

Rabbit Care: The Complete Guide

Written by Amy Pratt in Care,Diet,Health

hands holding a rabbit

Rabbits are the cutest! You already know this. And now you're thinking it's about time to bring one home. Or maybe you already brought a rabbit home and you're realizing rabbits are a little more work than you bargained for.

Rabbits are often incorrectly thought of as easy beginner pets (like a hamster). In reality, bunnies have much more complicated needs. The amount of care that a rabbit needs is closer to the amount of care a dog needs (you just don't need to take your rabbit out for a walk). Maybe a little more work than you first thought.

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The most important parts of rabbit care are providing a healthy diet and a large enclosure. Once you have that taken care of, you can focus on rabbit-proofing your home and providing them with toys and social enrichment. Other basics of rabbit care include litter training your rabbit, grooming, and learning how to properly hold them.

Don't panic! I'm here to help. Rabbits are amazing companion pets, and I want you and your new rabbit to have the best life together. I'm going to help make sure you have all the resources you need to have a happy and healthy bunny.

Learn the different type of care that is required for a lop-eared rabbit



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Setting expectations: Rabbit lifespan

The average lifespan of a rabbit is about 10 years. This estimate will vary a little bit, depending on the breed of the rabbit and the conditions they live in. But when you get a pet rabbit, you need to understand that this is a long term commitment.

A rabbit's long life expectancy means that they can grow to be amazing companion pets, just like a cat or dog. But it also means we have to consider the possibility of moving with a rabbit, or caring for them in their old age. Before you make the decision to adopt or purchase a rabbit, take the time to really consider the amount of work it will take to care for them for their whole lives.

I absolutely believe rabbits are wonderful pets. They are worth all the trouble they give you and make amazing pets. But you need to be informed, and make the decision for yourself.

Part 1: What to feed your rabbit

Let's start with the basics. Having a healthy diet is absolutely necessary for your rabbit's well being. Rabbits have a very sensitive digestive systems, and problems with their gut is one of the leading causes of illness and death. So what does a healthy rabbit diet look like?

Hay

A full 80% of your rabbit's diet should be grass hay. Timothy hay is best because it is high in fiber and it is rough, making it good for rabbit teeth and digestion. You'll want

to get a big bag of hay and make sure you never let your rabbit run out. Hay keeps their digestive system moving properly and helps them absorb the nutrients their body needs.

Most pet stores, even those that don't have much in stock for rabbit supplies, will have bags of timothy hay. This is a good and healthy hay to make up the base of your rabbits diet, but it's also a good idea to add in other grass hays, such as orchard, meadow, or oat hay, to add some variety and encourage your rabbit to eat more hay.

Some brands will sell bags of hay that are already mixed, but you can also get the different types of hay separately and mix them together. You could even purchase large bales from local farmers if you want to get the freshest possible hay for your rabbit.

I get my rabbit's hay from an online store called Small Pet Select and I have been impressed with the quality of the hay they deliver. My recommendation is their 2nd cutting Timothy hay, but they also have oat and orchard hay you can add in. (Use the code BUNNYLADY to get 15% off your first order!)

Note: Alfalfa is not a grass hay, and generally shouldn't be a part of your adult rabbit's diet unless you are instructed otherwise by a qualified veterinarian. The exception to this is baby bunnies who are less than six months old. In this case alfalfa has nutrients that are good for a growing bunny.

Leafy Greens

Fresh leafy green vegetables introduce variety and flavor into your rabbits diet, while also giving them the nutrients they need to stay healthy. You'll want to give your rabbit one to five cups of fresh greens daily, depending on how big your rabbit is. You can give this to your rabbit all at once or choose to portion it out over the course of the day. I choose to give my rabbit her daily greens during dinner time, but might give her a little as a reward for good behavior at other points in the day.

How much leafy greens to feed your rabbit:

Weight of the rabbit Maximum amount of leafy greens

2 lbs 1 cup

3 lbs 1.5 cups

4 lbs 2 cups

5 lbs 2.5 cups

6 lbs 3 cups

7 lbs 3.5 cups

8 lbs 4 cups

9 lbs 4.5 cups

10 lbs 5 cups

Most leafy greens you can find in a grocery store, or grow in your garden, are safe for your rabbit, but there are some varieties that you should give in smaller quantities, and a few that you should avoid giving your rabbit entirely.

Safe leafy greens for your rabbit:

Arugula

Carrot tops

Leafy lettuces (red, green, romaine)

Turnip greens

Dandelion greens

Mint

Basil

Cilantro

Watercress

Dill

Bok choy

Safe for your rabbit, but give in smaller quantities:

Parsley

Chard

Spinach

Beet greens

Mustard greens

Greens to avoid giving your rabbit:

Iceberg lettuce

Onion greens

Pellets

Pellets are not actually necessary for your rabbit's diet, but they do have some nutritional value and can be a healthy snack for your rabbit. You want to be very strict about the amount of pellets they get in a day. Too many pellets can quickly make your rabbit obese, causing a string of health problems.

It's okay if they run out of pellets during the day (or if they gobble them up right away). You still don't want to refill their food bowl until tomorrow. You want to encourage your rabbit to eat more hay, and too many pellets will make them full before they even get to their main food.

I recommend Oxbow's Garden Select pellets for rabbits. My rabbit gobbles this brand up like treats, but they're actually pretty healthy. If you look at the ingredients you'll see that they are made of mainly hay and dried vegetables.

How much pellets to feed your rabbit:

Weight of rabbit Amount of pellets daily

2 lbs 2 Tbsp

3 lbs 3 Tbsp

4 lbs $\frac{1}{4}$ cup

5 lbs 1 Tbsp + $\frac{1}{4}$ cup

6 lbs 2 Tbsp + $\frac{1}{4}$ cup

7 lbs 3 Tbsp + $\frac{1}{4}$ cup

8 lbs $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

9 lbs 1 Tbsp + $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

10 lbs 2 Tbsp + $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

Part 2: How to set up an indoor enclosure

Most pet stores will try to sell you a small cage for your rabbit, similar to what they would offer for a guinea pig. In the vast majority of cases, the cages sold as 'rabbit' cages are much too small. Unfortunately this is because there is still a lot of misinformation out there about rabbit care.

Rabbits won't be happy or healthy if they just sit in a tiny cage all day. So before you go out and purchase a new enclosure for your rabbit, you need to take the rabbit's size and the cage dimensions into consideration.

rabbit playpen

I recommend using a pet exercise pen for your rabbit's enclosure. It gives the rabbit a lot of space and it's easy to clean.

Enclosure size

When getting an enclosure or hutch for your rabbit you want to make sure the cage is long enough for your rabbit to make three hops from one end to the other. Your rabbit

should also be able to lay along the width with a little space to spare and stand all the way up on their hind legs without bumping their head on the top.

The enclosure size will vary a lot depending on your rabbit breed, but for an average sized rabbit (about 5 lbs), you should aim to have an area of at least 4ft by 2ft.

There are some hutches available that will be big enough, but I have found it easier to use a rabbit ex-pen instead. This makes cleaning your rabbits area a lot easier too, because all you have to do is move the gates and vacuum.

You could also consider getting a large dog crate as a rabbit cage. These can be very easy to set up and clean and can offer plenty of space for your rabbit's home base.

There are a few points you want to look out for, to make sure you avoid getting an enclosure not suitable for rabbits:

A cage that is too small. The number one thing you want to avoid is getting a cage that is too small for your rabbit. This can lead to some serious health problems in the long run, not to mention a bored and unhappy rabbit.

A cage with a wire bottom. Wire at the bottom of a cage can cut into a rabbits feet and cause sore hocks. If you have a wire cage that is appropriately sized, you can put a mat down along the bottom to keep them from standing on wire all day.

A hutch made of painted or toxic wood. Rabbits have an instinct to chew on everything, so they will definitely be trying to chew on a wooden hutch. This is why you want to avoid any painted wood, and you want to make sure the hutch is not made of a wood that is toxic to rabbits (such as cedar, birch and yew).

Exercise space

Rabbits, especially when they are young, have a ton of energy. So you'll need to make sure your rabbit gets a few hours of daily exercise time. You'll want to give your bunny an area that's at least 24sq feet for your rabbit to run around in for a few hours every day.

Usually people will just use the room they have their rabbits enclosure in as the exercise space, but you could also allow your rabbit access to the whole house. Or you could set up an extra exercise pen for your rabbit to use.

The best time of day to allow your rabbit out to exercise is in the morning or evening. Rabbits are crepuscular (not nocturnal), so they are most active during the hours around dawn and dusk. They'll get the most out of exercise time if you let them out during the times when they are most active.

Free range rabbits

Instead of having a rabbit closed up in an enclosure all day, many people choose to have what we call 'free roam' rabbits. They let their bunnies stay out in the house all day long. This is great for rabbits if it's something you can do, but it's not always possible. Rabbits have a tendency to be a little mischievous and chew on things they shouldn't, so you want to make sure you bunny-proof any areas of the house your rabbit is allowed to roam around in.

Temperature

Rabbits have thick fur coats and tend to do better in temperatures that are slightly cooler than what humans usually prefer. Because of this, it's usually best to house rabbits on lower floors of the house, or even in the basement if possible. This will keep your rabbit's living space in the coolest part of the house.

Even in the summer, you want to try to keep the indoor temperature below 75°F, especially if the humidity is high in the region where you live. Rabbits can get easily get heat stroke in temperatures above 80°F and long haired rabbits, such as lionheads, are at a higher risk.

In the winter, you may want to consider keeping your thermostat a little lower and wearing a sweater inside. Rabbits tend to thrive in temperatures that stay in the 50-70°F

range, so there is no need to keep their room extra toasty.

Part 3: How to litter train your rabbit

Rabbits are actually very clean animals. They will naturally want to keep themselves and their environment clean. Rabbits can even be trained to use a litter box, just like cats! It just takes a little bit of extra work to help your rabbit understand that the litter box is where they should use the bathroom.

When you bring your rabbit home, you want to have the supplies ready to get started on litter training right away. What you will need:

A few litter boxes

A pooper scooper

Paper based litter

Pet-safe cleaning spray

A pile of old newspaper (or a similar paper product)

The tools you need to litter train your rabbit: litter, a litter box, newspaper, a pooper scooper, pet-safe disinfectant, a garbage can with a lid.

To litter train your rabbit (I have a thorough step-by-step guide if you need help litter training your rabbit):

Start small. Keep your rabbit in their enclosure for a couple of days with a litter box set up in the corner. Clean the enclosure frequently, but keep a little urine and poop in the litter box so your rabbit can learn that's where they belong.

Increase the space. Place a couple of litter boxes throughout the room and give your rabbit some time out of the enclosure to exercise.

Pay close attention to your rabbit. As your rabbit explores, watch them and try to catch them as they defecate so you can herd them to a nearby litter box.

