leaves/stem)
- Brussels sprouts
- * Carrot & carrot tops
- Celery
- Chard
- Cilantro
- Clover (no pesticides)
- * Collard greens
- * Dandelion greens & flowers (no pesticides)
- * Endive
- Escarole
- Green pepper
- ! * Kale
- Mint
- * Mustard greens
- * Parsley
- * Pea pods (the flat edible kind)
- Peppermint leaves
- Radicchio
- Radish tops
- Raspberry leaves
- * Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light colored leaf)
- ! * Spinach
- Turnip greens (tops only)
- * Watercress
- Wheat grass

Fruits/Treats

- Small amounts totaling only 1-2 level tablespoons per 4 pounds of body weight (none if dieting):
- Apples
- Bananas
- Blueberries
- Melons
- Papayas
- Peaches
- Pears
- Pineapples
- Plums
- Raisins
- Raspberries
- Strawberries
- Sweet potato



Rooster enjoying his daily veggies

Never

The following should not be fed because of high starch and fat content. Do not feed human snacks to rabbits!!

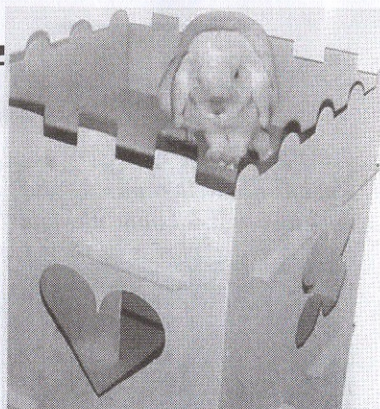
- Grains
- Legumes
- Nuts
- Breakfast Cereals

!Use sparingly. High in either oxalates or goitrogens and may be toxic in accumulated quantities over a period of time.

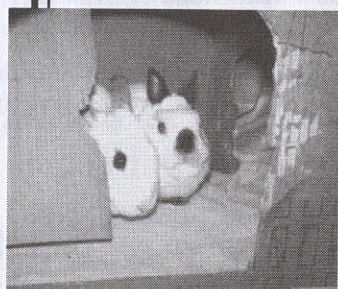
**Indicates Vitamin A— feed at least one per day.*

Hide'n Seek'n Dig'n Climb

- For hiding
 - Paper bags
 - Cardboard boxes
 - QUIK-TUBES (cardboard tubes for concrete pouring)
 - Kitty condos
- For digging
 - Old phone books
 - Shredded newspaper
- For climbing and hopping over
 - Stools
 - Ramps



A castle for a king (Toby)

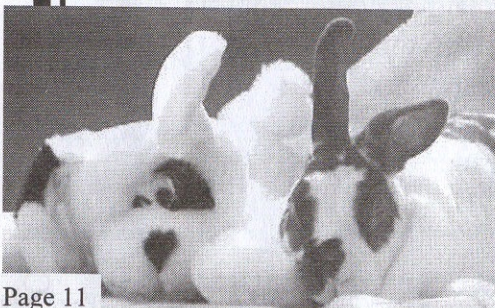


Important: Make sure your rabbit doesn't EAT these!

Old corrugated boxes make great places to hide and chew

- Stuffed toy
- Pillow
- Hand towel (also for scrunching)

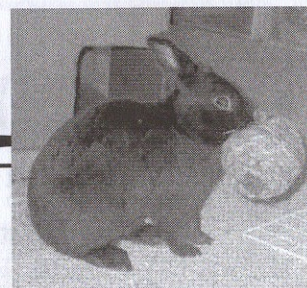
Kai



Important: Make sure your rabbit doesn't EAT these!

Grooming

Shadow with a wicker ball



- Untreated willow baskets (instructions below for cleaning baskets made outside the U.S.)
- Grass mats
- Untreated wood (no varnish, stain, paint, etc.)
- Fruit tree twigs that have been aged for two weeks. Stay away from: cherry, peach, apricot, plum and redwood, which are all poisonous (make sure trees have not been sprayed with pesticides).
- Pine cones (look on page 13 for prep)

Important: Be sure to read the pages referenced above to make these toys safe for your rabbit to chew.

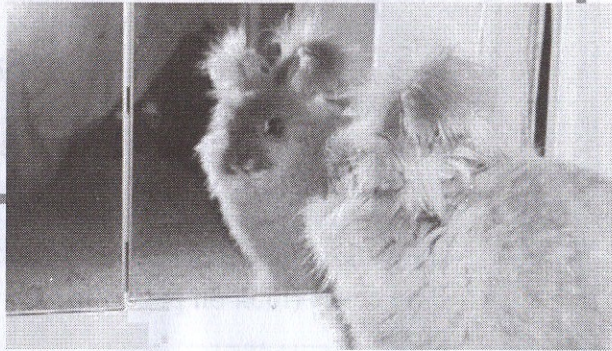
Making Baskets Safe

- Soak basket overnight in plain cold water.
- Air dry completely before use.

Chewings

Making Pine Cones Safe

- **Solar power**— Wait for a 4-5 day sunny stretch and just lay them out in the sun until the flaps open.
- **Oven power**— Put them on a cookie sheet in the oven on low for 2-3 hours, but keep an eye on them!



Where to Find Toys

- **Tag (garage) sales**— Old baby toys are a wonderful and cheap option.
- **Consignment shops**— Many items at a discounted price
- **Online options**— Busy Bunny, Bunny Bytes, Bunny Bunch Boutique
- **Pet section**— In discount stores



Lulu after a hard day of playing

Rabbits & Humans

Bringing a rabbit into your home allows for a friendship to develop as you become intrigued by his/her antics and your rabbit learns about you. Though they are thought to be social naturally, rabbits have been domesticated and bred to a point where some of these “natural” inclinations may be a little underdeveloped. Always be aware that from a rabbit’s perspective, humans can seem very large, noisy, and unpredictable!



Veronica

Getting to Know You

While your rabbit is getting used to you:

- Try to keep things at eye level—get on the floor with your rabbit!
- Use a soft voice. Keep any other noises soft, too.
- Move slowly and predictably.
- Build routine into his/her life with your feedings, cleaning and other routines. Do the same thing at the same time each day.



Rusty

Now that I Trust You

Handle your rabbits frequently so you can become well acquainted with each other. Pet and stroke their head, ears, and body. Many rabbits will show their pleasure by chattering their teeth as you pet them! Most rabbits are not "lap bunnies." They prefer to sit next to you while you pet them. While petting your rabbits:

- Check their ears.
- Feel their skin.
- Look at their teeth.
- Check their hindquarters.

In this way, you will not only build your relationship but also become aware if something has changed, often a sign of illness or injury.

Adults can find that rabbits are extremely interactive, have their own distinct personalities, and are able to communicate their needs and wants to anyone willing to learn. Stroking a rabbit is generally the way we want to express connection and most rabbits can learn to enjoy this. They seem to prefer strokes:

- To the top of the head
- Around the eyes
- On top of the nose
- Down the back

These are places where rabbits tend to groom each other. Rabbits appear to be tense and uncomfortable when people attempt to pet them under their chins.

Domino



In Order to Maintain that Trust

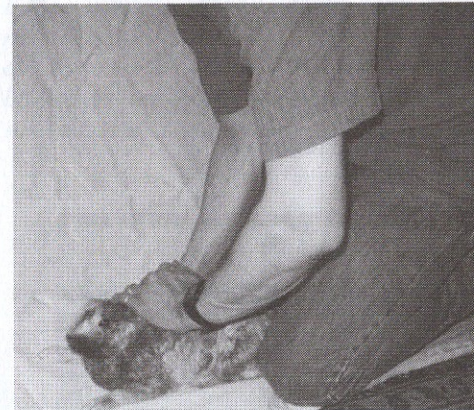
Rabbits know the comfort of the ground beneath their paws and when they are lifted or carried they may kick and struggle because they do not feel safe. Being carried is NOT something that rabbits get comfortable with over time, and this means that rabbits shouldn't be carried around like other pets. However, it makes sense to get your rabbit used to some lifting and carrying, for when it's absolutely necessary. Follow the directions on the next pages.

Bandit



Lifting Properly

Step One



Gently restrain your rabbit. Sometimes it helps to cover the eyes if you have an extremely squirmy rabbit.

Lucinda

In order to do this, try to make the rabbit feel supported, using both hands and NEVER carry your rabbit by their ears or scruff of the neck. Though the ears are sometimes big, they can't safely support the weight of the rabbit.

Step Two



Support your rabbit under his/her chest and hind quarters.

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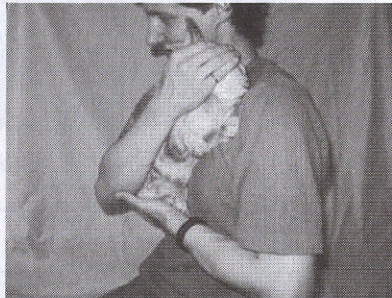
Step Three



Gently lift and bring bunny in close to body and hug. Always support rear quarters!



For really squirmy rabbits, covering the eyes may help keep them calm.



**Never drop a rabbit!
If your rabbit continues to struggle, maneuver yourself back down to the floor and release.**

Rabbits & Children

There are many things to consider in the interactions between children and rabbits. Before bringing a rabbit into the home, make sure that a rabbit can fit into the environment you will provide. A rabbit should never be used as an opportunity to teach children responsibility. This almost always fails with the parent surrendering the rabbit to a shelter. The only lesson there is, "If I decided I don't want to take care of someone, they are disposable." This is not the intended message.

