



CARING FOR YOUR RABBIT

ABOUT RABBITS

Rabbits make excellent pets. They enjoy being gently handled and petted and look forward to the attention you give them. They will follow you from room to room and can be walked on a leash and taught to interact with the entire family. They are quiet and can be litter box trained.

Rabbits tend to live for 7-10 years. They are available in several breeds, varieties, colors, and sizes. The most popular pet rabbits are the smaller, dwarf breeds such as Netherland Dwarfs, Mini Lops, Dutch and Polish Dwarfs.

Arrange a visit to the veterinarian as soon as possible after picking up your new rabbit. The vet will make sure your pet is healthy and can answer any questions you might have.

HOUSING

A wire cage with a solid bottom that is four times the size of your rabbit is the best home for your new companion. A hutch with two compartments is best, one for exercise during the day and the second to nest and hide at night. Always make sure there is a solid surface available as constantly walking on wire can cause injury to your rabbit's feet. Rabbits can adapt to normal household temperatures but be sure to keep their cage out of direct sunlight.

Rabbits are very social and love to be with people, so put the cage in a room that has frequent family activity.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED?

Bedding. Choose a dust-free, highly absorbent bedding for the bottom of the cage. It can be cleaned weekly, if your rabbit is litter boxed trained or daily spot cleaning is performed. Your rabbit's litter box should contain a different litter than the rest of the bedding and be scooped daily.

Accessories. Rabbits love to climb and sit up high, so include ledges and ramps in the cage which will also help expand the area your rabbit has to explore. There are several types of rabbit hideouts and shelters available that are easy to clean which allow you to provide privacy and security for your rabbit. A large corner litter box will make it easy for you to train your furry friend. A variety of toys will help keep your bunny mentally stimulated and chew toys are a must to keep your rabbit's constantly growing teeth at an acceptable length. Other necessities include a water bottle, bin feeder and hay manger attached to the side of the cage, which provide hygienic feeding methods.

HANDLING

Approach your rabbit on his level. Talk to it softly and let it come to you. Let it sniff the back of your hand. Gently place your hand over its shoulders grasping gently with your thumb and forefinger. Using your other hand, scoop the rabbit up under its hind legs offering support to its entire body. Place the rabbit in your lap or hold it close to your chest. Never pick a rabbit up by its ears or turn it over on its back.

DIET

A rabbit's diet should be mainly comprised of unlimited grass hay (timothy, oat, or wheat) with a limited amount of high-quality rabbit pellets that is high in fiber and low in protein. This high fiber diet should be always available and also encourages teeth grinding, which will help keep your rabbit's continuously growing teeth healthy.

Do not substitute Guinea Pig or other food pellets. Young rabbits can also have alfalfa hay, but it is too rich in protein and calcium for adult rabbits and can cause digestive disorders. This high fiber diet also encourages teeth grinding, which will keep your rabbits continuously growing teeth healthy.

Fresh green leafy vegetables are important for your rabbit's nutritional needs. Provide a daily helping of any of the following: dandelion greens, parsley, romaine lettuce, kale, endive, collard greens, carrot tops, and watercress. Limit the fruits you give your rabbit, a small portion of high fiber fruits such as apple, pear, papaya, or berries is OK.

Provide clean, de-chlorinated water daily in a ball-tip water bottle which prevents leakage and soaked bedding. Add a hanging salt lick in the cage to provide necessary minerals. Give your rabbit gnawing material such as small animal wood or mineral chews and sisal toys. This will further keep his teeth in proper alignment.

GROOMING

Rabbits are clean animals who groom themselves on a regular basis, but still need grooming from their owner. Brush long hair bunnies daily to prevent mats and tangles and short hair rabbits to remove loose hair. You'll also need nail clippers and styptic powder to clip your rabbit's nails monthly.

When grooming, always talk softly to your rabbit and support your rabbit's forelimbs and hind legs as they can hurt themselves if they become nervous and start kicking. A good best practice when clipping your rabbit's nails is to wrap their body and legs in a towel and only unwrap the leg you are working on to help keep them calm.

Never use food preparation areas to clean small animal habitats or anything in their habitats. If you clean the habitat in the bathroom, disinfect the area completely afterwards.

ENVIRONMENT

Rabbits living inside can roam freely, if you have rabbit-proofed the electrical cords and other valuables that your rabbit might find fun to chew on and your rabbit is litter box trained. Rabbits like to chew, so get an assortment of chew toys to help keep them occupied and your home furnishings safe.

If you would like your rabbit to go outside, there are indoor and outdoor hutches that allow your rabbit to safely enjoy the outdoors. You can also walk your rabbit with a harness and leash designed for all sizes of rabbits.

If you house your rabbit in a permanent enclosure outdoors, choose a large, well-ventilated hutch that provides adequate shelter and a solid surface for your rabbit to rest on. Allow sufficient time for your rabbit to acclimate to weather conditions. Rabbits should not be exposed to drafts, continuous sunlight, or extreme cold.

Children younger than 5 years old, people with weakened immune systems, and people 65 years of age and older are more likely to get diseases spread between animals and people (also known as zoonotic diseases); contact your health care provider for more information.

This information is a basic guide to rabbit care. There are books and online resources that provide in-depth information. Contact your veterinarian for additional information.