Clean up any accidents. You'll want to clean up any accidents right away so that your rabbit won't come back to use the same spot again. If they do continue to use the same spot as their bathroom, move one of the litter boxes to the rabbit's chosen place.

Remove the extra litter boxes. As your rabbit gets better at using the litter box, start to remove them one by one until your rabbit always goes back to their enclosure to use the bathroom.

Part 4: How to bunny proof your home

Rabbit's instincts to chew and dig are easily the most frustrating part of bunny ownership. We want to give our rabbits a chance to live the good life and zoom around the living room. But the little troublemakers just keep getting into things they shouldn't. They chew on wires and dig into the carpet.

If we want to keep our rabbit safe from the dangerous things they can get into, and keep our homes safe from our rabbit's destructive behaviors, we need to do some work to rabbit proof our homes.

bunny proof your home

Rabbits love to chew on wires, so make sure yours are covered or blocked off.

Wires

Rabbits love to chew through wires. This is unfortunate for our various electronic devices, but it's also very dangerous for our rabbits. If a rabbit bites into a wire while it's plugged in, the poor bun could end up getting shocked or electrocuted.

As much as possible, you will need to move your wires out of your rabbit's reach. This could mean keeping wires behind a fenced in area, or lifting wires off the ground so your rabbit doesn't find them. When it's impossible to physically move the wires away, you can cover wires with thick plastic tubing.

This works in two ways. One, rabbits are less likely to go after thick wires, and two, even if your rabbit tries to chew on the wire, he won't be able to get at the dangerous electrical part. Just make sure to check the wire covers occasionally to make sure your rabbit hasn't started to chew through them.

cat scratcher and plastic mat

Rabbits prefer to dig and chew at corners. Use a flexible cat scratcher to cover the baseboards and a plastic mat to cover the rugs.

Cover rugs and baseboards

Rabbits will often have an instinct to dig into the corners of rugs and chew on baseboards. This is because in nature rabbits are burrowers. They dig and use their teeth to make tunnels to live in. At home, however, this can be a very destructive behavior.

Carpets

Protecting your rugs is definitely the easier problem to solve. If it's possible for your living situation, you can try to circumvent this issue altogether by keeping your rabbit in a room that has wooden flooring, and using area rugs that you won't mind being dug into or chewed on.

If that's not possible, you still have options! You can solve this by putting down a plastic mat (like the ones you would use under a desk chair) in the corners or areas your rabbit has a tendency to dig into. You can also put down area rugs or even flattened cardboard boxes to prevent your rabbit from destroying the carpet.

Baseboards

It's a little more difficult to deal with baseboard chewers. Not all rabbits will go for the baseboards, but make sure to watch your rabbit's behavior to make sure they're not doing too much damage.

The best ways to deal with this behavior is by limiting your bun's access to the baseboard. Position furniture to block the baseboards, or keep a fence around the perimeter of the room. I use the fencing from these DIY storage cubes and line them up along the walls using zip ties. You can also resort to covering the visible baseboards with wood or cardboard.

One trick that I've been using recently is to cover the baseboards with a strip of masking tape. This has stopped my Ellie from chewing on the baseboards, but a rabbit could easily chew through the tape if they want to. If your rabbit continues to go after the tape, you'll want to remove it and try a different method. You don't want your rabbit to ingest the masking tape.

You'll also want to give your rabbit some wooden chew toys, so they have a productive way to use their chewing energy. Chewing on things is actually very important for keeping your rabbits teeth from growing too long, so you always want to make sure there are wooden chew toys available. Learn more about finding toys for your rabbit that they'll actually want to play with!

a rabbit and a houseplant

Keep any house plants away from your rabbit, they may try to eat anything within their reach.

Keep dangerous objects out of reach

Rabbits are a lot like children. They are curious about everything, especially the things they really shouldn't be getting into. So you'll need to take some precautions to make sure you keep your rabbit away from anything you don't want them to have access to.

This means you want to place houseplants (especially houseplants that are toxic for rabbits), on high shelves or window sills that your rabbit can't reach. You will also want to make sure you don't leave any human food unattended while your rabbit is roaming around. People food is definitely not for rabbits.

If you want to keep your rabbit out of areas of the house that aren't bunny-proofed, you could install baby gates. You'll probably want to install metal gates because rabbits might try to chew through any wooden gates over time.

Part 5: Enrichment toys for your rabbit

Rabbits need toys to keep their mind and teeth healthy. They are actually very intelligent animals and they need toys to keep their mind active. Rabbits need toys they can throw around, pull on, and dig into. And they like to use puzzle toys, so they can use their natural foraging instincts to figure out how to get at the treats.

Having appropriate toys is also good for your rabbits dental health. Rabbit teeth are open rooted and continue to grow forever. They need lots of hay and chew toys to help keep their teeth from growing out of control and causing health problems. If they're not given anything to chew on, a rabbit's teeth could end up growing so much that they can no longer eat.

If you're unsure of where to start, I recommend the toys from my favorite online store, Small Pet Select. It's what I always get for my my rabbit when she seems to be getting bored of her regular toys. You can get a variety of different toys from what they have in stock. Your rabbit can then pick the ones they like best so you know what toys to get in the future. (and you can get 15% off your first purchase by using the code BUNNYLADY at checkout)

You can also make your own DIY toys out of cardboard boxes and cardboard tubes. You can hide treats inside of the tubes, or turn them into hanging toys for your rabbit to play with. Or you can use cardboard boxes to make tunnels and digging play areas for your rabbit.

Part 6: Grooming your rabbit

Rabbits shed a lot and you'll have to brush them to get rid of excess fur. While rabbits shed a little bit all the time, they'll have two big molting seasons where they shed their winter and summer coats. During this time, there will be clouds of fur, and you'll need to brush your rabbit often to keep their fur from getting matted. It also keeps them from ingesting too much fur, preventing blockages in your rabbits gut.

rabbit nail quick

Clip your rabbit's nails on the section outside the nails vein (the quick).

Nail clipping

You will also need to clip your rabbit's nails. This is a task that is much easier with two people, but it's possible to do even if you're a single rabbit parent.

I've been clipping my rabbit's nails myself for the last eight years. It takes a lot of patience sometimes, since rabbits usually don't like it when you touch their feet, but I know you can do it. If your rabbit is just too difficult to handle, though, you can bring them into your rabbit's vet to get their nails clipped.

When clipping your rabbit's nails you want to look out for the vein, called the quick, that runs up the base of each nail. This is easy to see in rabbits with lighter nails, but it's more difficult to find in rabbits with thicker or darker nails. In these cases, use the clippers at a spot you think is past the quick. Put some pressure on the nail, but don't clip all the way through. If the rabbit flinches away, this means you should clip at a spot closer to the tip of the nail.

If you do accidentally clip into the quick, it's okay. It's a little painful for the rabbit, and there will probably be a lot of blood, but this is not a serious injury. Your rabbit will recover in no time and wonder why you are making such a fuss.

Part 7: Socializing your rabbit

Rabbits are very social animals and they get lonely if they are left alone all day. Like with humans, loneliness in rabbits leads to a shorter lifespan. If you want your rabbit to live

the best life possible, you need to spend time with them. Sit with your rabbit every day to form a bond with them and let them know how much you love them.

petting a rabbit

be patient and slowly start petting your rabbit when they approach you.

How to pet your rabbit

Rabbits prefer to be stroked on the top of their heads and behind their ears. Many rabbits also like it when you pet them on the cheeks and when you pet them in long strokes down their back. Contrary to popular belief, rabbits don't usually mind so much when you touch their ears too.

Try giving your rabbit some nice head and back massages. Usually rabbits will love this so much that they sink into the ground and start purring by grinding their teeth.

Most rabbits do not like it when you pet their feet, especially their hind feet. Their tail and butt are usually off limits too. Rabbits often don't like it when people touch them on their stomach or underneath their abdomen either, but this is an area that you may want to slowly desensitize on your rabbit so they won't make as much of a fuss when you need to pick them up.

how to pick up a rabbit

Pick up a rabbit by placing one hand under their chest and the other hand on their bottom.

How to pick up your rabbit

Most rabbits don't like to be picked up. Since rabbits are prey animals, their main defense against predators is their ability to run away. They'll often get scared when they get picked up because they feel trapped. If anything bad were to suddenly happen, they wouldn't be able to run away, so rabbits prefer it when they have their feet on the ground.

For this reason, when interacting with your rabbit on a daily basis, it's best not to pick them up very often. If you pick up your rabbit everytime you play with them, they'll start to associate you with the fear of being held and they will run away from you.

But there are times when you have to pick your rabbit up. Whether it be when you clip their nails, or to keep them out of a dangerous place. So it is best to occasionally practice picking your rabbit up, so you know you can handle them properly.

To pick your rabbit up, place one hand on their bottom and one on their chest behind their front feet. Gently lift them up and hold them in your arms or against your chest. Always make sure their backside is supported. Rabbits have relatively weak spines. If held incorrectly they can kick and hurt their back.

Basic Rabbit body language

Rabbit body language is unique. They use their ears, tail, nose, and body position to tell us exactly what they mean. All we have to do is learn the behavioral signs and pay attention.

Some basic rabbit behaviors you might notice as you socialize with your rabbit:

Binky: A jump and twist in the air, usually accompanied with some zooming around the room. This means that your rabbit is very happy.

Cautious/Curious: They will slowly approach an object of interest on tiptoe with their ears forward and tail down. They might stretch out as far as they can with their back feet, staying in the same place so they'll be ready to make a dash for it if they get scared.

Chinning: The rabbit will rub their chin against an object to claim it as their own. Rabbits have scent glands under their chins, so this spreads their scent around and lets any other rabbits know that this is your rabbit's territory.

Flop: Flopping is when rabbits throw themselves onto their side and sleep. It can be startling if you're not used to it, because it kind of looks like the rabbit is dead, but it

actually means your rabbit feels very safe.

Loaf: Loafing is when your rabbit fluffs up into a ball and looks like a loaf of bread. This is generally a comfortable position for rabbits and they'll often sleep in this position, especially in the colder months.

Periscope: This is when your rabbit stands on her hind legs, it means she is curious and is trying to get a better vantage point. This is another one of those adorable rabbit behaviors that is just too irresistible. And your rabbit knows it! This is how she begs for treats.

Purring: if you listen very closely when you pet your rabbit, you might hear her softly grinding her teeth together. And if you put your hand on top of her head, you'll be able to feel a slight vibration. This is what rabbits do when they are happy and content. It means the same thing as a cat's purring.

Territorial/Aggressive: Rabbits are usually very gentle creatures, especially if they have been spayed or neutered. If a rabbit is displaying aggressive behavior, they will pull their ears back and growl at you to warn you. But it's very rare for a rabbit to attack anyone out of the blue.