Before Making the Decision



A rabbit may benefit from this kind of companionship in a home where children are:

- Easy-going
- Gentle
- Cooperative



Rusty



Takoda

A rabbit will be very stressed in a home where children are:

- Generally loud
- Extremely active
- Aggressive
- Very strong-willed and/or frequently challenge rules

Continued on next page

Things to Consider Breed

A larger rabbit is very often a good choice for children not familiar with rabbits as they are somewhat less fragile, less likely to be “mistakenly” picked up and often more mellow in personality.

Netherland Dwarf	2 1/2 lbs.	Mini Lop	6 1/2 lbs.
Jersey Wooly	3 1/2 lbs.	Rex	9 lbs.
Holland Lop	4 lbs.	Palomino	10 lbs.
Mini Rex	4 1/2 lbs.	Satin	11 lbs.
Dutch	5 1/2 lbs.	New Zealand	11 lbs.
Havana	5 1/2 lbs.	French Lop	12 lbs.
Florida White	6 lbs.	Flemish Giant	13+ lbs.

Age

Rabbits are rarely a good choice as companion animals for children under seven years old. Children older than that should have a compatible personality style (as described on page 18), and should show an ability to maintain a level of responsibility beyond their needs and wants.

Infant to Toddler

- Provide supervised visits.
- Teach children gentle petting on the forehead.
- Teach children to avoid poking nose, eyes, and under chin.
- NEVER pick up the rabbit (an injury could occur otherwise).
- Do not teach a child to feed the rabbit since a toddler will not know the difference between good food and bad.



Wyatt

Toddler to Ten Years

- Provide mostly supervised visits (the younger the child, more supervision will be required).
- Teach children gentle petting on the forehead.
- Teach children to avoid poking nose, eyes, and under chin.
- Teach to respect a rabbit’s personal space: no chasing or going into the cage where the rabbit may choose to go to “get away.”
- NEVER pick up rabbit (an injury could occur otherwise).
- Help with daily feeding.

Ten Years to Teenager

- Allow unsupervised visits.
- Pick up rabbit with adult supervision and teach the appropriate method.
- Help with daily feeding (an adult in the home should always supervise).
- Help with cleaning (again, adult supervision).

Allergies

The allergy status of ALL household members should be checked before bringing a rabbit into the home. Rabbit hair will become part of your household environment and is often given as a reason for abandoning rabbits in shelters. Allergies to hay should also be considered since hay will also be part of the environment.



Lily

Rabbits & Rabbits

Rabbits are gregarious animals that thrive on social interaction with humans and other species. In most cases, your rabbit would also enjoy the companionship of his/her same species. Introducing one rabbit to the companionship of another rabbit is known as bonding. This process requires commitment, time, and, most of all, patience, for the rabbits will determine their own timetable for becoming lifelong companions.



Ways to increase the success of your bond

Make sure that both rabbits have been spayed or neutered.

- Altering decreases aggressiveness.
- Altering prevents hormones from getting in the way (i.e., the reproductive urges).

Consider personality type— Some rabbits have very dominant personalities while other rabbits tend to be more submissive. It is very difficult to bond two rabbits with highly dominant personalities.

Consider gender— Male-female pairs are generally the easiest to bond; same sex pairs are also possible, but may require more effort.

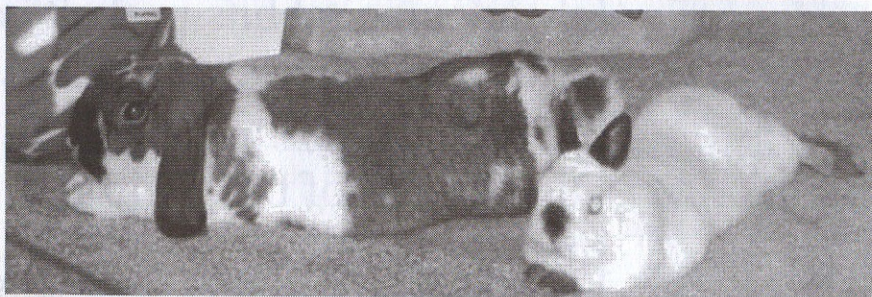
Consider age— Older rabbits tend to be far less energetic than adolescent rabbits.

Use neutral territory— This will eliminate territorial behavior during bonding dates.

Be patient— Do not try to rush the bonding process. Your rabbits' body language will guide you through the steps.

Be consistent.

- Start with 20 minutes per day.
- Add 5 minutes each day.
- Skipping a day will bring you back to the beginning.
- Once bonded never separate a pair even when going to the vet.

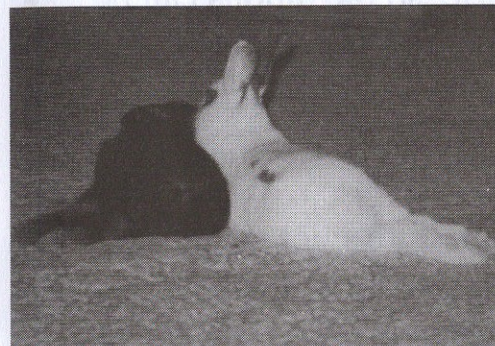


Bonded rabbits will often lie side by side

Step One: The First Date

Work with a rabbit rescue group. Their volunteers often share their homes with foster rabbits and know each rabbit's distinct personality, and many are skilled at reading bunny body language during introductions. A rabbit rescue group can narrow a 'herd' of possible choices down to a few likely candidates.

Emily and Wyatt



Positive signs to watch for include:

- Sniffing and snuggling (indicates the possibility of a love at first sight bond)
- One rabbit chasing and/or attempting to mount, and the

other rabbit running away (indicates a dominant/submissive match, which is highly workable though the bonding process will need heavy supervision)

- Both rabbits pretending to have no interest in each other (indicates a personality 'match' and the likelihood of an easy bond)

Warning signs of a difficult or impossible bond:

- Both rabbits attacking each other—choose another bonding candidate!
- One rabbit attempts to attack the other—a bond might be possible but plan on a lengthy and highly supervised bonding process.

Harry and Hermione



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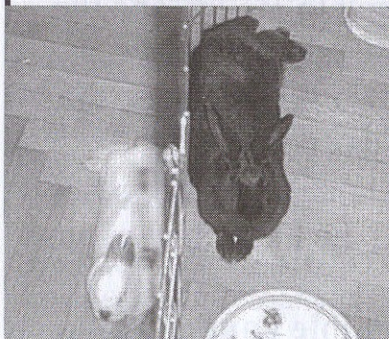
Step Two: Getting Used to Each Other's Presence

This is a very important step in the bonding process. It allows the rabbits to get to know each other through indirect contact.

- Set up each rabbit's 'home base' so the rabbits can be near each other with the wall of the crate, screen, or animal gate in between.
- Watch for positive signs:
 - Grooming
 - Lying side by side on opposite sides of the barrier
- This stage of the bonding process can be as short as a few days or as lengthy as several months.

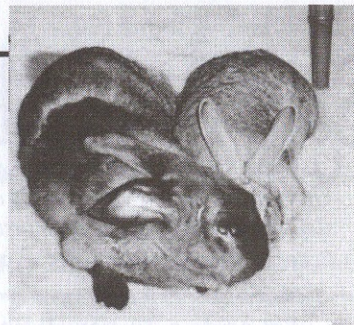
- Do not move on to 'Step Three: Supervised Visits' until you see the rabbits exhibiting the above positive behaviors!

Smudge and Blackberry are showing signs that a bond is imminent



Step Three: Supervised Visits

Neutral territory, where neither rabbit 'owns' the space, will reduce the sense of territorialism that may result in aggressive behaviors. Use a hallway or other area that is 'new' to both rabbits. Use a pen or close off bedroom doorways to make sure both rabbits stay close enough so that you can quickly intervene if necessary.



Big Reggie and Daisy

Be as consistent as possible:

- Hold daily supervised visits.
- Begin with short dates of approximately 5 minutes.
- Increase the length of dates by 5 to 10 minutes daily.
- Always try to end a visit **BEFORE** a rabbit is nipped by the other, as rabbits can hold a grudge!

Expect to see:

- Some mounting and/or chasing behaviors.
- Do not be alarmed if a little bit of fur flies, as the rabbit mounting the other may latch on by grabbing the scruff of the other rabbit with his/her teeth.
- Be vigilant to ensure that no actual fighting occurs!

Prepare to intervene quickly if necessary:

- Wear oven mitts or gardening gloves to protect your hands if you need to reach in between two excited rabbits.
- Separate your rabbits if they face off and begin biting (again, try to avoid this in the first place), begin circling each other with tails up, or if the passive rabbit cannot get away and becomes trapped.

Encourage grooming:

- If your supervised visits are lasting 30 to 40 minutes without grooming, encourage this behavior by putting a dab of banana or jarred baby food (such as peaches, pears, or applesauce) on the bridge of each rabbit's nose.
- You are ready to move on to Step Four once your rabbits begin grooming and snuggling during supervised visits.

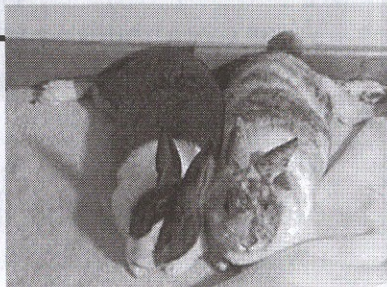
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Step Four: Sharing Living Quarters

Your patience and vigilance is about to pay off. Your rabbits are almost bonded! The final step of the process requires just a little more of your time and supervision, though it is necessary to ensure that your bunnies accept their shared living arrangements.

