

Rabbits

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Congratulations on adopting your rabbit! Rabbits are intelligent, affectionate and personable and make wonderful companions; however, they do require a lot of care and attention. We hope that you'll enjoy your new companion for many years to come. Here are some tips to help you and your new friend get off to a great start.

Bunny Basics

- If kept indoors and cared for properly, rabbits have a life span of 8-10 years!
- Rabbits are ground dwelling animals. They are afraid of heights and do not like being lifted and/or cuddled all of the time. Lifting the rabbit makes him more likely to kick and scratch. They prefer (and need) attention on the ground.
- Given time, understanding, patience and effort, a rabbit will amaze and delight you with his personality and playfulness! Rabbits can really shine as members of your family.

Housing

- Rabbits need a cage that allows them to move and stretch freely. The cage should have adequate space for a bed, a litter pan, toys and food dishes. Plan on a cage that is at the very least 2' x 2' x 4'
- Do not buy a cage with a wire/mesh bottom. These can cause ulcers or sores on the bunny's feet. If you already have one, cover the wire mesh with a piece of plywood or carpet.
- Dog crates make ideal cages—they are spacious, have flat bottoms that are ideal for the feet and have doors that open from the front, not the top, so your rabbit can freely move in or out.

Litter-training

- ***Avoid clay cat litter, cedar shavings and corn cob litter.*** The best type of litter is recycled newspaper type, i.e. CAREfresh and Yesterday's News. These are good at absorbing and controlling odors and are harmless if consumed
- Start by observing which corner of the cage your rabbit uses as the "Bathroom" spot. Place the litter box in this corner of the cage. A little hay in the litter box will also positively reinforce usage.
- Once the rabbit is using the box in her cage, you can open the door and let her into a small room with a litter box. Supervision is key! Never let her out of your sight until you are certain she is trained. If she starts to urinate/defecate where there isn't a box, say "No!" once, loud and clear. Then, gently herd her to the cage or the litter box in the room. Praise her and give a treat when she uses the box. When she is using the box comfortably, you can increase the amount of space she has to roam around in.
- Expect the bunny to have accidents! Rabbits are not cats and it will take time for them to thoroughly understand litter box usage.
- Most rabbits will defecate outside of the box to some degree in order to "mark her territory". This is normal.
- Use many litter boxes at first, and when habits improve, decrease number of boxes.

Exercise

- Rabbits need a minimum of 3-4 hours of out-of-cage romp time daily
- If exercising the rabbit outside, ensure the area is completely secure. NEVER leave bunny unattended outside!

Toys

- Toys provide mental stimulation, exercise and an outlet for chewing
- Good types of toys (this is not by any means an all inclusive list!): cardboard boxes to crawl in, untreated wicker baskets to chew, balls (cat toy types), parrot toys that can be hung from the top of the cage, hard plastic baby toys, plastic slinkies, untreated wood, things to jump on.
- Rotate toys to maintain interest.

Bunny-Proofing Your Home

- Wrap all electrical cords with cord wrap
- Hazardous materials must be kept out of reach
- If you don't want your rabbit to chew something, don't make it available!

Diet

- The daily diet: 80% hay (timothy), 10-15% fresh vegetables, 5-10% pellets.
- Avoid pellets with corn or seeds in them (i.e. Kaytee Fiesta). Corn and seeds are fattening and also are a choking hazard
- Dark green, leafy vegetables are the best. Stay away from light green, watery vegetables such as celery or iceberg lettuce. These can cause diarrhea.
- Limit fruits. Do not feed corn puff type or sugary treats

Veterinary Care

- Rabbits need regular check-ups by a vet. Try to find one that specializes in or has a lot of experience treating rabbits.
- Because rabbits are prey animals, they will hide signs of illness. Thus it is very important to monitor your rabbit's behavior and if you notice any sudden changes in behavior, contact your vet immediately.
- Other danger signs:
 - Diarrhea
 - Loss of appetite with bloating, labored breathing or runny nose
 - Head tilt or Incontinence (urine-soaked legs)
 - Abscesses, lumps or swellings

Additional Resources

- House Rabbit Society, 1524 Benton St., Alameda, CA; 510-521-4631; www.rabbit.org.
- Bunny Bliss, P.O. Box 4156, Oceanside, CA 92054; 619-439-3283.
- Harriman, Marinell. House Rabbit Handbook. Drollery Press.
- Fritzsche, Helga. Rabbits: A Complete Pet Owner's Manual. Barron Book Series. New York.
- Wimmer, Paul. A Beginner's Guide to Rabbits. T.F.H. Publications.