Thump: when your rabbit thumps their strong hind legs against the ground. It might even be loud enough to wake you up at night. This means that your rabbit senses danger or is very upset with something you did.

common rabbit behaviors

Common rabbit behaviors

Children and rabbits

If you have kids who really want a turn to play with the bunny, then it's important to show them how to respect your rabbit. Supervise your child as you teach them how to gently pet them. If the rabbit runs away, take it as a chance to teach your child to be patient and not to chase after the bunny.

person sitting with a rabbit

spend some time with your rabbit on the floor.

Your rabbit might need a little time to trust you

Rabbits are incredibly friendly and playful creatures, but they also get scared very easily. Rabbits are prey animals, and their best defense in any situation is running away. So don't be surprised if your new rabbit runs away and hides from you at first. If you give your rabbit the time and space they need to warm up to you, you'll have a spunky little fluffer whizzing around you in no time.

Here are a few quick tips to help your rabbit trust you sooner:

Sit on the floor quietly near your rabbit and let him approach you. You'll have to be patient with this. Sooner or later, your rabbit will get curious and come up to you.

Don't pick up your rabbit unless you have to (e.g. put him into a carrier, cut his nails, etc.). Most rabbits don't like to be held, so they'll be more likely to run away if they think you will pick them up every time you come near.

Give your rabbit some treats (in moderation). You don't want to give him too many treats, since that's bad for his digestion, but it's okay to bribe your rabbit a little bit. Raisins tend to be a big hit with most of the rabbits I work with.

Part 8: How to tell if your rabbit is sick

Rabbits are prey animals so they have a tendency to hide their weaknesses. It's often difficult to tell if a rabbit is sick unless they are very sick, so you don't want to wait for those more obvious signs.

The symptoms you should be aware of so you can get your rabbit to the vet as soon as possible:

Lack of appetite, especially if they're not interested in their favorite treats

Lack of energy

Small or deformed poops

Not pooping (this is an emergency situation)

Sitting in a hunched position

A change in previously good litter box habits

A bloated looking belly

Part 9: Finding a rabbit veterinarian

Rabbit biology is very different from a cat or dog, so you need to find a veterinarian that specializes in rabbits. Usually the terms you want to look for are 'small animal veterinarian' or 'exotic animal veterinarian.' But you should always double check to make sure this vet has experience with rabbits. The House Rabbit Society has a useful list of rabbit vets across the US and even some international rabbit veterinarians.

As with any pet, it's a good idea to bring your rabbit in for a basic check-up when your bunny first comes home with you. After that, you only have to bring your rabbit in once a year for their annual exam, unless your rabbit gets sick. If you notice your rabbit not eating or pooping for more than 12 hours, that's a sign that you need to get to a vet right away.

Spay or neuter your rabbit

If your rabbit has not been spayed or neutered, you'll want to make sure you get that taken care of as soon as you can. If your rabbit is young, you'll have to wait for sexual maturity, which is about six months for female rabbits and 4 months for male rabbits. An unaltered rabbit will develop a number of health and behavioral problems. It's much better for your rabbit's happiness and health in the long run if you get them fixed as soon as possible.

Adopt a rabbit

If you haven't already brought a rabbit home, then you still have the choice to adopt a rabbit instead of buying one from a pet store or breeder. Many shelters do have rabbits, and in my experience the rabbits have a much longer stay in the shelter system than cats and dogs.

I work with abandoned shelter bunnies, and I know these little fluff balls are just waiting

for a safe home where they can be happy bunnies forever. Many of them have even already been altered and litter trained, so it will be a little less work for you. So give a bun a second chance and rescue a rabbit today!

Are Rabbits Good Pets? (Why You Should Get a Rabbit)

Written by Amy Pratt in Care,Facts

8 reasons rabbits are the best pets

Rabbits have become increasingly popular as house pets around the globe. Their small size, quiet nature, and adorable personalities make them an appealing choice for many. While rabbits are not the right pet for everyone (I'll get to that in a different post), they are still excellent pets for anyone who is willing to learn about how to care for rabbits.

Learn more about rabbits and their unique care requirements

If you're thinking about getting a rabbit, I want to encourage you to check out your local animal shelter. I've been volunteering with rescue rabbits for almost 10 years now and I can say there are always rabbits in need of loving homes!

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rabbit in a litter box next to a hay feeder

Tip: Moving the hay near the box can encourage your rabbit to use the litter box more.

1. Rabbits can be litter trained

Rabbits can indeed be litter trained effectively. Similar to cats, rabbits have a natural inclination to use a specific spot for their bathroom needs. While not quite as easy to litter train as cats, with a little bit of time and patience most rabbits will learn to use a litter box, making it easy to clean up after them.

Once you bring a bunny home, they will typically choose a corner to use as their bathroom, so the rest of their enclosure stays clean. Place the litter box in your rabbit's preferred corner so that your rabbit will use it.

Some rabbits will need a little extra encouragement, so don't be surprised if your new rabbit takes a little longer with their litter training. Use my bunny litter training tips to help you get started.

read with your rabbit

Rabbits are easily scared of loud sounds. Try reading a book or some other quiet activity while you sit on the floor with your rabbit.

2. Rabbits don't make too much noise

Rabbits are generally quiet pets. Unlike dogs that bark loudly or cats that meow to annoy you. They don't even squeak loudly, like guinea pigs. Rabbits produce minimal noise, making them ideal if you prefer a quieter environment.

Rabbits do make some sounds, but most of them are extremely quiet. The most common sound you'll hear is a soft grinding of their teeth (a sign of contentment), or gentle humming sounds when they're happy.

Sometimes, rabbits may thump their hind legs when they are scared, or they can make some noticeable noises digging into cardboard, but overall they are quite quiet pets.

3. Rabbits are an eco friendly pet

Compared to other household pets, like cats or dogs, rabbits are actually quite eco friendly. They can help reduce household organic waste by consuming vegetable scraps and leftovers. For instance, instead of discarding carrot tops or lettuce leaves, you can feed them to your rabbit, minimizing food waste.

Since rabbits are herbivores, their diet consists entirely of plant-based materials. This reduces the carbon footprint associated with pet food production, especially compared

to meat-based pet foods needed for dogs and cats.

Furthermore, rabbit poop is an excellent organic fertilizer for gardens. Unlike some other types of animal manure, rabbit droppings don't spread disease. They don't even need to be composted before use. If you're a gardener, rabbit poop is rich in nitrogen and other nutrients and can benefit your plants and reduce your reliance on commercial fertilizers.

person sitting with a rabbit

Spending some time with your rabbit inside can keep them from getting lonely or depressed.

4. Rabbits have adorable personalities

Domestic rabbits are actually extremely social animals. They enjoy human interaction and develop a bond with their people, making them excellent companion animals.

Their personalities don't stop with friendliness though. Rabbits are also curious creatures who love exploring and interacting with their surroundings. They are quite playful and like to bounce around open spaces, such as your living room, and play with toys, boxes, and tunnels.

5. Rabbits don't usually smell

Rabbits are generally clean animals. They spend a lot of their time grooming themselves, much like cats. This constant grooming helps keep their fur free of odors. Unlike many other animals, rabbit poop does not have a significant odor either.

That being said, rabbit urine can smell if given the chance to build up. Regularly cleaning their enclosure and litter box can do a lot to prevent these smells. A quick clean every few days and a deeper clean every 1-2 weeks is recommended.

If you do notice a strong odor, it may indicate a health issue. For instance, dental

problems, infections, or digestive issues can all cause smells. Regular vet check-ups help in catching these issues early.

6. Rabbits have a longer life expectancy than you think

Many people don't want to get a rabbit because they are afraid they will become attached to a pet who will die in just a few years. This is not the case with rabbits. Contrary to popular belief, domestic rabbits will can live to about 8 to 12 years on average.

Obviously, factors such as a healthy diet, adequate exercise, good care, and pure luck in avoiding illness all play a role in any specific rabbit's lifespan. But you can expect to spend more than just a few years loving and caring for a companion rabbit.

where do rabbits like to be pet

The best places to pet a rabbit are their forehead and behind their ears. The cheeks and strokes down their backs are also good spots. But rabbits dislike being pet on their bottom, feet, chin, and underside.

7. Rabbits are soft and love being petted

Pet rabbits are known for their incredibly soft fur. Their fur comes in a variety of textures, ranging from velvety Rex coats to the fluffy Angora type, but overall rabbit fur is softer than most cats and dogs.

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Most rabbits also enjoy being petted if they feel safe and comfortable. Gently stroking a rabbit's head or cheeks can be calming for them and creates a wonderful bonding

opportunity. Rabbits might show their enjoyment by nudging your hand for more pets, licking you, or simply relaxing and closing their eyes.

Not all rabbits enjoy being petted in the same way. While many love head scratches, some might prefer gentle strokes along their back. Observing your rabbit's body language can help you understand their preferences better.

bunny sitting by a couch

Spend time with your rabbit and they will become a part of your family. Just like a cat or a dog!

8. Rabbits can live inside just like dogs and cats

Rabbits can be indoor pets who free roam around your house the same way cats and dogs do. This helps them become more like companion pets. Think of them as members of the family who provide love and comfort, instead of just a cage pet.

Even if you only have a small apartment, it's probably the perfect size for living with a rabbit (they are great apartment pets). Just be sure to rabbit proof to make sure your rabbit can't chew on anything they are not supposed to (learn more about rabbit proofing).

In fact, it's generally better for rabbits to live indoors instead of outside. Not only is extreme weather (especially heat) dangerous for rabbits, but they are also more likely to catch some kind of parasite (such as ticks, fleas, or mites) outside, or come into contact with dangerous predators (such as raccoons, dogs, cats, coyotes, hawks, etc.).

Bring yourself down to their level so that you're no longer towering over your rabbit. You can sit with a book or your phone and just hang out on the floor with your rabbit. The goal isn't to force your rabbit to come up to you and interact, but to give them the option to. By sitting quietly on the floor in a place your rabbit has access to, they will eventually get curious and come up to you all on their own.

If your rabbit is very shy, they might not come up to you at all the first couple of times you hang out with them, and that's okay. They'll still be getting used to your presence little by little. Over time, they'll learn that you're not a scary giant coming to get them. If you make it a habit to sit with your rabbit for some quality time every day, your bond will strengthen.

gentle rabbits

Rabbits are very gentle pets and enjoy spending time with you and being pet.

8. Let your rabbit come to you

Instead of forcing your rabbit into an interaction, you need to let them choose to come to you so you can gain their trust. Rabbits are prey animals, and that means they'll start to feel very scared if they feel cornered. Forcing your rabbit to interact with you, or chasing them until they have nowhere to run, are quick ways to make a rabbit scared and distrustful.