- Set aside a 24-hour time period where you can work on projects, nap, or engage in some activity that allows you to remain close to your rabbits' new home base.
- Put the rabbits into the confined area you selected, whether an appropriately-sized dog crate, exercise pen, or even a specially-chosen room of the house. (Note: If you chose a male bonding companion for your female, we do not recommend choosing her original housing as the home base for the new couple due to the lingering sense of territoriality in females.)
- Remain in close range in case you need to intervene.
- Once your rabbits have spent a peaceful 24 hours together sharing space and enjoying each other's company, your work is done.
- Once bonded, never separate a pair even when going to a vet.
- Congratulations on the role you played in providing your rabbit with a lifelong companion!

Gabe and Izzy



Thoughts on Forced Bonding

Over the years we have learned that forced bonding techniques (such as taking rabbits on car rides, placing them together on washing machines during a spin cycle, or inventing other stressful situations that force two rabbits to come together in search of solace) are not as effective as gradual bonding. Forced bonds are quick to deteriorate when the dynamics of the pair's relationship changes, such as through the illness of the more dominant rabbit or when another animal or family member is added to the household. We believe that the best way to bond rabbits is to provide an appropriate environment, supervision, consistency, and most of all—patience—and allow the bond to occur naturally. Using the steps outlined in this section, most rabbit pairs will bond themselves over time. Some rabbit pairs will take longer if they need to overcome past experiences of insult or injury, but these long-term bonding processes are less common. Once again, we believe our role in the bonding process is one of patience, supervision, and respect for the individual personality of each rabbit involved.

Rabbits & Dogs &/or Cats

Although rabbits are identified as prey animals, they often don't act it around the dogs and cats in many of our homes. A lot of people who are devoted to their rabbits are just as devoted to other species as well, and we find that rabbits can often get along quite well with some preparation, care and attention. There are many special considerations that need to be attended to when mixing species.

Consider the temperament of the dog or cat.

- Easy-going
- Gentle
- No hunter instincts

Consider the rabbit.

- Larger breeds tend to be less prey-like.
- Noise-sensitive rabbits are more likely to be frightened by a dog.

Introducing Dogs

You must be very mindful of the power of your dog; even when merely playing he/she can cause serious injury to the more fragile structure of the rabbit. Dogs naturally chase and they generally weigh a lot more than rabbits. Pouncing on the rabbit at the end of a chase could result in an injury or worse. You need to teach your dog a command that will get him/her to move away from the rabbit and come to you. This is a safety precaution for all concerned.



Huckleberry and Mocha

First contact:

- Introductions should always be gradual.
- The animals view each other without physical contact (cage, screen, animal gate).
- Excluding smell and sound could also make for a safer and calmer beginning.

Continued on next page

Supervised Contact

- Leash or pen the dog.
- Allow for a safe place for your rabbit to go to if he/she needs to escape.

Discontinue contact if:

- Your rabbit is thumping in fear.
- Your dog is over-excited.
- An injury has occurred.



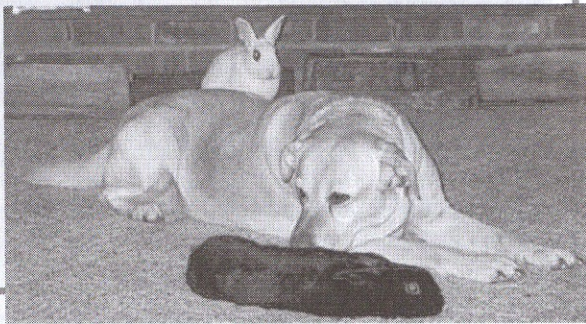
Lucy and Tristan

Extended Contact

Precautions to consider for the long haul:

- Keep water and food products inaccessible between dog and rabbit.
- The food products for one are not intended for the other and can cause digestive problems that can cause illness.
- Keep waste away from each other.
- Never allow your dog to chase your rabbit—this can lead to serious injury or death.

Wyatt, Montana, and Emily



Introducing Cats

Cats are even more popular than dogs in American households and many are now sharing their homes with rabbits of all breeds. Bringing cats and rabbits together safely will require special attention. Again, you must remember that cats are predators (as are dogs) so it may be unwise to leave them loose and unattended with your rabbit.

However, most people with both rabbits and cats in their home have found they either get along or the rabbits rule the roost!



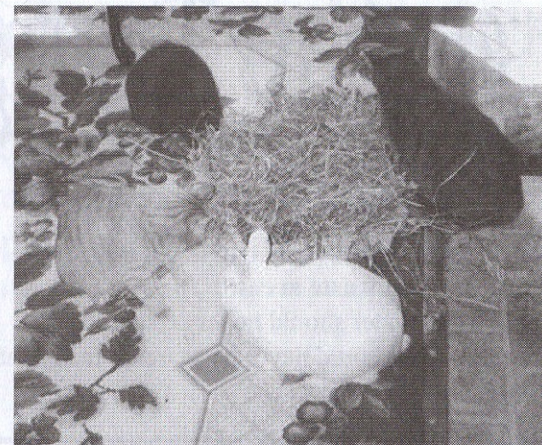
Mutt and Baxter

The Nose Knows

As cats are oriented strongly by scent, it is suggested that you introduce your rabbit to your cat first by way of scent.

- Try rubbing a clean cloth under your rabbit's chin, the site of a scent gland; then place this near your cat.
- Let him/her sniff out the new scent; you can even rub the cloth on your cat's back and flanks.
- This is intended to transfer the scent to the cat, which should help him/her accept the rabbit more easily.

Nicky, Baxter, Heather, and Jackie Chan



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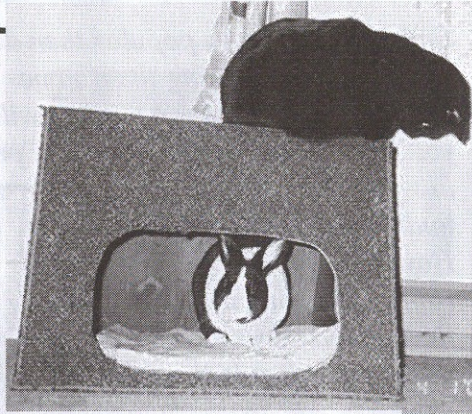
First Visual Contact

Allow each animal to get used to the other's presence by sight (cage, screen, animal gate).

- As cats generally are less responsive to commands than dogs, you will need to physically manage the space and safety between the two.
- Holding the rabbit while you let the cat explore will generally give you greater control.
- Letting the rabbit down to wander while your cat is also loose should be done with you on the floor as well; this puts you on the same level and allows you to intercede quickly if necessary.

Discontinue contact if:

- The cat is chasing the rabbit.
- Your rabbit is thumping in fear.
- An injury has occurred.



Bandit and Spice

For the Long Haul

Playing

- Discourage chasing.
- Keep cat's nails trimmed to avoid injuries.

Food/water and waste areas

- Food and water should never be shared.
- Litterboxes should never be shared—many cat litters are dangerous to rabbits.

Rabbits & Guinea Pigs

Rabbits and guinea pigs can have a very special bond.

Considerations throughout the lifespan of your rabbit and guinea pig:

- Rabbits and guinea pigs can be safely housed together.
- Rabbits carry disease that, although of little risk to himself/herself, can be fatal to the guinea pig.
- Sharing water, food, and litter boxes is not a problem; however, guinea pigs have additional nutritional needs to those of rabbits.
- Always consult a vet when considering bonding a rabbit and a guinea pig.



Cinnamon and Pancake

Start with Indirect Contact

In these pairings it is more likely that the guinea pig will be dominated and thus more likely to be injured.

Rabbit and guinea pig should be introduced through indirect contact first.

- Cage
- Screen
- Animal Gate

Continued on next page



- Amount: 1 to 2 tablespoons of fruit per 4 pounds of body weight
- Fruits can add to the vitamins and minerals your rabbit gets daily
- Fruits are a better choice for a treat than store-bought "treats"
- Avoid store-bought treats containing:
 - ◊ Dairy (causes bladder sludge)
 - ◊ Sugar (causes gastro-intestinal problems)
 - ◊ Starchy foods (causes gastro-intestinal problems)

