

RABBITS AS PETS

Rabbits are very playful and loving animals. They can be housed both indoors and outdoors. They are inquisitive and friendly and like to come out to play regularly. Rabbits make very good pets for all ages and many people who had rabbits as childhood pets will continue to have rabbits when they are older! Obviously, as with all animals, young children should be supervised when handling a rabbit.

The following information is as a guide only. If you have any concerns with regards to your pet, please seek veterinary advice.

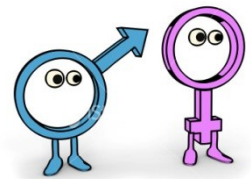


Which breed to get?

Most domestic rabbit breeds are suitable as pets and the breed you get depends on your own situation and circumstances. For example, if you live in a flat, a large breed would not be suitable. Generally, most of the dwarf/mini breeds make exceptional pets. They are easy to house and care for due to their size and they have very easy going temperaments, particularly the lop eared varieties.

Which Sex to get?

Both male and females rabbits make excellent pets. However, males are generally more laid back and if you only intend on getting one rabbit, a male would settle to this lifestyle easier than a female.



Can they be kept alone?



Rabbits are sociable animals and will always prefer a companion. However, DO NOT purchase more than one rabbit unless you have the adequate space and time to give them the care required. Rabbits can live long and happy lives as lone solo pets, provided that they are given lots of love and attention from their owners.

If you do wish to purchase more than one rabbit, the best pair is a neutered male and spayed female or litter mates of the same sex (i.e.; two sisters), although please be aware that it may still be necessary to neuter rabbits even of same sex in order to prevent fighting upon reaching sexual maturity. Contrary to popular belief, rabbits

should not be paired with Guinea Pigs as bullying and domination may occur.

Where do I keep my rabbit?

Rabbits can be housed indoors or outdoors. Whichever you choose, the cage/hutch should have the soiled bedding removed daily and be cleaned out completely 1-2 times a week.



- Tall
- Two Compartments
- Safe Locks
- Weatherproof
- Raised from Ground
- Study Structure



- Long enough to stretch in
- Tall
- Secure
- Access to fodder
- Side opening for constant access

Outdoors

Your rabbit will require a weatherproof hutch of an adequate size. As a guide, the hutch should be tall enough for your rabbit to stand up on his/her back legs and should be at least 4ft long for a single rabbit. Obviously, larger breeds or multiple rabbits should be housed in a bigger hutch. The hutch should have two compartments; one for living and eating, and another for sleeping or hiding away for some peace and quiet! The hutch should be sturdy with strong catches to prevent foxes and other predators from entering. It should be raised from ground level to avoid dampness and attracting rodents.

You should use shavings as a base layer with straw in the bedroom compartment for extra warmth.

If you keep your rabbit in a hutch, you should ensure that you give them daily exercise, either in your house or in an external run. (See exercise section)

Indoors

Rabbits can happily live indoors and many breeds can be litter trained. Your rabbit should never be allowed to roam the house unattended and should be provided with a cage where he/she is shut away at night or when you are not home.

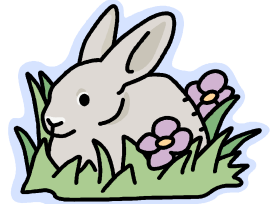
Male rabbits may tend to scent mark their territory and neutering can help to curb this.

The cage should be tall enough for the rabbit to stand on its back legs and should be of a big enough size for the rabbit to stretch out. Shavings and/or straw should be used to line the cage. You will find that your rabbit will use the cage as a secure place to go, so always make sure the cage is open so that rabbit can go in and out as it pleases.

Even if you keep your rabbit indoors, it will still enjoy some time outside in a run.

Exercise

You should purchase an external run that you can put your rabbit in to allow him/her to exercise and play. Rabbits are very busy little characters but are naturally scared of open spaces. Ensure that you place items such as boxes, tubes, flowerpots etc into the run so that your rabbit can explore the items and not feel exposed. The run should be strong, secure and safe from predators, with a sheltered area at one end to allow the rabbit to get away from the sun or if it starts to rain.

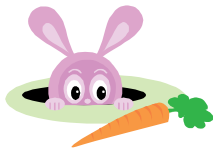


What do I feed?

Rabbits have a very sensitive digestive system and should not have a sudden change of diet. You should purchase a specially designed complete rabbit food. There are two types of food available, mix/muesli and nuggets/pellets. Nuggets/pellets offers all the nutrients your rabbit requires, compacted into a simple pellet. This type of food is useful to help prevent selective/fussy eating.

Mix/muesli offers the nutrients your rabbit needs in its natural form, so you can actually see what your rabbit is eating. Many mixes include bits of alfalfa which can help to grind your rabbit's teeth down.

Rabbit teeth continuously grow and in order to keep them at a healthy level, rabbits must be given things they can chew to grind their teeth down. Hay is an essential part of their diet. It not only helps to grind down their teeth but keeps their digestive system in order. Chew sticks and wood blocks that are specially made for rabbits can also help, as well as being great boredom breakers.



Rabbits also enjoy a range of fruit and vegetables and should be fed a small quantity of these regularly. Carrots, cabbage, broccoli, apples, kale, oranges and dandelions are favourites to rabbits. However, be careful not to feed too much as this may upset your rabbits tummy. They must not be fed lettuce.

A water bottle should be accessible at all times, both on the hutch/cage and on the run during playtimes. The water should be clean and fresh with extra care given during winter to ensure that the water is not frozen.

How do I handle a rabbit?



Rabbits enjoy attention and need regular human contact to ensure they remain friendly and don't become scared of being handled. You can also bond with your rabbit without picking it up. Talk to your rabbit everytime you are with it, even if you are just feeding or changing its water bottle. You can also sit in the run or house with your rabbit and allow it to approach you and get used to your presence.

When you do want to pick your rabbit up, approach it and gently place one hand over its shoulder and slide the other hand under its tail and support its bottom as you lift it up. Hold the rabbit close to your chest or sit down and place it on your knee.

Rabbits also enjoy gentle brushing with a soft bristled brush. This helps to keep their coats clean and helps you to bond with your pet.

Vaccinations

Rabbits are vulnerable to two main diseases; Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD). Both of these illnesses are easily contractible through ground and grass that other rabbits have been in contact with and can both be fatal. Rabbits should be vaccinated to prevent them from catching these life-threatening diseases. Rabbits are able to be given the vaccination after they are 8 weeks old and then should receive a booster vac every 12 months. Speak to your vet for information.