When you sit somewhere on your rabbit's level and allow them to approach you in their own time, it builds trust. Your rabbit will learn that you are not so scary. They'll be more likely to be brave and approach you again in the future. Having some small treats with you to reward your rabbit's curiosity can also help reinforce the behavior.

rabbit eat greens

Try to give your rabbit their food at the same time every day to get them used to a daily routine.

9. Have a daily routine

Rabbits thrive with the predictability of a routine. Because rabbits are prey animals, anything unexpected can easily put them on the alert. To help them feel safe and comfortable in their environment, you'll want to adopt a daily routine or schedule. A rabbit that feels safe in their surroundings will also be braver and more likely to spend time with you and other members of the household.

clicker training a rabbit

You can clicker train a rabbit and train them to give you high fives.

10. Train your rabbit

It can be really adorable to teach a rabbit some cute tricks, but the real value of training a bunny is in the bond it creates between you and your rabbit. Training means you are spending quality time with each other. Your rabbit is using their brain to get a yummy treat and trusting that you will eventually give it to them. You are getting intimately familiar with your rabbit's body language to help them figure out how to do the trick.

By training your rabbit you are not only teaching them cool tricks, but you're also teaching them to trust you. Your rabbit will be excited to spend time with you, knowing they'll have fun exercising their brain and figuring out how to get treats.

11. Avoid picking up or cornering your rabbit

Rabbits are prey animals, which means they survived in the wild by being ready to run and hide at any second. This means that anything you do that makes a rabbit feel trapped will instantly make them trust you less. To bond with your rabbit, you want to avoid cornering them or picking them up whenever possible.

Whenever you are interacting with your rabbit, you want to make sure that they have an escape route. This could mean giving your rabbit a place to hide, or simply leaving space so they can run away around you. A cornered rabbit might even lash out aggressively by biting or scratching. Rabbits will be more likely to confidently approach you and bond with you if they feel they have a choice in the interaction.

Most rabbits absolutely hate to be held. When rabbits are held in someone's arms, they no longer have the ability to run away. They may even feel that they have been caught by a big predator. If you pick your rabbit up all the time, they will start to associate you with that feeling of being trapped and scared. Rabbits will avoid anyone who comes and tries to pick them up all the time.

rabbit staring at delicious berries

Rabbits love sweet fruit, like raspberries and strawberries. Don't give them too much though, since that could upset their sensitive stomachs.

12. Give your rabbit treats (but not too much!)

Treats are a great way to gain the favor of a rabbit. Almost every rabbit I've interacted with had some kind of treat that they loved. It was just a matter of finding their special treat that will motivate them.

If you're having trouble finding a treat your rabbit loves, try this sampler pack from my friends at Small Pet Select. They have lots of different kinds of healthy treats so there's sure to be a kind that your rabbit will love. Once you know what your rabbit likes, you can use it to teach them to associate you with good and yummy things. (Use the code BUNNYLADY to get 15% off your first purchase at Small Pet Select)

Giving a shy rabbit a treat when they approach you is a form of reward training. You give them positive reinforcement for their curious and brave behavior. You'll help your rabbit associate you with getting their favorite treat, making it more likely your rabbit will approach you again in the future. Over time, your rabbit will no longer hesitate. They'll come up to you right away because they know that only good things come from you.

petting a rabbit

be patient and slowly start petting your rabbit when they approach you.

13. Pet your rabbit

Most rabbits really enjoy being pet. Some even enjoy getting a good massage more than they like to get treats! Teaching your rabbit to not be afraid of hands and petting them is an excellent way to bond with your rabbit.

Young rabbits seem to be the exception to this, but not because they don't enjoy being pet. Instead, it's because they just have too much energy to sit still. As they get older, rabbits will inevitably start to mellow out and enjoy being pet more, though.

Many rabbits will very readily accept being pet and will quickly learn to settle down while you give them a nice massage. However, sometimes rabbits will be afraid of hands at first and flinch away from any hands that come toward them.

In my experience, some of the rabbits who enjoy being pet the most are the ones who were completely afraid of it when I first met them. My Elusive, for example, was one of those rabbits. She would come up to me, snatch a treat and run away as soon as I tried to pet her. But now she's turned into a bunny who demands petting all day long.

14. Spay or neuter your rabbit

If your young rabbit is reaching maturity, it may seem like they suddenly hate everyone. As many sweet bunnies reach adolescence, they develop some territorial and aggressive rabbit behaviors that make it difficult to befriend your rabbit.

At this point, it will be important to bring your bunny to a rabbit-savvy veterinarian to be spayed or neutered. This will solve many of the behavioral issues that cause a rabbit to act out, making it much easier for you and your rabbit to bond.

Getting a rabbit spayed or neutered also solves many health issues that are common in unaltered rabbits. Female rabbits, for example, have a very high chance of developing uterine cancer by the time they are 6 years old. That's only about half the average lifespan of a rabbit. It's important to get your rabbit fixed to give the best chance at a long and healthy life.

read with your rabbit

Rabbits are easily scared of loud sounds. Try reading a book or some other quiet activity while you sit on the floor with your rabbit.

15. Keep quiet around your bunny

Rabbits can be easily startled by loud noises. They are unlikely to approach anyone who is making a lot of noise and will continue to hide away until the loud noise goes away.

You don't need to be completely silent around your rabbit, but keep the noises you make to a minimum. Speak in a soft and gentle voice. You can even consider singing or humming softly around your rabbit.

When sitting with your rabbit, you'll also want to pick quiet activities to keep you occupied while they decide whether or not to approach you. Reading a book can be a great quiet activity. If you're scrolling through your phone or playing a game, make sure to use headphones for anything that will generate noise. If you're not using a noisy app, it's still a good idea to turn the volume on your phone off. Even the notification beeps can be enough to startle a rabbit sometimes.

What to Expect When Adopting a Rabbit

Written by Amy Pratt in Care

how to adopt a rabbit

Other than cats and dogs, rabbits are the most common animal that is surrendered to animal shelters. There are many, many rabbits in the adoption and foster care system that are looking for loving new homes. As someone who volunteers with rabbits and other small animals at my local animal shelter, I love seeing these sweet bunnies find their forever homes.

When choosing to adopt a rabbit, you'll want to first meet your rabbit and learn about their personality from the staff and volunteers at the animal shelter. Most shelters will also have an application and interview process where they make sure you have information about rabbit care and the health history of your new bunny.

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adopt BABY RABBITS

Shelters will often even have young rabbits available from accidental litters of unwanted baby bunnies.

Step 1: Where to find animal shelters that have rabbits

Many animal shelters and rescue organizations will only have cats and dogs up for adoption. This can make the first step of finding rabbits to adopt a bit more difficult. Despite that, there are many, many shelters that do take in a wide variety of other animals (I've seen everything from turtles to chinchillas).

The first place to look is on the websites of any local animal shelters. They will often have all available animals listed on their website to help potential adopters find their new pets. If your local shelter is owned by the state or local municipality, they are more likely to have a wide variety of animals for adoption.

You can also use online resources to help you. Many rescue organizations will list their available animals on places such as Petfinder.com, where it is a lot easier to search for animals based on species. If you are living in the US, you may also be able to find available rabbits through the House Rabbit Society. They are the number one association in the United States for rabbit rescue and education.

petting a rabbit

Be patient and wait to start petting a rabbit until they approach you.

Step 2: Meeting the rabbit

After you find a place where rabbits are available for adoption, you'll want to go and meet the rabbit. This is a chance for you to get an idea of the rabbit's personality so that you can see if they'll be a good fit for your lifestyle. You can see how shy the rabbit is if they have any tendency toward aggression, or how active (and likely to get into mischief) they are.

Remember, it's not all about what the rabbit looks like. Many rabbits that end up in the shelter system have come from negligent homes. Some rabbits that have newly arrived have dirt and urine stains on their fur, giving them a more disheveled appearance.

This doesn't mean they are a dirty rabbit. Over time, the stained fur will shed off and a new shiny coat will grow.

When meeting a rabbit for such a short amount of time, it's impossible to get a complete idea of their personality. You'll also want to ask the staff, volunteers, or foster parents about their experiences with the rabbit. This is often the best source of information you can get about your potential new pet.

For example, as a volunteer, I am able to tell potential adopters that a rabbit who is shy at first will be an absolute lovebug once you sit with them for five minutes. You'll also be able to get information on which rabbits have already been litter trained and even what kind of treats are their favorites.

Step 3: The adoption application and interview

The process for adopting a pet rabbit will be different depending on where you go. Some places make it easier than others to bring a rabbit home, but almost all animal shelters and rescue organizations will have some sort of application process that you'll need to go through.

The organizations that I have worked with try to make the process easy for potential adopters. They have the philosophy that people want the best for their pets and will take good care of their rabbits if they are given the information and resources that they need. For these organizations, there is a simple interview process where they give you information about rabbit care, resources for help that are available in the community, and the history of the specific animal you are adopting.

Other organizations have different models for adopting animals. These rescue centers focus first and foremost on making sure the animal is going to a caring and responsible home. They may ask for photos of the enclosure you intend to keep your rabbit in, to make sure you have the proper supplies. Some may even insist on a home visit to

ensure you have everything set up for success.

Many organizations will also check into any prior pet history. They'll ask for the contact information of your veterinarian so the rescue can confirm that you've taken good care of pets in the past. You'll want to check the application procedures of whatever organization you are getting your rabbit from so that you can be prepared with any information that you need.

Adoption fees

Most organizations will have a small adoption fee as part of their adoption procedures. This fee helps to cover the expenses of the animals while they are living in the shelter. It also helps to cover the cost of any spaying and neutering surgery or other medical expenses.

Usually, this fee is very small, especially for small animals like rabbits. When I brought my last rabbit home, the fee was only \$35, and I wouldn't expect it to be more than about \$50 from your average animal shelter.

Spaying and neutering

It is very important for rabbits to be spayed or neutered. This can prevent a number of behavioral issues and some severe health problems. The good news is that many animal shelters and rescue organizations will have already neutered the animals that they are adopting out. This will save you a lot of money since you won't have to pay for the surgery yourself.

It's important to ask to make sure that your shelter spays and neuters their rabbits though. Shelters that don't specialize in rabbits might not be able to perform this procedure, so you will need to consider it into your expenses when adopting a rabbit.

Step 4: Find a rabbit veterinarian

Rabbit anatomy and health are very different from cats and dogs. For this reason, you'll need to find a veterinarian that specializes in rabbits. These veterinarians may be listed as Small Animal Veterinarians or Exotic Animal Veterinarians. If you need help finding a veterinarian in your area, check out my resources page where I have links to some rabbit care resources in the US and the UK.

Once you find a veterinarian, you'll want to make sure you bring your rabbit in for an initial check-up. This will help to check for any health problems that may have arisen from your rabbit's previous life and give you a chance to get a baseline for your rabbit's general health.