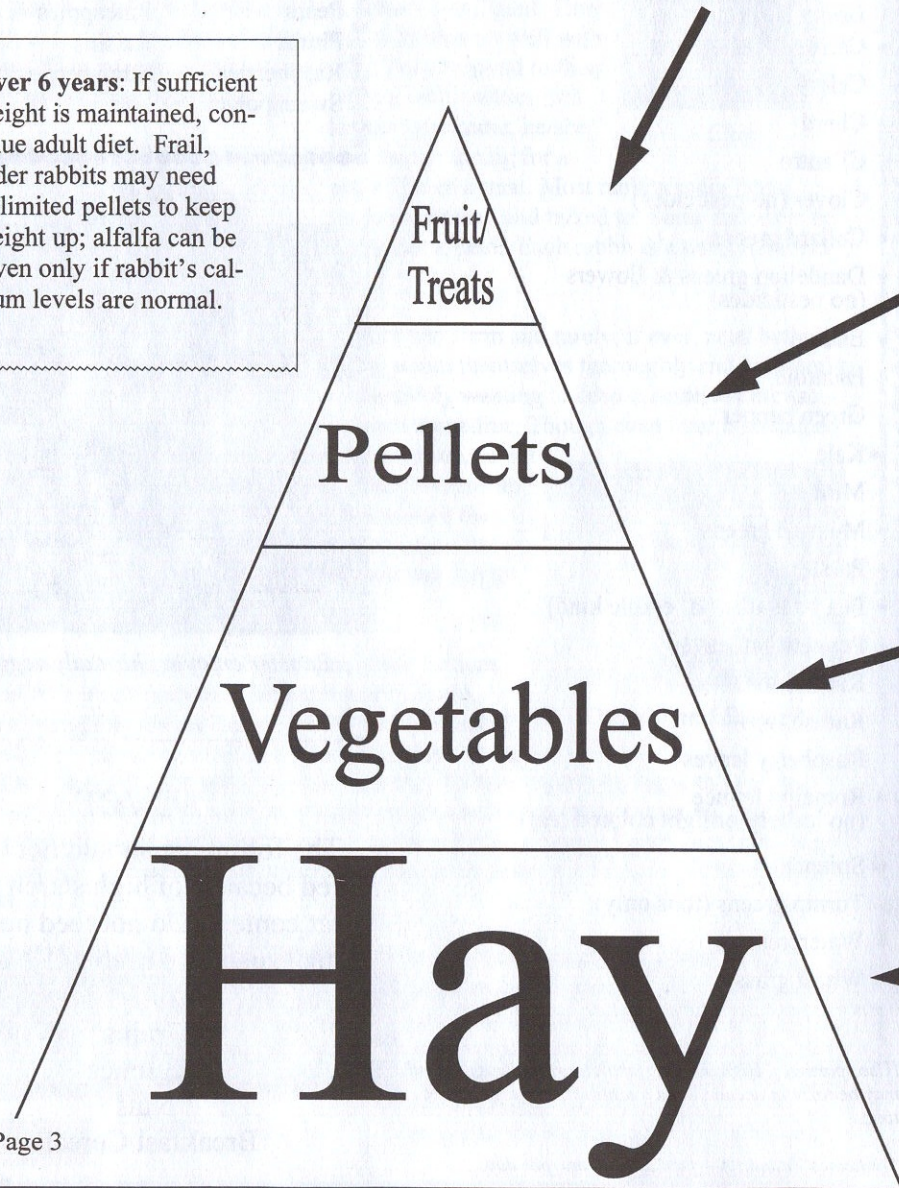
The Adult Rabbit Dietary Pyramid

- Type: Timothy only (alfalfa too high in calcium)
- Amount: Measure according to body weight. See chart on the right for amount to give each day.
- Pellets are not necessary for balanced nutrition, so if withholding pellets, increase vegetables.
- It's processed food – so it should NOT be the primary part of the diet. Avoid "gourmet" pellets with dried fruits, nuts and seeds.
- Look for nutritional content of pellets on the bag:
 - ◊ Fiber: 18% or more
 - ◊ Fat: 2.5% or less
 - ◊ Protein: 16% or less
 - ◊ Calcium: 1% or less

Body weight	Cups per day
Up to 4 lbs	1/8 cup
4 to 8 lbs	1/4 cup
8 to 12 lbs	3/4 cup
> 12 lbs	1 cup

Over 6 years: If sufficient weight is maintained, continue adult diet. Frail, older rabbits may need unlimited pellets to keep weight up; alfalfa can be given only if rabbit's calcium levels are normal.

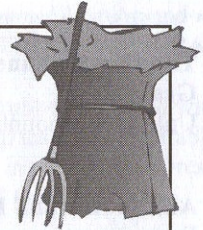
Adult is defined as 1 year or older. For young and adolescent rabbit diet info turn to page 5.



- Amount: 1 cup vegetables per 4 pounds of body weight each day
 - ◊ 6-pound bunny gets 1.5 cups
 - ◊ 2-pound bunny gets one-half cup
- Provides vitamins and minerals
- Variety is key: at least 3 kinds each day
- Leafy greens are best, as well as veggies that require a lot of chewing
- See the chart of appropriate veggies on page 2



- **Amount: Unlimited hay, available all the time**
- Most overlooked, yet **most important** part of the diet
- Provides fiber to keep the digestive system moving
- Use high quality and fresh (the greener the better)
- Good possibilities: timothy, oat, brome, prairie, meadow
- Avoid alfalfa if possible (too high in calcium); use only when nothing else available



This diet is recommended for most adult rabbits, unless otherwise directed by a rabbit-savvy vet.

Signs you're ready to go to the next level:

- Grooming through the gate
- Rabbit and guinea pig lying side by side

Signs you'll need to give it more time:

- Biting through the gate
- Lunging through the gate

Supervised Visits

Always supervise during the beginning stages of contact.

Find neutral territory.

Behaviors to discourage:

- Rabbit mounting guinea pig in his/her attempt to establish dominance
- Rabbit chasing guinea pig

Be patient.

- Bonds can take up to a year.
- Don't move to direct contact until the rabbit and guinea pig are ready.

Be consistent.

- Start with 20 minutes per day.
- Add 5 minutes per day.
- Skipping a day will bring you back to the beginning.
- Once bonded, never separate a pair even when going to the vet.



Marcy and Eddie

Housing

Everyone is happier having a place of one's own, a place to rest when tired, to get food when hungry, to go when quiet moments are desired. So it is with rabbits. Each rabbit or bonded group of rabbits needs a place of their own. Home base is also a place where a rabbit can stay comfortably at times when you are not around or when another pet, who is not bonded to your rabbit, is enjoying the shared area. Having time away from home base is equally important for your rabbit. A rabbit needs an average of 6 to 8 hours per day of out time (outside a cage) to be healthy and happy.



Home base should be as large as possible, especially if you have a large rabbit or if out time needs to be limited

on particular days. Sizes are listed below.

- 24"x24"x18" minimum for small rabbits
- 36"x24"x20" minimum for medium rabbits
- 42"x24"x20" minimum for large rabbits

Continued on next page



Size

Where

Your rabbit's home base should be located in a quiet area of your home where your family spends the most time, so the rabbit isn't isolated. The area should be free from any hazards.

- Fumes from cars
- Other pets (if the other pets and your rabbit aren't bonded)
- Dampness
- Boredom (rabbits kept in a child's room are likely to become bored since children rarely spend 6-8 hours of non-sleeping time in their rooms)



Tristan

Requirements



Solid surface for flooring

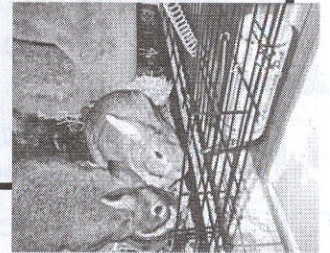
- Wire mesh floors are a health hazard—they cause sore, painful feet. They are also completely unnecessary for a litter-trained rabbit.
- Solid floors wipe clean in just a minute, making the rabbit's home infinitely easier to keep clean.

Wire sides, open to the air—never use aquariums!

- Be sure the home doesn't have unfinished sharp edges or grates that injure feet/toes or cause sores.
- Avoid wire spacing that is large enough to permit your rabbit's head through.

Opens from the front rather than the top, so the rabbit can hop in and out.

- This allows the rabbit to come and go on his/her own terms.
- A cage that opens from the top in addition can be helpful during cleaning.



Isadora and Pennington

Types

Dog crates

Dog crates are a great option for rabbits. They are often less expensive than traditional rabbit cages and have more room and greater height. They also have solid floors.



Dottie

Continued on next page

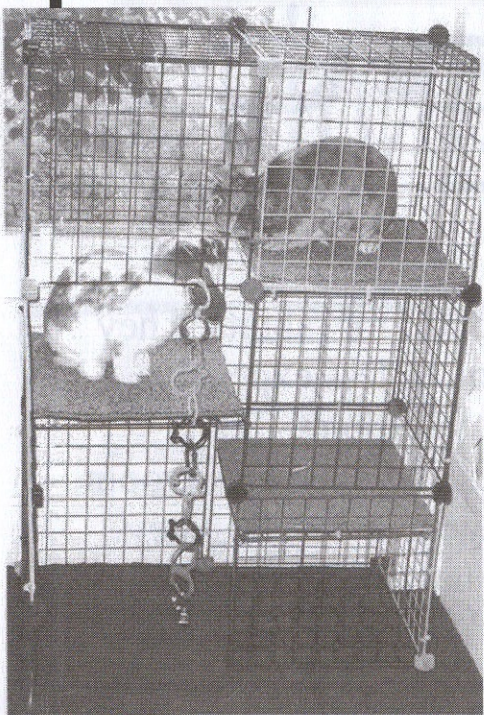
Exercise pens

“Ex pens” (indoor fencing) can be used to create a large home base, or can be used to restrict access to areas in the house that aren’t rabbit-proofed. Some rabbits are quite athletic and can get over sizable fences, particularly if there is an attraction on the other side. Four feet is usually a safe height. Rabbits learn how to move fence ends that are being used to block access to doors or hallways, so it’s advisable to secure them well.

Rack and Stack

For creative, do-it-yourself people, this is the way to go. Buy these panels that can be connected to

create anything from a simple rabbit home to a multilevel luxury condo. This is an economical way to create a custom home for your rabbit; you’ll be able to shape your rabbit’s home to fit exactly in the available space in your house. Wire coated panels can be purchased at Target and office supply stores.



Kala and Angel

Litter Box Training

It is essential that you litter box train your rabbit. Thankfully, the task of training rabbits to use a litter box is a fairly easy one.