Afterward, you'll want to make a visit to the vet every year for an annual checkup to help make sure your rabbit stays in good health. It's also good to have a relationship with a veterinarian, so you can have their office on call if you ever do run into an emergency situation.

Choosing the Best Enclosure for House Rabbits

Written by Amy Pratt in Care

get the right home base for your bunny

Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation out there about what kind of enclosure a rabbit needs. You'll see pet stores marketing cages and hutches that are much too small, simply because they can sell these for a high price. Instead, the best kind of cage for rabbits is actually a pet playpen. This type of enclosure gives your rabbit more space, is cheaper, and securely keeps your rabbit out of trouble.

Important: This post contains affiliate links. As an associate to Amazon, Small Pet Select, and Chewy.com, I earn a small commission from qualifying purchases.

drawing of a rabbit playpen

I always recommend a pet exercise pen as your rabbit's enclosure. This type of habitat gives your rabbit a lot of space and it's easier to clean.

A pet playpen is the best enclosure for rabbits

A rabbit playpen is a freestanding and collapsible fence that you can use as an enclosure. It gives you a lot of flexibility for how you shape the enclosure, so it will fit into unusual spaces if necessary. A pen also more convenient, makes cleanup a lot easier, and it's pretty easy to get a second playpen and connect it to the first if you want to expand your rabbit's living area.

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Why are pet playpens the best option for rabbit cages?

They are larger than cages marketed for rabbits. Most cages that are sold and marketed toward rabbits are much too small to be a comfortable living space. It would be like living in a space the size of your bathroom. Rabbits are active animals that are healthiest when they have space to hop around and play. A standard size pet playpen will give your rabbit about 16 square feet of space

They are cheaper. Most of the cheaper cages that are marketed toward rabbits will cost somewhere in the area of \$100. Pet playpens, on the other hand, will cost you somewhere around \$50.

Pens are easier to clean. Instead of trying to take the cage apart and scrub it down to make sure it stays clean, all you have to do is sweep and vacuum.

Playpens are more versatile. Since a pet playpen is made up of eight individual panels, it can easily be shifted around into different shapes that can fit into just about any space in your home.

It's easier to expand and move. If you plan on getting more rabbits later on or just want to expand your rabbits space, it's a lot easier and cheaper to simply connect two playpens together than to purchase a whole new larger cage. It's also more portable

since it can be easily collapsed into a 2' by 4' rectangle.

Flooring in rabbit pens

The one downside to getting a pen instead of a cage is that it doesn't come with built-in flooring. Depending on the type of floors you have, you will need to get an area rug or mat to go with it. Rabbit paws don't do so well with slick floors, so you'll have to cover up any hardwood or tile floors. Or if your rabbit likes to dig into the carpet, you may want to cover it up with a cheaper area rug. Try getting an area rug made of natural fibers (such as seagrass) so that you don't have to worry if your rabbit chews on it.

Taking size of the rabbit enclosure into consideration

The most important consideration when choosing the right rabbit cage is the size of the enclosure. It shouldn't be so cramped that your rabbit just can't wait to get out. Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all hutch. Full-size rabbits can vary from dwarfs that weigh in at around 2lbs to some flemish giant rabbits that can weigh more than 25lbs!

A correctly sized enclosure will give your rabbit room for three to four hops along the length of their enclosure. The width should be at least one hop length, and the rabbit should be able to stand all the way up on their hind legs without bumping their head against the top.

Remember this is a minimum size. You can always go bigger! In fact, I'm sure you'll find that the more space you give your rabbit, the happier they are and the less likely they are to keep you up all night rattling the sides of their enclosure.

What if you already have an enclosure that is too small?

Your rabbit might already be attached to the cage they have, so moving to a completely new enclosure could be a little stressful for both of you. The best solution is

to get a rabbit playpen and attach it to the outside of the cage. This will increase the space your rabbit has by giving them something like a front yard that they can hop around in.

infographic showing a pen connected to a cage

If you have a cage that's too small, you can get a pet exercise pen and attach it to the original cage using zip ties.

How to provide enough exercise space

In addition to the space in their enclosure, rabbits need time in a larger area to get exercise. For most rabbit caretakers, you won't need any additional fencing to create an exercise enclosure for your rabbit. A room in your house will do just fine.

You'll want to make sure you bunny-proof the exercise area thoroughly, so your rabbit can't get at any wires or chew on anything dangerous. If you haven't fully bunny-proofed the room, make sure to supervise your rabbit closely. They can be little troublemakers if they want to be.

It's best to give a rabbit at least four hours of exercise a day, but more is definitely better. This doesn't have to be all in one go. For example, let your rabbit out for a couple hours in the morning, and then again for a couple hours in the evening. Rabbits are most active in the morning around dawn and in the evening around dusk, so it's best if you can let them out to exercise around one (or both) of these times.

Free roaming a rabbit

Instead of keeping your rabbit in an enclosure, you can choose to allow them free access to your home, similar to the way we keep cats and dogs.

If you are bringing your rabbit home for the first time, you want to make sure to keep a close eye on them for the first few weeks while you let them roam. Keep them in an enclosure whenever you can't watch them.

This will give you the chance to learn their habits and quirks, and figure out just what kind of trouble they like to get into while you fully bunny-proof your house. You can find their favorite hiding places, figure out what furniture needs to be moved, which wires need to be covered, or where barriers need to be put up to make sure important and dangerous objects are outside your rabbit's reach.

15+ Supplies Everyone With a Rabbit Should Have

Written by Amy Pratt in Care

15+ supplies ever rabbit needs

Bringing a rabbit into your home is an exciting adventure, but it comes with responsibilities. Proper care requires having the right supplies on hand. From housing to nutrition, grooming to entertainment, rabbits have specific needs that must be met to maintain their health and happiness.

The items on this form the foundation of rabbit care, allowing you to provide a comfortable and enriching environment. If you are a new rabbit caretaker, I recommend stocking up on the necessary supplies before bringing your rabbit home.

You'll be better prepared to meet their needs from day one. This proactive approach sets the stage for a positive relationship with your new pet and helps prevent common issues that can arise from inadequate care or preparation.

rabbit playpen

I always recommend using a pet exercise pen for your rabbit's enclosure. This gives your rabbit a lot of space and it's a lot easier to clean.

1. A pet playpen

Instead of purchasing an expensive rabbit cage or hutch, I recommend getting a pet playpen for your rabbit's enclosure. Most of the cages that are marketed towards rabbits are actually much too small for them. They'll lead to an unhappy rabbit who loudly rattles on the cage bars and will never want to go back into their enclosure after exercise time.

A rabbit playpen, on the other hand, is large enough to give rabbits space to hop around and sprawl out. They are also much easier to clean. All you need to do is move the gates aside and run the vacuum. The best part is that this type of enclosure is one of the cheapest options out there. Instead of paying hundreds for a rabbit cage or hutch, you can usually get a playpen for somewhere around \$50 (check out the current price).

large litter box vs. small corner litter box

Avoid getting the small corner litter boxes that are marketed towards rabbits. Instead get a large cat litter box that your rabbit can fit inside.

2. A cat litter box

To encourage your rabbit to use their litter box, you'll want to make sure you get them a box that's large enough for them to fit in. Those small corner litter boxes are not big enough to be comfortable for rabbits and many will ignore those little boxes altogether. Instead, get a large cat litter box.

lip vs non-lip bowls

Bowls with a lip give rabbits a teeth-hold making it easier to flip the bowl. Instead get a ceramic or heavy bowl with straight sides.

3. A water bowl

A lot of rabbits like to play with their food and water bowls by grabbing onto the edge and flipping them over. This can end up making a pretty big mess, so it's best to try to find heavy ceramic bowls to use for your rabbit so that they can't be flipped.

A water bowl is better for rabbits than a water bottle. Bowls are a more natural way for rabbits to drink and encourage rabbits to stay better hydrated.

rabbit in a litter box next to a hay feeder

Tip: Moving the hay near the box can encourage your rabbit to use the litter box more.

4. A hay rack

I used to use a hay bin for my rabbit, but I found that it was easier for me to put the hay directly into the litter box instead. This works for me because my rabbit only uses one end of the litter box to do her business, so I could put the hay on the other end and it would stay mostly clean.

If you decide you want to get a hay bin, get one that has large holes for your rabbit to pull the hay out of. Something like this hanging hay bin is best for keeping your rabbit's hay clean and also making it easily available.

5. Simethicone gas drops

Rabbits have a sensitive digestive system and can suffer from a gas build-up. To help ease your rabbit's discomfort and prevent GI stasis, it's a good idea to have simethicone on hand, also known as infant gas drops. This is sold in most grocery or drug stores in the baby aisle.

If you notice your rabbit is sitting uncomfortably, pressing their belly onto the floor, they may be suffering from gas. Try to give them 1 mL of the simethicone formula. If there is no improvement over the next couple of hours, and your rabbit has not been eating or pooping, then you should treat it as an emergency situation and get your rabbit to the vet immediately.

[Learn more about GI Stasis in rabbits](#)

DIY pet safe cleaner

To make a pet-safe cleaner, simply add equal amount of water and vinegar to a spray bottle and shake it to blend them together.

6. Vinegar

Inevitably, you will have to clean up messes around your rabbit. To avoid your rabbit potentially licking up or breathing in harmful chemicals, you'll want to have a pet-safe cleaning spray on hand. Vinegar is one of the safest cleaning products you can use. Mix a cup of white vinegar with a cup of water. Shake them together in a spray bottle and use it to clean up messes in a completely pet safe way.

If you don't want to bother with vinegar (maybe you can't stand the smell), you can get a pet safe cleaning solution instead. My current favorite is one called Fizzion, but I've also heard good things about Puracy brand cleaning sprays too.

7. Timothy hay

Hay is the most important part of your rabbit's diet. You want to make sure they have hay available for munching all day long. Timothy hay is best for adult rabbits, since it is rougher and will help grind down a rabbit's teeth to keep them from overgrowing. Rabbits that are 6 months or younger should get alfalfa hay (learn more about a young rabbit diet).

You can get hay at a pet store (and if you do I recommend getting Oxbow brand hay), but I actually prefer to get hay for my rabbits online at Small Pet Select. This is an excellent online store that I always trust to have high-quality hay. It's greener and fresher than what you'll find on the pet store shelves making it much more enticing for rabbits to eat. And you can get 15% off your first order if you use the code BUNNYLADY at checkout!

8. Healthy pellets

Pellets should only be a small part of a rabbit's diet. They really only need about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of pellets per day. And it's completely okay, even expected, that they'll run out before the day is over. Instead of having a dish with pellets always available to rabbits, it's much healthier for them to be munching on hay all day.

I recommend getting Oxbow Garden Select pellets for your rabbit. This is a brand that is known for having high-quality food that has a good balance of fiber and nutrients. My rabbits love eating them so much that I use them as healthy treats too.

9. A fridge with fresh greens

Rabbits need one to two cups of fresh leafy greens on a daily basis. You can get these at your local supermarket, farmers market, or even by keeping a garden in your backyard. Most leafy greens are safe for rabbits, but you do want to avoid iceberg

lettuce (other types of lettuce are fine). Iceberg has a small amount of a chemical called lactucarium that can build up in a rabbit's system over time and cause health problems.

pine and cedar shavings

Pine and cedar shavings should be avoided for use in bedding or litter for rabbits. They are toxic and can lead to liver complications.

10. Rabbit-safe litter

Clumping cat litter is NOT safe to use with bunnies. Rabbits will often eat pieces of their litter, and it can clump up in their stomach and cause a dangerous blockage. Instead, get a paper-based litter or a wood-pellet based litter (NOT wood shavings). I like to use Small Pet Select because it's an eco friendly recycled paper litter that's safe for rabbits and doesn't contain baking soda like most other brands, and it does a good job at controlling the smell from rabbit urine.

bunny proof your home

Rabbits love to chew on wires, so make sure yours are covered or blocked off.

11. Cord covers

Rabbits like to chew on wires and run the risk of getting electrocuted if they bite into a live wire. To protect your rabbit (and your chargers) you'll want to get split loom wire covering so your rabbit won't be able to do any damage.

12. Cardboard boxes

Cardboard is a versatile tool that can be used for rabbit proofing and as a toy for rabbits. You can make a lot of your own DIY toys using toilet paper tubes and cardboard boxes, or flatten the boxes to use as mats to protect your carpets and flooring.

Try making these DIY toys for your rabbit, or if you need more ideas try out these toys too!

carrier behind the back passenger seat

The safest place to put a standard carrier is on the floor in back of the passenger or driver's seat.

13. A pet carrier

You might receive a small cardboard carrier when you first bring your rabbit home, but you'll want a more permanent carrier for when you need to take trips to the vet or travel with your rabbit. Most cat carriers are a good size for rabbits.

The safest carriers are ones that have been crash tested. For that reason, I recommend SleepyPod pet carriers (learn more about why I recommend this carrier for pet safety).

However, it is quite expensive. So if you need to go with a cheaper option, I recommend a sturdy plastic carrier that opens at the top because these can make it easier to get a rabbit inside. When traveling in the car with one of these carriers, place it on the ground in back of the passenger or driver's seat for safety.

rabbit nail clippers

To clip your rabbit nails you need nail clippers. You can use either the spring loaded clippers or the smaller clippers for more control.

14. Nail clippers

Rabbits need to have their nails clipped about every 2-3 months. If you plan on clipping their nails yourself, you'll need to have a pair of nail clippers available. I prefer to use the manual nail clippers since they give me more control, but some people prefer to use the spring-loaded nail clippers instead.

For more information on how to clip your rabbit's nails at home, check out this article.

15. Critical Care

Critical care is an emergency food formula for your rabbit. Rabbit health depends on the constant movement of their digestive system. If they stop eating for long periods of time, they may need to be syringe fed this Critical Care formula.

Most of the time, your veterinary office will have packages of critical care on hand for

you to purchase when your rabbit has an emergency. However, my vet recommended I always have a bag at home just in case. Sometimes there is a shortage in supply, and it's best to be prepared.

Learn more about critical care in this article

rabbit in a hidey house

Give your rabbit a place to hide so they can feel safe.

16. A Hiding Spot

Rabbits are prey animals, which means they survive in the wild by finding places to run and hide. For our pet rabbits, this means they'll feel a lot safer and more comfortable if you give them a hiding house.

You can get nice-looking hiding houses online made of wood or woven hay. I love the castle pieces from Small Pet Select (and so do my rabbits!), but even a simple cardboard box is good enough.

Recommended Products and Brands

Important: This post contains affiliate links. As an associate to Amazon, Small Pet Select, and Chewy.com, I earn a small commission from qualifying purchases.

Food

The two brands that I use when getting food for my rabbit are Oxbow and Small Pet Select. These both have high quality rabbit products and are companies that care about the health of our small animals. Oxbow products can be found online and in most pet stores. Small Pet Select is an online store that specializes in selling products for small animals, such as rabbits and guinea pigs. If you use the code BUNNYLADY at checkout, you can get 15% off your first order.

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Hay: For most rabbits I recommend getting Second Cutting Timothy Hay from Small Pet Select (this is what I get for my bunnies). If you have a particularly picky rabbit then you may want to go for the Third Cutting Timothy Hay instead since this tends to be a little softer for rabbits to eat.

Pellets: I recommend getting the Oxbow Garden Select Food for Rabbits. This is made from healthy ingredients and tends to have the least amount of pellet dust at the bottom of the bag compared to other healthy brands. It's also the type of pellets that my rabbit likes best. They also have a version for young rabbits if your bunny is less than 6 months old.

Critical Care: This is a form of rabbit food to use in emergencies when your rabbit refuses to eat. It's a powdered rabbit food that you mix with water to syringe feed your rabbit. While I hope you never have to use it, it's best to have a bag on hand just in case. Find out more about how to use Critical Care in this article.

Treats

The best treats to get for rabbits are often fresh fruits and vegetables that you would get at a grocery store. However sometimes you'll want something with a longer shelf life. Small Pet Select and Oxbow both have some healthy treats that you can give to your rabbit. Just be sure to limit the amount of treats you give your rabbit every day, even when you give them these healthier kinds.

Small Pet Select snacks and treats: Small Pet Select has a variety of healthy snacks to choose from. They also have a snack sampler that you can get to see what kinds your rabbit likes best.

Oxbow Simple Rewards: These are healthy hay-based snacks with some sweet fruit or vegetable flavoring. My rabbits like the bell pepper flavor best, but try different kinds to see what your bunnies prefer.

Enclosure

Rabbit Exercise Pen: I always recommend getting a rabbit exercise pen to use as their enclosure. These are convenient to set up and easy to clean too! I recommend making sure the fence is at least 30in high (size medium and up) to make sure your rabbit can't hop over it.

Sleepypod pet carrier: The Sleepypod Mobile pet bed is one of the only brands that actually safety tests their carriers. They are a bit expensive, but these carriers are the best way to travel by car with your rabbit (learn more about why I recommend this carrier).

If the Sleepypod is too expensive, you can get a hard-sided carrier (such as this one) and make sure to place it on the floor of the car behind the driver or passenger seat.

Toys

Small Pet Select is my go-to for rabbit toys. They have different kinds of natural hay-based toys that my rabbits actually like to play with. You'll want to get your rabbit a variety of toys so you can figure out what they like best.

SPS Toys: Small Pet Select has a variety of hay based and natural toys you can get. This is a great way to get different toys for your rabbit to play with, and see what your rabbit likes best.

Hanging toys: Hanging mobile toys are often some of the toys my rabbit has the most fun with, so I recommend getting some of these for your rabbit too.

Food dispenser ball: This is my rabbit's absolute favorite toy! It's a type of puzzle toy that you hide treats inside of and give it to your rabbit. I actually use these dispenser balls to give my rabbit her daily pellets. It's great for helping rabbit slow down their eating and use their natural foraging instincts when eating their food.

Other accessories

Hiding house: It's really important to make sure your rabbit has places to hide. This will help them feel safe and comfortable in their environment. The SPS castle will work for rabbits up to about 7 or 9 pounds and it's completely safe for rabbits to chew on. For larger rabbits, you'll need to get products made for cats.

Cat tree: Many rabbits like to get different vantage points by hopping up onto platforms. I got this Trixie Cat Tree because it's short enough that I don't have to worry about my rabbit falling off and it has a little hiding house on the bottom too.

Rabbit Proofing

Bitter Apple Spray: You can use a Bitter Apple on baseboards to deter your rabbit from chewing on them. It will make the baseboards taste bad to your rabbit. For this product to work you'll have to reapply it pretty frequently, at least every few days, so it's best used in an area your rabbit doesn't have constant access to.

Carlson Pet Gate: My old roommate had this gate for her rabbits and it worked really well. The bars were close enough together that even her small rabbits could get through. I made the mistake of getting a different brand that was cheaper, only to find out that my rabbit could slip right through the bars.

Wire covers: Rabbits love to chew through wires. To keep your rabbit safe, you need to cover your wires with these plastic coverings.

DIY cube fencing: These cube fences are actually very versatile. They can be used to keep your rabbit out of areas where they shouldn't be and you can use them along the perimeter of the room to keep your rabbit away from the baseboards.

Flexible cat scratchers: Use these cat scratcher mats in corners and around the legs of furniture to keep your rabbit from chewing. You can also use them as mats to cover areas where your rabbit tends to dig into the carpet.

Plastic mats: These are a durable way to keep your rabbit from digging into the carpet. While other mats will eventually have to be replaced, these plastic mats can withstand rabbit nails pretty much forever.

Litter box

SPS Paper litter: Paper based litter is best to use for rabbits because it is absorbent, and it's safe if rabbits end up eating a little of it. I like the Small Pet Select Brand because it doesn't contain baking soda, like most types of cat litter, so it won't cause respiratory irritation from any excess powder used.

Large litter box: Rather than getting a small corner litter box that's often marketed to small animals, I recommend getting a large cat litter box. This will be a lot more comfortable for your rabbit to sit in, and it can even help improve your rabbit's litter box habits.

Grooming

Nail Clippers: I recommend using these small manual clippers rather than the automatic ones. It will give you more control when clipping your rabbit's nails. I also recommend replacing your clippers every few years to make sure they remain sharp.

Hair Buster Comb: The Hair Buster definitely works best at getting all that loose fur off of your rabbit. It even grabs the fur stuck on the undercoat. The only problem I find is that some rabbits don't like the feeling of being brushed with this and will run away whenever it's time for grooming.

Grooming Mitt: The grooming mitt is a little gentler than the Hair Buster. Rabbits are

less likely to protest when you groom them with this. However, it is not as effective as the Hair Buster comb.

Training

Clicker: If you want to train your rabbit to do any complicated tricks, you'll need to clicker train them. Getting one of these clickers that has a soft sound (so it doesn't startle your rabbit) is incredibly helpful.

High-Value Treats: To keep your rabbit motivated when they're learning a new trick you have to give them treats they'll love. I recommend cutting these dried fruit treats into small pieces to use as high-value rewards.

Jumping Hurdles: If you're ready to bring your rabbit's training to the next level, consider getting these jumping hurdles. You can start to train your rabbit on how to dash through exciting agility courses.

What to Feed Your New Baby Bunny

Written by Amy Pratt in Diet

young rabbit diet

Many people bring home a rabbit when they are still just a young bunny. But most of the information you find about rabbit care and health is directed toward adult rabbits. You may find very helpful information about how to keep an adult rabbit on a healthy diet, but what about your new baby bunny?