What you’ll need

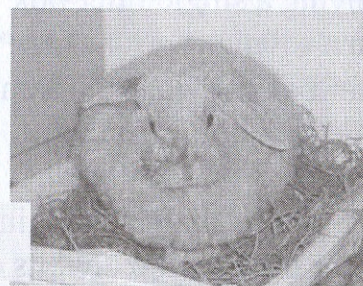
Litter pan

- Standard cat litter pan
- High back corner pan

Litter types to use

- Pellet stove wood (hardwood, no accelerant)
- Hay with newspaper liner
- Care Fresh (recycled newspaper)
- Yesterday’s News (recycled newspaper)
- Aspen Litter

TOOLS



King Murray

Poops (droppings) are often a way for rabbits to mark territory. Leaving poops in front of the litter box is not unusual behavior. However, this may increase if people in the household invade the rabbit’s perceived territory.

Many litters are dangerous to your rabbit’s health and well being. Be sure to avoid the following.

- **Clumping cat litter**— Can get stuck in his/her GI tract causing GI stasis and possibly death.
- **Clay cat litter**— Dusty and can cause respiratory problems.
- **Pine or cedar shavings**— There are phenols in the shavings that the rabbit’s liver must work continually to remove from his/her system; thus the liver is compromised.

AVOID

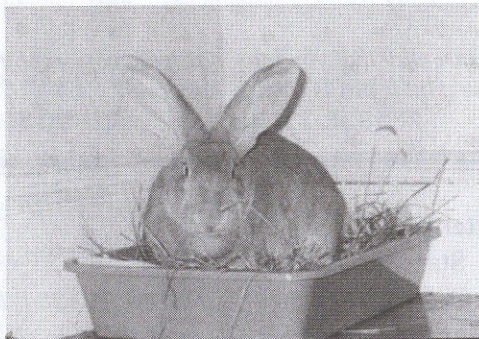
Note about shavings: The phenols enter the rabbit’s system through the lungs. So even if you have shavings under the cage, or at the bottom of a litter box with hay on top, it is still a danger.

Continued on next page

Set up the environment

In the cage

- Place the litter box in a corner (preferably one they are using).
- Hay in the litter box can encourage good litter habits. Rabbits love munching while doing their business.



Rusty

In the room

- It is most likely a rabbit will choose more than one place for pooping. Having multiple litter boxes may reduce your frustration of moving a single litter box from one corner to another in a room.
- Hay in the corner of each litter box provides the same encouragement out of the cage as it does inside the cage.
- Due to territorial issues, other rabbits may make things more difficult. It is common for the litter box habits of foster rabbits to change when they move into a new home and have a new territory to explore and claim for their own. The presence of other rabbits may complicate matters as the rabbits mark their areas through territorial "poop wars." The key is patience.

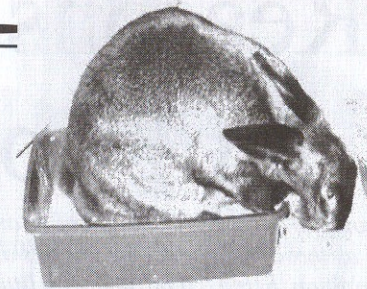


Harry in the hay

Tricks of the trade

Rewards

Treats are a sure-fire way to get the most difficult rabbits to use the litter box. Raisins make a good reward system. Treats must be given immediately to be effective.



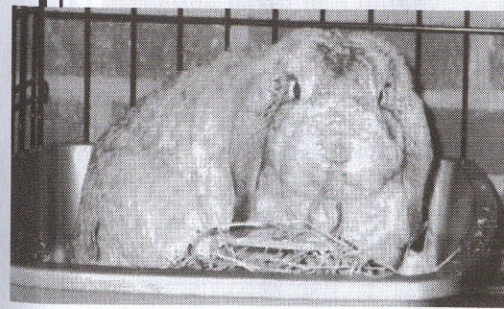
Big Reggie

- Start with a single raisin every time your rabbit is sitting in the litter box (at this point whether or not he/she uses it is immaterial).
- Once your rabbit is hopping in the litter box on a regular basis, reward him/her with a treat only when he/she uses the litter box (look for signs of use: poops in the litter box or the tail extended up for peeing).
- Once your rabbit is well established in the use of his/her litter box, wean the treats to every other time and decrease the frequency of the treats until the behavior is learned and using the litter box is a regular behavior.

Reduce mishaps

It's never a good idea to use punishment. Instead, try correcting the behavior.

- Shoo your rabbit back to the litter box or cage if he/she starts to poop or pee.
- Along with the shooing, telling your bunny "No" in a stern voice (but not loud or scary). This should help reduce mistakes.



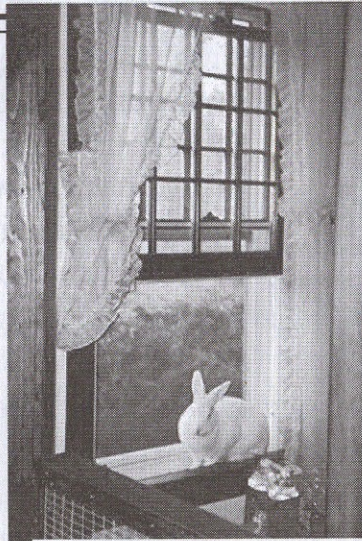
Liam

Reasons Not to Put Your Rabbit Outdoors

Although traditionally thought of as an outdoor pet, rabbits kept outdoors do not fare as well as those living indoors. Rabbits are very social and need to be around their family. In addition, being left outside with little or no protection against the weather or predators is in many cases cruel. If you cannot keep your rabbits indoors due to allergies, then the best thing to do is accept the fact that a rabbit is not a choice for you.

Understanding the rabbit psyche

- **Loneliness**— Rabbits live in warrens surrounded by an extended family with which they love to socialize, play and interact. Being completely by themselves for long periods is unnatural and stressful.
- **Your relationship**— Rabbits are very affectionate and will even follow their caregivers from room to room. It's very hard (nearly impossible) to develop a relationship with your rabbit if they are constantly outside alone.
- **Boredom**— Rabbits like to play. With no one and nothing to play with, boredom sets in quickly.
- **Fear**— Rabbits are at the mercy of their outdoor confinement; strange sounds, smells and sights can cause undue stress.

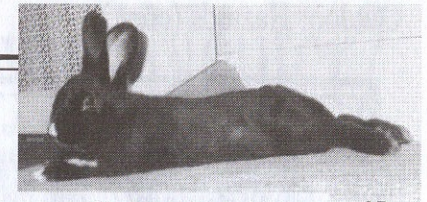


Heather enjoying the view



Benny sunning

Providing a safe home environment



Shadow relaxed

Temperature

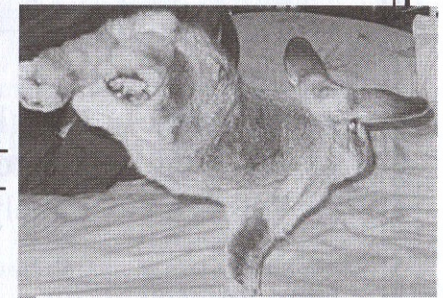
The ideal temperature for a rabbit's environment is between 60 and 70 degrees.

Winter hazards

- Outside temperatures get well below freezing. Outdoor wild rabbits have shelter from the cold underground, where the temperatures do not get so low.
- Rabbits can die of thirst if their water bowl freezes.
- Rabbits can get frostbite on their ears.
- Rabbits can freeze to death.

Summer hazards

- Outside temperatures get well above 70. Wild rabbits take shelter underground, where temperatures don't get so high. Inside a hutch, add 20 degrees in worst-case scenarios.
- Rabbits can die from heat exhaustion.
- Rabbits have no way to cool themselves down. They don't sweat.

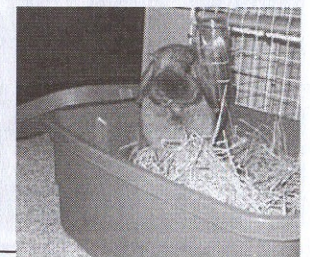


Lady MacBeth doing binkies

Outdoor predators

- As prey animal, rabbits have no natural defenses. They flee to survive—but this is completely impossible to do in a hutch.
- Predators get into hutches and kill rabbits (including humans with ill intent).
- Predators try to get into hutches and rabbits die from fright even in a predator-proof hutch.

Ginger sneaking in the hay

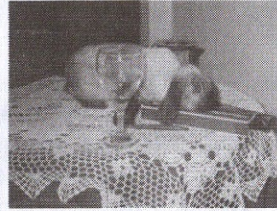


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Insects and other pests

Unfortunately, there are no ways to protect your rabbit from outdoor parasites.

- **Fleas**— Rabbits, like cats and dogs, can get fleas but cannot be treated the same way.



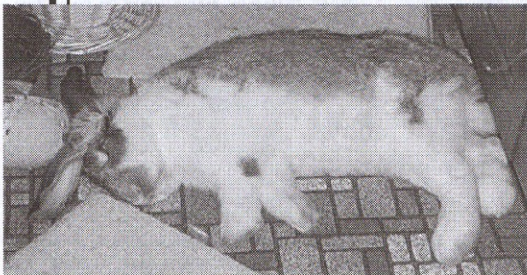
Roger caught in the act

DO NOT USE ANY OVER THE COUNTER REMEDY FOR FLEAS ON RABBITS, WITHOUT CONSULTING A VET. Fleas can cause flea anemia or myxomatosis in rabbits.

- **Ticks and mites**— Same as above. You must consult a vet.
- **Fly strike**— Flies lay their eggs in a rabbit's fur. When the eggs hatch, the maggots kill the rabbit. This is an extremely painful way to die.

Inadequate shelter

- Most hutches have wire flooring. As stated in the "Housing" section of this guide, wire floors cause foot sores.
- Bad weather can cause stress on your rabbit as well. Rain can leak through the tops of hutches.
- Lack of space is also a major concern for hutch rabbits. Like horses, they need to exercise to be healthy. For example, exercise keeps their digestive system moving.

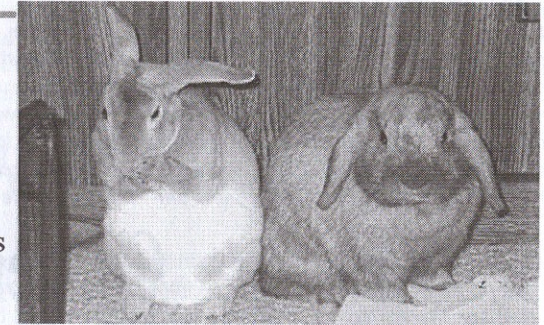


Thumper napping

Why Should I Spay or Neuter?

Health benefits

- Decrease the chance of cancer; female rabbits at the age of five have a 50% chance of getting cancer.
- Increase life span for males as well since they will not fight with other animals in the home (i.e., cats or dogs) due to sexual aggression.



Dusty and Ginger

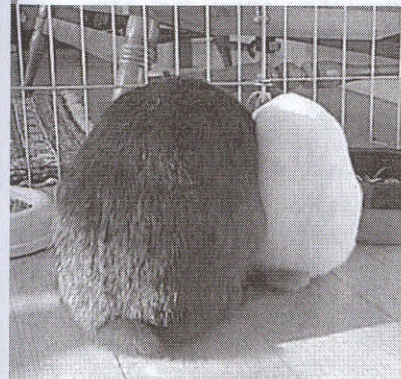
Behavior benefits

Decrease unwanted behaviors (especially with males).

- Male behaviors that may decrease:
 - **Spraying**— Males spray to mark territory, including female rabbits (and sometimes humans).
 - **Biting**— Although not the nicest way to court a girl, males will bite.
- Female behaviors that may decrease:
 - **Cage aggression**— A female will defend her nest from real and perceived danger (e.g., a human hand changing the litter box).
 - **Lunging and growling**— Sometimes part cage aggression; sometimes anytime, anyplace.

Increase desirable behaviors.

- **Mellow disposition**— Altered rabbits tend to have a more mellow temperament and ultimately are more enjoyable.
- **Litter habits**— It's easier to litter train an altered rabbit.
- **Prevent unwanted litters.**
 - Rabbits can have about six kits in a litter; finding homes for all may be an arduous task.
 - Not all females take care of the young and babies starve to death (a devastating experience for the family).



Blackberry and Smudge

Health Care

Many common medical disorders of domestic rabbits can be prevented by practicing proper husbandry. Rabbit caregivers should frequently seek the most current information concerning diet, exercise, housing, and preventative care. Many reliable sources are readily accessible, but caregivers should question the validity and wisdom of each recommendation before implementing it in their home. In addition, a complete and thorough annual physical examination by a knowledgeable rabbit veterinarian is essential. Rabbit caregivers should seek recommendations from local rabbit groups or other rabbit caregivers for reliable and knowledgeable rabbit veterinarians.

Cancer

Cancer is being found more commonly as our pet rabbit population ages, although overall it is not as commonly found in rabbits as in other pet species. Cervical cancer in females and skin cancer are the most common forms of cancer. The high rate of cervical cancer underscores the importance of spraying. Skin cancer can be treated surgically. Don't ignore lumps—there are no good lumps in rabbits!

Dental Disease

Incisor malocclusion is congenital (especially in dwarf breeds) or can result from trauma or other dental problems. In cases of trauma, frequent trimming with a high speed dental burr is necessary until the damaged incisor grows in, approximately 4-6 weeks. Misaligned incisors secondary to other dental problems may be repetitively trimmed. Some veterinarians recommend surgical removal of incisors if regular trimming does not lead to improvement in their alignment.

Molar disorders:

Many dental problems can be prevented by feeding a high fiber diet of hay and green leafy vegetables to encourage the even wear of the molars.

Molar points can be treated by trimming the affected molars with high speed burrs that can remove the points on the teeth. Uneven molar growth necessitates dental x-rays, more extensive treatments occasionally including extractions, and carries a poorer prognosis. Lifelong dental attention is often the result.

Molar abscesses are painful, often resulting in a decreased appetite. The first symptom is often a white mucousy discharge from one or both of the eyes. This is a result of the lacrimal duct - a tear duct that drains tears from the eye into the nose - being occluded from the swelling of the infected molar roots.

Gastrointestinal Conditions

Hairballs can be a problem in any rabbit regardless of the breed, but are most problematic in rabbits fed a low fiber diet. Dietary fiber requirements can be met by feeding good quality hays, fresh leafy green vegetables, and relatively few pellets. Routine grooming (brushing and combing once to twice weekly) helps prevent hairballs by reducing the amount of hair ingested. Small doses of a hairball laxative for cats may be effective; however, side-effects on the lower digestive tract of rabbits may

include diarrhea and nutritional deficiencies if used excessively or frequently. Discuss the pros and cons of these laxatives with your veterinarian. Intestinal obstruction can result from large hairballs.

Diarrhea is often a result of inappropriate diets. Carbohydrates are often the offensive ingredient and are neither necessary or desirable for a rabbit's nutrition, although small amounts can be fed as treats. Diarrhea is the end result of the maldigestion that occurs as the carbohydrates break down and the fermentation of the resulting simple sugars begin. Bacteria that digest carbohydrates cause excessive gas production in the lower digestive tract that can lead to excruciating abdominal pain. Mild cases of diarrhea without abdominal pain can be controlled by only feeding hay and withholding pellets and vegetables until the feces are formed again. Once the feces are formed again, re-introduce vegetables first allowing a few days before restarting pellets or treats. Cases of moderate to severe diarrhea, diarrhea accompanied by abdominal pain, or persistent diarrhea require prompt veterinary attention.

Gastric stasis quickly become a life-threatening emergency situation. It can result from any condition that causes a rabbit to lose his/her appetite. The causes may be gastrointestinal in nature or pain from sources outside the digestive tract. Early detection and treatment are keys to a speedy and complete recovery. Once gastric stasis occurs, fermenting bacteria of the digestive tract produce excessive amounts of gas in the cecum and colon causing severe pain and secondary electrolyte and circulatory problems. Immediate veterinary care from an experienced rabbit veterinarian is necessary. Initially, efforts should be aimed at pain relief, re-establishing gastrointestinal motility, and reducing gas production. Once the rabbit is stabilized, an intravenous catheter can be placed and warmed IV fluids can be started to treat the shock. Simethicone to decrease gas production should be the only oral treatment and is ideally given by stomach tube. Complete blood counts, blood chemistries, and x-rays are delayed until the patient is more stable. These tests are necessary to determine what initiated the gastric stasis and how seriously it affected the rabbit's overall health. Once the abdominal pain is relieved, force feeding the rabbit with Critical Care by Oxbow or vegetable baby food provides stimulation to the gastrointestinal tract to increase its motility.

Neurological Conditions

E. cuniculi is a protozoal parasite that causes damage in the brain, nervous system, and/or major organs (kidneys, liver, etc.) in pet rabbits. It is spread from one rabbit to another rabbit primarily through contact with infected urine. The symptoms can range from a head tilt and loss of balance, rear-end weakness/paralysis, to no external signs of the infection. Titers can be run on blood samples to determine which rabbits have been previously exposed. Unfortunately, a negative titer does not guarantee a lack of exposure or lack of contagiousness. Treatment consists of antiparasiticides (oxybendazole, fenbendazole, or albendazole), anti-inflammatory, antibiotics in the early stage of treatment, and supportive care (force feeding or IV fluids). Recovery from symptoms does occur and shedding of the parasite may recur with stressful conditions.

Orthopedic Conditions

Fractures to the legs are not typically seen in pet rabbits but they do occasionally occur. They are repaired by routine orthopedic techniques but can be complicated by the very thin walls of the rabbit's bones. Pain management is essential to the successful management of rabbit fractures. Bandages, splints, and casts do not work well due to the rabbit's propensity to chew them. Fractures of the spinal cord are unfortunately common and are often permanently paralyzing. The rabbit's combination of powerful muscles and frail bone structure make them susceptible to fractures of the back. Proper handling techniques, daily exercise to strengthen bone development, and supervision of children's interactions with rabbits are necessary to prevent accidental injury. Treatment is often

Health Care, Orthopedic Conditions (cont.)

humane euthanasia because the nerve tissue of the spinal cord does not rejuvenate and recovery of the use of the rear legs and urinary bladder is unlikely.

Parasitic Conditions

Internal parasites:

Gastrointestinal parasites, with the exception of *Coccidia*, are not common in domestic house rabbits. All rabbits should, however, be checked for internal parasites when they are first brought into the household regardless of their age. A fresh fecal sample should be tested anytime a diarrhea outbreak occurs, if the rabbit is bred or shown, or at least at the annual physical examination. *Coccidia* occasionally causes diarrhea in pet rabbits and is treated with anti-protozoals. It is infectious to both people and other domestic pets so good sanitary practices are recommended to prevent its spreading.

External parasites:

Skin mites occasionally are found on recently acquired rabbits. They produce intense itching especially around the neck and shoulder areas as well as dry scaly skin. Treatment of the rabbit, the cage and the surrounding area is required for resolution of the problem. Re-infestation is not uncommon and usually is due to ineffective cleaning of the environment or re-acquisition of the infection from another rabbit. Use a 10 parts water to 1 part bleach solution to clean the rabbit's environment.