Young rabbits are growing bunnies, and have special dietary needs that differ from adult rabbits. The amount that you feed your rabbit and even the type of food that they need is different. Then, of course, there is a transition period. As your rabbit grows up, they'll need to be safely transitioned from a young rabbit diet to an adult rabbit diet.



Important: This page may contain affiliate links. As an Amazon Associate and an associate to other companies I earn a small commission from qualifying purchases.

healthy young rabbit diet

Young rabbits should have access to alfalfa hay and pellets. They should also be introduced to leafy greens and have a small amount on a daily basis.

Young rabbits (2-6 months)

Once a young rabbit reaches 2 months old, they can be separated from their mother and have a diet of all solid food. However, they will still have a diet that differs from adult rabbits. These bunnies are still growing a lot! They need more protein and calcium in their diets to make sure they grow up to be healthy rabbits.

rabbit eating from a hanging hay rack

Some rabbits prefer to eat hay from higher levels. Try purchasing or creating a hanging hay rack or a raised hay trough that can be attached to the side of the rabbit enclosure.

rabbit eat greens

Try to give your rabbit their food at the same time every day to get them used to a daily routine.

Hay: Young rabbits should have alfalfa hay. Alfalfa hay has a much higher amount of protein and calcium, which makes it ideal for a growing bunny. Hay should be a large portion of your rabbit's diet because it promotes good digestion and healthy teeth. It's not going to make up as large a percentage of the diet as it does for adult rabbits, but you still want to make sure your young bunny is munching on hay every day.

Pellets. Young rabbits should be given an alfalfa-based pellet blend because it will promote healthy growth for young rabbits. You want to make sure to give your young rabbit a healthy brand of pellets. Stay away from any blend that has lots of colorful pieces, or dried pieces of fruits, vegetables or seeds.

I recommend Oxbow's pellets for young rabbits. Oxbow is a well-known and respected brand in the rabbit community.

Leafy greens. When a rabbit is about 3 months old, you can start to introduce some leafy greens into their diet. Take it slow and only introduce one type of leafy green vegetable at a time. You don't want to give your young bunny too many leafy greens at

this stage in their life. Their digestion is more sensitive right now. Therefore, you want to very gradually increase the amount of green you give your rabbit until you give them about 1 cup per day

Treats. It's best to avoid giving young rabbits any sweet treats for the time being (including foods like banana, berries, carrots, apple, etc.). Their digestion is still developing at this time and can easily be unbalanced by the introduction of highly sugary foods.

How much dry food should you give your young rabbit?

Most guides for a young rabbit diet will encourage you to give your rabbit an unlimited supply of pellets. However, I offer this advice with some caution because you want to make sure your rabbit is also eating their hay.

Most rabbits will prefer pellets to hay. Therefore, when they have unlimited pellets available, they may end up completely ignoring their pile of hay. Watch your rabbit to see what their behavior is. If giving them unlimited pellets means they don't touch their hay at all, then you will need to limit their pellets a little bit.

If your young rabbit is ignoring their hay and eating only pellets, then limit the pellets to about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup per day for every 2 pounds that a rabbit weighs. This is not an exact measurement, and you may need to adjust the amount for your rabbit. Watch your rabbit to make sure they are still energetic and happy, and be sure they are maintaining healthy body weight as they grow.

rabbit food

You may need to adjust your rabbit's diet as they get older, but they will still need access to all the basics: hay, leafy greens, water, and some pellets.

Transitioning to an adult diet (6 months – 1 year)

After rabbits reach 6 months old, they will need to be slowly transitioned to a healthy adult diet. During this time, the young rabbits are still growing, so they'll need more food than adult rabbits, however, adjustments should be made to the diet over time and not all at once.

As with a young rabbit diet, you don't want to make any drastic changes to a rabbit's transitional diet in a short period of time. You want to make sure that you give your rabbit's digestion time to adjust to their healthy adult diet.

Hay. When your rabbit reaches 6 months old, you'll want to start to transition them to a timothy-based diet and slowly phase out the alfalfa hay. If your rabbit is being picky about eating timothy hay, try this:

Mix in other types of hay. Timothy hay is best for rabbits, but there are other kinds that are also good for a rabbit's digestion. Add in handfuls of other grass-based hays, such as orchard hay, oat hay, or meadow hay to make the transition more appetizing to your young rabbit.

Look for fresh brands of hay. Fresh hay tastes better than old, browned hay. I like to get my hay from an online store called Small Pet Select. They have impressed me with the quality of their hay and I never hesitate to recommend them. Check out their timothy hay for your growing bunny (and get 15% off your first order by using the code BUNNYLADY at checkout)

Place the hay near the litter box. Rabbits like to munch and poop at the same time, so placing the new timothy hay near the litter box can encourage them to nibble on it.

Hide treats in hay. You can hide dried herbs or pieces of dried fruit in the hay pile. You could even make toys with toilet paper tubes where you hide a treat in the middle and cover it with hay.

Pellets. Just like with hay, you'll want to transition your rabbit from alfalfa-based rabbit food pellets to timothy-based rabbit food pellets. Don't replace all of your rabbit alfalfa pellets with timothy pellets all at once, since this could be a shock to their digestion. Instead over the course of 3-4 months, you'll want to slowly decrease the percentage of the alfalfa pellets you give your rabbit and increase the amount of timothy pellets.

I again recommend the Oxbow brand. They have Garden Select Pellets for adult rabbits, making it easy to transition from the young rabbit pellets.

Leafy Greens. You can also start to increase the amount of fresh leafy greens you give your rabbit on a daily basis. As their digestion is able to handle more variety, you can

double the amount that you give your rabbit.

Treats. Once your rabbit reaches 6 months old, you can start to introduce some yummy treats to them. Keep the treats you give your young rabbit to approximately 1 tablespoon or less per day.

spoon feeding a rabbit

If your rabbit is overly enthusiastic about treats and tends to bite your finger, use a spoon to help them improve their aim.

What kinds of treats are safe for rabbits?

Fresh or dried fruits and vegetables (make sure there is no added sugar)

Baked hay treats. Oxbow has a variety of flavors of baked hay treats. These are especially good because they are hay-based, making them healthy for your rabbit.

Dried herbs. The only place where I've seen herb blends being sold is Small Pet Select. They have a number of herbal blends that also have mild medicinal properties to keep your rabbit healthy. (don't forget to take 15% off your order with the code BUNNYLADY)

DIY treats. You can try making your own treats using your rabbit's pellets and some fresh fruit and vegetables.

7 Rabbit Litter Training Mistakes to Avoid

Written by Amy Pratt in Care, Training

7 litter training mistakes for rabbits

While rabbits can be litter trained, it doesn't always go as easily as we hope. Unfortunately, sometimes the choices you're making are making the process even more difficult. By avoiding common mistakes, you can make the process smoother and convince your rabbit to use the potty for a cleaner (and less smelly) home.

large litter box vs. small corner litter box

Avoid getting the small corner litter boxes that are marketed towards rabbits. Instead get a large cat litter box that your rabbit can fit inside.

1. Don't use a litter box that's too small

Most litter boxes marketed for rabbits are a bit on the small side. You know, the ones that are meant to sit in the corner of a cage that most rabbits can barely fit in. Most rabbits will refuse to use these small litter boxes entirely and will instead choose to use a different place to do their business.

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Instead, you'll want to buy a litter box that your rabbit can fit inside or and be able to comfortably turn around. Usually, getting litter pans made for a cat is a much better option (something like this).

DIY pet safe cleaner

To make a pet-safe cleaner, simply add equal amount of water and vinegar to a spray bottle and shake it to blend them together.

2. You forget to clean up accidents and deodorize them

Whenever your rabbit pees or poops outside the litter box, it's important to clean it up thoroughly so your rabbit doesn't pee there again. Sweep or vacuum up the excess droppings, mop up the urine, and use a pet-safe cleaner to disinfect the area. This helps to erase your rabbit's scent and keep the urine smell confined to the litter box, making it more likely they'll associate the box with the bathroom.

I recommend using a vinegar-based spray to clean and deodorize. Vinegar is pretty effective at neutralizing the smell of rabbit urine. You can make your own by mixing equal parts water and white vinegar in a spray bottle.

For tougher urine stains, I recommend Fizzion. This is the best product I've found for getting pee stains out of the carpet (it works best if you use it twice, once immediately and again after the spot dries)

3. Don't give your rabbit too much space too quickly

If your rabbit is struggling with potty training, try starting in a smaller space. Begin by litter training your rabbit in their enclosure even if your goal is to eventually let your rabbit roam freely around the house. You can even add multiple boxes into the small space so that there is less chance of your rabbit missing the box.

Keeping the area small helps your rabbit locate the litter box when they need to go. It also promotes general cleanliness, as soiling the entire habitat will leave no clean spots for lounging (and most rabbits don't like sleeping in pee).

Once your rabbit improves in a small area, try expanding the space bit by bit. This helps your rabbit develop good habits while keeping the litter box within easy reach. It also makes it simpler for you to monitor your rabbit, clean up after them, and place additional litter boxes where needed.

Note: by small space, I mean the size of a rabbit pen (usually something around 16 square feet). It does not have to be a space that's too teeny tiny.

rabbits and cats

Rabbits and cats can sometimes be very good friends, but your rabbit might get territorial and spray if the cat is allowed in their territory.

4. You let other pets invade your rabbit's space

Rabbits will often get territorial if other animals are allowed near their space. It's common for rabbits to spray urine all around the border of their perceived territory to let other animals know where the border is.

This happens most frequently if you have multiple un-bonded rabbits in the same home. But it can also happen if you have cats or dogs that have access to the rabbit's room.

Respect your rabbit's territory and don't let other pets invade their cage or living area.

This helps maintain your rabbit's sense of security. Try using baby gates and completely separate rooms to create boundaries between your rabbit and other pets.

5. You don't get your rabbit spayed or neutered

The top piece of advice I can offer for addressing poor potty habits in rabbits is to get them spayed or neutered. Like many other animals, hormonal rabbits mark their territory by scattering droppings and spraying urine all around the area. This issue is especially common in unneutered male rabbits, though female rabbits can also spray.

Once your rabbit is spayed or neutered, they produce fewer hormones that drive territorial behavior, reducing their urge to mark their territory. You might notice an improvement in your rabbit's litter habits soon after surgery, but it could take a few weeks for hormone levels to drop.

peeing over the side of the litter box

If the litter box is too small or has low sides, the rabbit might pee over the side

6. You get a litter box with too-low sides

Some rabbits are better at using the litter box than it seems. The problem is that when they pee their butt hangs over the side of the box and they pee on the floor (you'd be surprised at how far from the litter box it can get).