Ear mites are the most common parasite seen in pet rabbits. Ear mites are extremely irritating and cause copious dry discharge to form in the ear canals and external ear. DO NOT attempt to clean this discharge as the resulting pain can be excruciating. Your veterinarian can dispense an appropriate miticidal medication and an anti-inflammatory to relieve the pain and itching. Delay cleaning any remaining discharge of the ear until 10-14 days after initiating treatment to allow the inflammation and pain to resolve. Ear infections are most common in dwarf breeds, but can occur in any rabbit. Smears of the ear canal and cultures will determine the cause and topical medication can be dispensed to treat the problem.

Fleas may be found on rabbits in households shared with dogs or cats or where the rabbit receives outdoor exercise. Fleas can be treated by applying kitten dose Advantage® to the neck of the rabbit. This product is not one approved for use in rabbits but has been used safely for several years. Other topical products are not approved or safe and should not be used in rabbits.

Maggots may be found around the groin following the development of urine scalding or diarrhea or (more infrequently) in skin wounds. They can lead to profound pain and debilitation of the rabbit and require immediate attention by a veterinarian. Manual extraction of the maggots under sedation, supportive care (antibiotics, pain relief and fluids), and resolution of the initiating cause is necessary for successful treatment.

Reproductive System Conditions

Miscellaneous conditions: Uterine infections, retained fetuses, and endometriosis (fluid accumulation in the uterus) may be encountered in unspayed females but often are recognized by observing abnormal vaginal discharges as well as other signs of illness such as lethargy, inappetance and/or pain. Surgery to remove the affected uterus is necessary to correct the problem. (See also "Cancer" section.)

Respiratory Conditions

Upper respiratory infections: Sinus infections, commonly referred to as "snuffles," are commonly secondary to stress or husbandry problems such as a poor diet or improper housing. Acute infections can be treated with oral or injectable antibiotics, but resolution of chronic sinus infections is rare. Injectable antibiotics, humidification, and intranasal instillation of ophthalmic antibiotic drops to cooperative patients are the preferred treatments. Bacterial cultures should be performed on all chronic sinus infections to determine the primary infectious agent and the proper antibiotic treatment. Occasionally, foreign material inhaled into the nose is the cause of the sinusitis.

Lower respiratory infections: Pneumonia is generally considered to be a result of the spread of a systemic infection rather than an inhaled infection. Early intervention with aggressive antibiotic and supportive therapy (IV fluids) is necessary. Do not attempt to force feed rabbits displaying respiratory distress as inhalation of food will likely occur. Gram positive bacteria are commonly responsible for causing bacterial pneumonias and therapy is initially aimed at this group until bacterial culture results indicate otherwise.

Pasteurella historically has been a common opportunistic infection in pet rabbits. It is a common bacteria naturally found in all rabbits' respiratory tracts. Husbandry problems and stress allow for the *Pasteurella* to become problematic. Very often this can lead to sinus infections, pneumonia, or abscesses. Once these infections are established, they can be very difficult to eliminate and can become a source of bacteria that can spread to other areas of the body. Successful outcomes require early recognition and treatment.

Skin Conditions

Skin parasites (see "Parasitic Conditions" section) are relatively common in recently acquired rabbits. Although superficial bacterial and fungal skin infections occasionally occur in rabbits, they are not frequently seen.

Abscesses are not unusual in rabbits. They result both from wounds or systemic spreading of bacteria via the blood stream. Abscesses around the face often result from dental disease that must be addressed in order to resolve the abscess. Whenever possible, abscesses in other areas of the body should be excised intact including the wall of the abscess (rather than drained as is done in cats and dogs). Systemic antibiotics usually do not penetrate rabbit abscesses sufficiently to resolve the abscess without surgery, but they are used after excising the abscess to prevent its re-occurrence.

Injuries to the feet and hocks are common occurrences in rabbits kept in cages with wire floors. Solid floors are recommended to avoid calluses and ulcerations of the feet and/or hock. The use of acceptable litter to cover the cage bottom will help to prevent urine accumulation and wet conditions that can lead to skin irritation or ulceration. Keep toenails trimmed short. Overgrown nails can catch on a variety of material, causing them to break.

Urinary Tract Conditions

Discolored urine can be caused by blood in the urine or pigments in the diet primarily from fresh vegetables. Rabbits showing signs of frequent urination, urinating outside the litter box, spots of blood, or more frequent grooming of the groin should have a urinalysis done and a physical performed by a knowledgeable veterinarian. Rabbits that are not showing any unusual signs can be observed and fed hay and pellets without treats for a few days to see if the color of the urine returns

Health Care, Urinary Tract Conditions (cont.)

to normal. It is typical for rabbit urine to be cloudy, milky white, or yellow. Dietary pigments or blood may color the urine orange to red. A routine urinalysis can differentiate between blood and dietary pigments. Blood in the urine is more serious and can come from urinary tract infections, bladder or kidney stones, uterine infections, or uterine cancer. These conditions warrant additional testing such as x-rays, blood chemistries, and complete blood counts to determine the cause and the extent of the problem.

Urinary bladder and kidney stones can cause bloody urine, abdominal discomfort, frequent and/or painful urination or straining to urinate. X-rays are usually necessary to determine the location and the number of stones. Surgical removal is the only option to correct the condition. If the rabbit's symptoms are mild, your veterinarian may choose to monitor the condition instead of immediately recommending surgery.

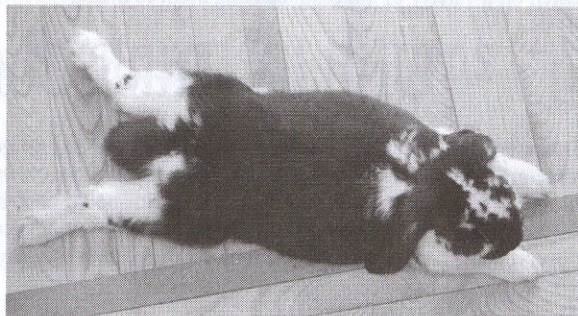
Urinary sludge syndrome results from too much dietary calcium which causes calcium crystals to form in the urinary bladder. This condition can be both irritating and painful. Prevention is accomplished by reducing the dietary calcium by eliminating alfalfa from the diet except for treats and feeding low calcium vegetables. Timothy hay based pellets and hay other than alfalfa can be fed as a substitute for alfalfa. Serious cases require irrigation of the urinary bladder with warmed saline to dissolve and remove the calcium crystals.

Vestibular Disease

Vestibular disease is characterized by loss of balance, head tilt, and/or nystagmus (the rapid shaking of the eyes from side to side or circularly). It is caused by an infection of the inner ear and results in nausea, loss of appetite, and spastic, uncoordinated movements. The infection can be from a bacterial abscess, a parasite, or a virus. It is treated by supportive care until the appetite develops, including fluids, force feeding, anti-inflammatory, and antibiotics. Depending on the amount of permanent damage, the rabbit may recover completely (no tilt) or have some residual permanent head-tilt. Good husbandry and proper nutrition can help with, but not guarantee, prevention of vestibular disease.

A Healthy Rabbit Is Up to You

With proper prevention, good husbandry, and good medical care, domestic rabbits can avoid and recover from many medical conditions. Education, vigilance, and early intervention are the keys to successful prevention and recuperation.



Tristan

Special Note: Easter is a very busy time for House Rabbit Connection (HRC). HRC is dedicated to educating the public that rabbits involve a lifetime of love and care, and therefore should not be an impulse purchase inspired by the tale of the Easter Bunny and the sudden overpopulation of rabbits (toy and live) in retail stores. Unfortunately, a large number of rabbits are unwanted approximately 6 months after Easter. Our surrender calls (where an individual is trying to find a home for their rabbit(s)) increase significantly in the fall. Many of these unwanted rabbits are "dropped at shelters" or worse, are released into the wild. Domestic rabbits have a very short life span in the wild. They do not have the natural instincts and abilities of their wild brethren. Appropriate food, shelter, water, and camouflage are generally not available to a companion rabbit. It is likely that a domestic rabbit will be viciously attacked and killed by a predator before it dies of starvation or thirst. If you encounter someone who is contemplating turning an unwanted rabbit loose, please ask him or her to contact the **HopLine** at 413-525-9222 or info@hopline.com before they take that step.

References

Health Care section, Paul A. Chace, D.V.M.
Rabbit Health in the 21st Century, Kathy Smith
Care of Rabbits, Susan A. Brown, D.V.M.
The House Rabbit Handbook, Marinell Harriman
FAQ: Children and Rabbits, Carolyn Mixon

Online References

www.rabbit.org

Acknowledgments

- The Oxbow Hay Company for the generous grant allowing this project to be completed
- House Rabbit Society who started it all
- All the HRC volunteers who worked on this project
- All the HRC vets who contribute daily to the well-being of our rabbits
- A special thanks to Kathy Smith for her editing skills
- All the members of HRC who make it possible for HRC to help the helpless



Baby Molly

If you're interested in adopting a rabbit or would like more info on rabbit care, please contact the House Rabbit Connection.

(413) 525-9222

www.hopline.com

info@hopline.com

Very Young

Birth to 2 Weeks Mother's milk	2 to 4 Weeks: Mother's milk Nibbles of alfalfa and pellets	4 to 7-8 Weeks: Mother's milk, access to alfalfa and pellets
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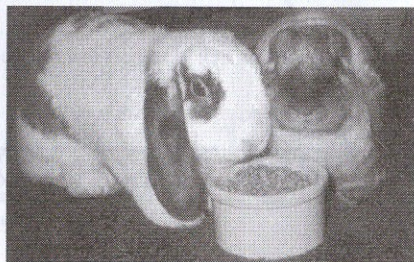
*Atilla the
Bun and
Hannibal*



7-8 Weeks to 8 Months

Grass Hay Unlimited amounts	Pellets Unlimited amounts of timothy or alfalfa pellets	Vegetables Can be introduced after 12 weeks (one at a time, quantities under 1/2 oz.)
Alfalfa Hay One handful per day		Treats Should consist of vegetables or herbs

8 Months to 1 Year



*Roger
and
Millie*

Timothy, Oat and Grass Hays Unlimited amounts	Pellets 1/2 cup of timothy pellets per 6 lbs. of body weight per day	Vegetables Slowly increase the amounts
Alfalfa Hay and Pellets Decrease to none or as treat only		Treats Fruits can be introduced at 1 to 2 oz per 6 lb of body weight per day

Rabbit Proofing

Rabbits have behaviors that don't always work well with our lifestyles. To keep them and your things protected, you should always rabbit proof no matter how "good" your bunny is.

Wood

Examples



Woodstock caught in the act

- **Molding**— Molding just seems to have the texture and taste rabbits love. It's the corners and hardness they like.
- **Table and chair legs**— Legs are especially susceptible if they are not rounded.
- **Doors**— The corner of the door is a favorite with many buns.

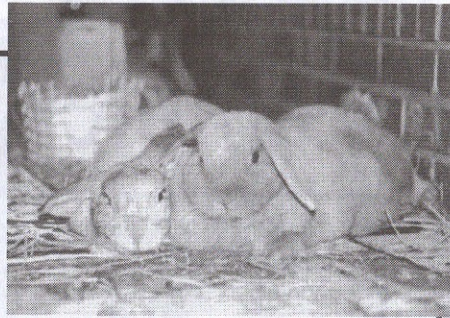
Prevention

- **Supervise**— When you allow your rabbits time out of their cage, make the effort to supervise their activities. As they behave themselves and learn what's OK and what's not, you will find you won't need to spend as much time observing their activities.
- **Restrict their area**— Never start rabbits with the full run of a large area, such as a living room. Use barriers to start them in a small space, and increase the area gradually.
- **Train your rabbit**— Yes, this can be done. In fact, rabbits are very easy to train. Remember, if you supervise and train in a small area, you'll be sure to notice if your rabbits go for a nibble of some unsuspecting chair leg! Yelling "No" when this happens will startle them. Clapping and stomping your feet are also effective. **(NEVER STRIKE YOUR RABBIT.)**
- **Soap often does the trick**— An **all-natural** soap rubbed on wood will usually prevent your rabbit from nibbling. The soap taste is undesirable, unlike the pepper and bitter apple sprays available in pet supply stores, which they love. **(DON'T USE BITTER APPLE OR PEPPER SPRAY—they don't work!)**
- **Substitute**— Provide acceptable items that will satisfy the desire to chew and wear down the teeth.

Rugs & Carpets

Examples

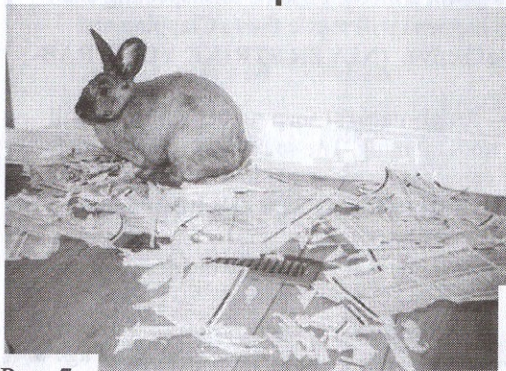
- Wall to wall
- Area rugs



Goldie and Murray taking it easy in a rabbit-proofed area

Prevention

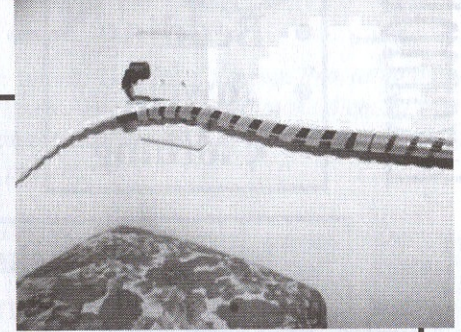
- **Supervise**— When you allow your rabbits time out of their cage, make the effort to supervise their activities. As they behave themselves and learn what's OK and what's not, you will find you won't need to spend as much time observing their activities.
- **Restrict their area**— Never start rabbits with the full run of a large area, such as a living room. Use barriers to start them in a small space, and increase the area gradually.
- **Cover the rug**— Corner spots seem to be the most susceptible. Covering a corner with linoleum, tile or even a litter box sometimes can make all the difference. Carpet samples and plastic covers for under the desk also work well.
- **Substitute something else for the rug**— A rabbit that likes to dig at carpet needs to dig at something, so offer something less pricey. Old phone books work great. Face the binding toward the rabbit so the rabbit can dig through the pages. Most rabbits will just shred the pages, but if you notice your rabbit eating the pages, do not use this method.



Clover letting her paws do the walking

Wires & Cords

Examples



- **Electrical**— Cords are very dangerous and can kill your rabbit if they are chewed through.
- **Phone**— Although they don't pose the danger an electrical cord does, it can be frustrating when your phone suddenly stops working.
- **Cable TV and others**— Printer cables can be especially expensive to replace.

Prevention

You must remove and/or contain all wires/cords. Rabbits find it impossible to resist chewing wires and cords, because they look like vines. In the wild, rabbits clip through all vines to clear escape routes. Domestic rabbits still have this instinct. The only way to ensure your rabbit does not chew wires and cords is to make them inaccessible. Use:

- **Wire wrap**— from a hardware store, Home Depot, etc. This is a really great solution. The plastic wrap protects your rabbit from the wires and vice versa. You need to wrap several wires together to make a bundle thicker than a vine; that way, your rabbit won't instinctively clip it. Even so, **CHECK YOUR WIRES REGULARLY.**
- **PVC or plastic tubing**— Slice the PVC or tubing, and insert the wires.
- **Shower curtain rods**— Insert the wires.

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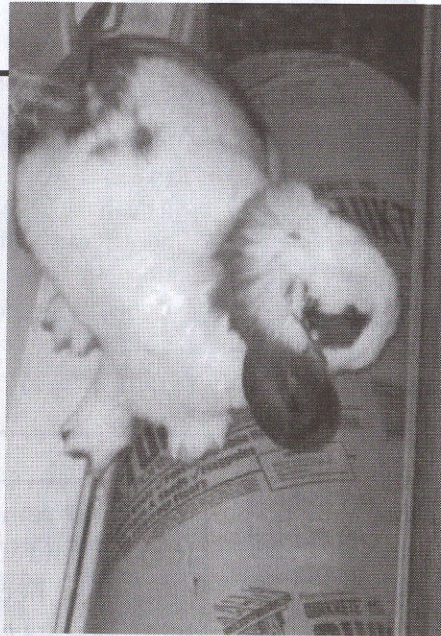
Examples

- Furniture
- Bedding
- Towels
- Clothing

Upholstery & Textiles

Prevention

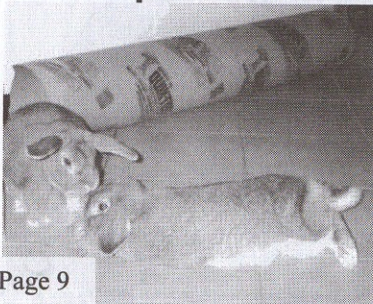
• **Protect the backs** of sofas and chairs with cardboard QUIK-TUBES. This has the added benefit of protecting your rug as well. QUIK-TUBES are used for pouring cement posts and can be found at most hardware stores.



Although normally rabbits choose to go through the QUIK-TUBE, Millie has taken the rooftop approach

- **Block access** to underneath beds or behind pieces of furniture.
- **Keep folded towels and clothing off the floor** to keep them out of your rabbit's mouth.
- **Provide substitutes**— Have no use for old clothes or towels? Now you do!

• **Toys, toys, toys**— You like to play, I like to play, and so does your rabbit!



Macswell and Sunny Bunny

Toys

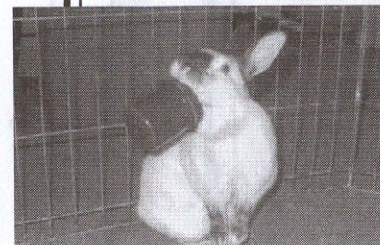
Rabbits are well-known for their mischievous antics. They love playing. Providing them with toys will not only alleviate "bad bunny" behavior, but also will make them happier. Rabbits' play is as varied as their personalities. A rabbit may like a certain type of toy, so try them all and see what your rabbit prefers.

Toys are broken down into four categories: Toss & Swat, Hide 'n' Seek 'n' Dig 'n' Climb, Grooming, and Chewing.



Ginger playing with her jingle toy

- Baby toys
 - Plastic keys
 - Plastic play sets
 - Plastic rattles
- Storemade toys for pets
 - Balls with bells
 - Jingle cubes
 - Busy ball
 - Wooden or plastic rings
- Homemade toys
 - Cardboard tubes (put hay inside and you'll have a nice treat for your rabbit)
 - Plastic covers from laundry detergent



Zena tossing a detergent cover

bottles (clean thoroughly in dishwasher and never use drain opener or bathroom cleaner bottle covers)

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Toss & Swat