The good news is that your rabbit is probably litter trained in this case, they just don't realize (or care) the pee is going over the edge.

There are a couple solutions you can try:

Get a larger litter box so your rabbit isn't sitting close to the edge

Get a litter box with higher sides

Place a dog pee mat underneath the litter box to act as a urine guard

rabbit pees outside the litter box

Even a rabbit who is litter trained may pee outside the litter box if you don't clean their box frequently enough.

7. You don't clean the rabbit habitat frequently enough

Until your rabbit develops good potty habits, it's important to clean their enclosure every day. Leave a small amount of pee and poop in the litter box, but ensure that the rest of the enclosure is spotless (as much as possible). Keeping the rest of the enclosure clean will help reinforce the idea that the litter box is the designated bathroom area for your rabbit.

Over time, your rabbit will improve their litter box habits, and you won't need to clean the enclosure quite as frequently. It will also be much easier to maintain, as you won't have to deal with so many urine stains.

Owning a rabbit

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Caring for your pet rabbit

White rabbit Rabbits make great pets. In general, rabbits need appropriate housing, exercise, socialisation and a specific diet for good welfare. Some breeds of rabbits,

particularly the longer haired rabbits, may require daily grooming. It is important that you understand all the requirements for caring for a rabbit before you buy one.

Rabbits generally live for 5 to 8 years depending on their environment and breed, but they can live for as long as 12 years. If you decide to purchase a rabbit, make sure you are prepared to care for them that long.

Legislation

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 protects the welfare of all animals, including rabbits.

Feeding your rabbit

Rabbits are herbivores and only eat plant material. Their natural diet consists generally of young leaves from:

plants or bushes

grasses

weeds

sometimes the bark from bushes and trees.

Rabbits need to eat small amounts frequently. Approximately 30 feeds, of 2 to 8g of food, each day is normal. Pet rabbits must be fed a high fibre diet to help maintain their body and teeth's health. Rabbits' teeth are constantly growing and need to be continually worn down by eating.

Their diet must consist of unlimited access to grass hay and/or grass. If you are keeping your rabbit inside most of the time, or they do not have access to grass for several hours a day, you can use grass hay as an alternative fibre source. Lawn clippings must not be fed as they ferment rapidly and cause digestive upset in your rabbit.

Fresh green vegetables such as cabbage, lettuce, broccoli and celery should be included

in their daily diet — approximately 2 cups a day. But fresh green vegetables must not be their only source of food; the fibre content is too low. Rabbits must be provided with a high fibre diet.

Rabbits need a tablespoon of commercial rabbit nuggets or pellets once or twice daily. Do not feed your rabbit muesli — this causes dental disease. Rabbits eating muesli also tend to leave the bits they don't like, and this leads to nutrient deficiencies.

High fat and high sugar foods such as carrots, other root vegetables, and fruit should only be fed in small amounts. You can use these types of foods as environmental enrichment.

There are many toxic food and plants for rabbits that you should avoid feeding your rabbit or growing in your garden.

Speak to your local vet, pet shop, or rabbit breeder about the most suitable diet for your pet. Always remember to introduce new food slowly to avoid digestive upset.

Fresh, cool water must be provided at all times.

Housing your rabbit

Rabbits require a hutch to live in that is safe from predators, such as dogs and cats. It needs an area that protects them from the weather and has enough space for exercise. A suitable hutch design is water proof and includes a dark, dry area for the rabbits to rest which has a bedding of soft hay. The other section of the hutch should be light and large enough to allow for a separate exercise and toileting area. The hutch must be well ventilated. It is best to have a hutch made out of wood, as metal hutches heat up more quickly.

Rabbits should not be placed in pens or hutches with wire floors, it is bad for their feet. It is ok for part of the pen to be made of wire as long as your rabbit has an area where it can stand on solid ground. Many two story hutches provide this option.

Your hutch needs to be at least 'three hops long' (approximately 4 times the length of your bunny when stretched out) and twice as wide as your bunny. Anything smaller and your bunny will be too cramped. If you buy a juvenile bunny, remember it will grow.

It is important to clean the hutch at least every second day by removing soiled bedding and making sure rabbits have a dry area to sleep in. Rabbits that do not have clean bedding can suffer from respiratory infections, skin ailments and pest infestations such as fleas and mites. Rabbits are capable of being toilet trained. There is plenty of information online about toilet training rabbits.

Rabbit should spend most of their time indoors, or equal time indoors and outdoors. When your rabbit is indoors it should have at least some time each day to roam free. You may wish to set up a room or two rooms where your rabbit can roam free and interact with the family. Remember, that rabbits like to chew on things, so if you leave your rabbit free to roam unsupervised, you may come home to some chewed skirting boards, cables or chair legs.

If you wish to provide your rabbit with a larger living area than its hutch when you are not home, consider a pet pen or a children's play pen. You could attach it to the hutch to give your rabbit a larger space to exercise and play.

Your pet rabbit should have the opportunity to dig and forage when they are outside. They should be confined to an enclosed area and not allowed to roam free. A secure backyard where no other animals (particularly cats or wild rabbits) can enter is great, but a sectioned off area of grass is also good.

Ensure that if you leave your rabbit outside for long periods of time, they have access to their hutch or a weather proof area with bedding, so they can rest.

Companionship for your rabbit

Rabbits are a social species and prefer to live in groups. If you decide to own a rabbit,

always have at least 2 rabbits. However, if you don't have the room or time or money to keep two rabbits, you will need to become your rabbit's companion. This means that if you are away for long periods (more than 4 hours every day), you will need to provide your rabbit with enrichment activities and toys to keep them occupied and prevent them from becoming lonely or suffering from stress.

If you have 2 or more rabbits, it is important to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Separate males and females into different pens or have your veterinarian desex them. Males will be less likely to fight each other if introduced at a young age. Females and males can be prone to fighting with each other, so make sure you help new rabbits get used to each other in a supervised environment or through a mesh fence before they co-habit.

Rabbit behaviour

Rabbits are playful and inquisitive and require the stimulation of other rabbits or humans and their environment. They are active animals that need to exercise and play regularly. Ensuring your rabbit is adequately stimulated is an important aspect of caring for your rabbit. This can be achieved through environmental enrichment.

Rabbits are most active during the early morning, late afternoon and evening. This is the best time for you to interact with your rabbit.

Scent is an important means of communication for rabbits.

Rabbits are a prey species. They are the animals that other animals catch and eat. Therefore, rabbits naturally hide from things that scare them. Your rabbit's environment must cater for this. You need to provide them with places in their enclosure to hide.

It is natural for rabbits to:

chew on things (it keeps their teeth in good health)

nest (create nests using their own fur, hay and other materials they find lying around)

thump their back feet

play with objects.

Contact your vet if you notice a rapid change in your rabbit's behaviour such as:

hiding

aggression when you try to touch or pick them up

excessive cage or object chewing

over grooming

changes in feeding or toileting

playing with water bottles

over drinking

repeated circling of enclosure.

Your rabbit may be in pain or suffering from stress.

Health problems

Rabbits are vulnerable to a number of health problems, in particular diseases such as Myxomatosis and Calicivirus. These diseases are generally fatal for pet rabbits. They have been introduced into Australia to control the wild rabbit population. Unfortunately, pet rabbits are just as susceptible to them. Try to reduce the risk of mosquito bites to your rabbits as mosquitos can carry Myxomatosis from the wild rabbit population to your pet.

There is a vaccine for Calicivirus. You can have your rabbit vaccinated against this disease every 6 months by your vet.

Rabbits can develop dental problems. It is important that they are constantly chewing on something, either grass, hay or a gnawing block. Their teeth grow at a rate of 2 to 3mm per week. Overgrown teeth can lead to weight loss, severe pain and discomfort. If

you think your rabbit's teeth are getting too long, talk to your vet about some suitable options for reducing their length and maintaining an appropriate length.

Rabbits are susceptible to mite infestations. Symptoms include hair loss and itchiness. Thoroughly clean out and disinfect the hutch. The rabbit should be treated by a vet.

Get advice from your local vet about any health issues your rabbit develops.

Desexing your rabbit

Many animal welfare shelters are inundated with unwanted pet rabbits, which have been bred by accident. If you do not plan to breed with your rabbit, discuss desexing with your vet. In male rabbits this is a relatively simple procedure. In female rabbits it is a more major operation. Desexing can help reduce nesting behaviour and improve toilet training.

Alternatively, you can separate males and females into different pens.

Heat stress in rabbits

Rabbits can suffer from heat stress. Once the temperature rises above 28°C it is necessary to regularly monitor your rabbits. It is important not to place the hutch in direct sunlight during the warmer months. Keep it in the shade even on warm to cool days. It does not take long for heat to build up in small areas. On hot days, it may be necessary to provide a frozen drink bottle or ice brick in the nesting area of the hutch to reduce the temperature.

If your hutch is located inside the house and the temperature is likely to get rise above 30°C you may need to place the hutch in an area where there is a breeze. You could open a window if there is a breeze which will help cool your rabbit.

A rabbit suffering from heat stroke may show signs of:

weakness

incoordination

convulsions

coma.

If you suspect your rabbit is suffering from heat stress, you must contact your vet immediately. While you are waiting, begin the process of reducing the rabbit's temperature by placing them in tepid water or wrapping them in cool wet towels. Never place your heat stressed rabbit in cold or iced water.

Handling your rabbit

Rabbits make great pets for children. However, they are fragile and young children should not handle them. They can accidentally cause injury by picking up the rabbit, by squeezing too tightly, or dropping it. Children should always be supervised when interacting with and, in the case of older children, handling rabbits.

Rabbits must be handled appropriately so they do not scratch or bite and so they can develop a positive relationship with humans. Handle rabbits regularly, especially when they are young. Sit while you are handling a rabbit so the rabbit can't fall. Rabbits should be picked up with two hands. Hold them close to the chest or on your lap so they can rest their feet and feel secure.

Exercising your rabbit

Rabbits need daily exercise. If your rabbit is living in a hutch of minimum size, make sure it has an exercise area that is safe. Your rabbit needs to access it for at least four hours a day. Toys, obstacles and food treats are environmental enrichment that encourages your rabbit to exercise when you are not home.

Rabbits and other pets

Rabbits can make a wonderful addition to your family. If you have other pets, it is important you consider the impact of your rabbit on them and them on your rabbit. Dogs and cats can have a natural instinct to hunt and kill rabbits. If you are introducing rabbits to a home that already has dogs and cats, your rabbit must be safe from other

pets at all times.

Barking dogs can also cause your rabbit stress. If your dog barks at your rabbit, ensure the hutch or run is not accessible to your dog when you are not there to supervise.

If your rabbits get along well with your other pets, that is fantastic. Your rabbit will have another companion when you are unable to be with it. But always keep your rabbit safe.