

# The Wonderful World of Rabbits

**You have or will have your first rabbit.** After finding your perfect rabbit you will have a lot of questions on care, feeding, handling and I'm sure a lot more. I will try to help with some of your questions. I'm a breeder with a small rabbitry and I've been modestly successful in the world of show rabbits. I'm not a vet, but I'll share my experience, give you some tips and tell you how and what I do so you won't make all the mistakes I've made.

**Housing is your first step.** You want to have a minimum of 24 X 24 wire cage for a 4 -5 lb rabbit. Some hutches are made of wood so that will be up to you and your family what will work best for your rabbit. I personally like a wire floor, ½ x 1 inch. A foot pad is nice to put in there. It can be a plastic one that you bought or what I use is a 8 x 12 piece of sheet rock, DO NOT use the kind with fiberglass in it. I peel most of the paper off and just put it in the cage. They can get off the wire, in winter it helps keep their feet off the frozen wire too. If they are outside I give them lots of hay to burrow down in and keep warm in freezing weather. They can handle cold much better than heat. When it gets to 90 degrees they can start getting in trouble. That's also why I like wire cages, they are cooler. Some cages come with a tray underneath to catch the droppings. You can use kitty litter or shavings in the pan. I use shavings in mine. Make sure it's pine shavings, NO cedar as that is unhealthy for your rabbit. I also cut a piece off a 2 x 4 UNTREATED board, usually about 2" wide. Rabbits teeth keep growing so they need something to chew on to keep them wore down. The wood blocks and the sheet rock both help with that. I also put a plastic woofers ball in their cage so they have something to play with, they will eat some of it but the young rabbits will play by the hour, just like a child.

**Water:** you can use a water bowl, crock, or a water bottle. This is one of the most important things you can do for them. Keep the water bowl or bottle clean and full of cool fresh water at all times. In the winter if they are outside make sure their water isn't frozen, if it is dump it out and give more water. When you water check to see how much they drink. Some rabbits drink a lot of water and others not so much. Watch and learn what yours drinks normally so you know when something is wrong.

**Feed:** There are a lot of good rabbit feeds on the market. Fresh is best. I feed mine ¼ cup, twice a day. I also give them hay 3 times a week. You can adjust the amount of feed depending on their weight. You don't want a rabbit too fat or too thin. Neither is healthy. You also don't want to keep changing feed, especially if you are going to show. That can throw them into a molt, shedding. I like to eat more than one time a day so I figure the animals like to eat more than once a day. Their system is made for eating almost all the time. Try to feed close to the same time of day. Routine is good for any animal.

**Rabbits are social animals**, so you don't want them someplace there isn't something going on. I also keep a radio on to keep noise up. They stay much calmer when they aren't kept in a bubble. Also if you get another rabbit, male or female, do not keep them in the same cage. They will fight and they can hurt or even kill another of the same sex. If they are different sexes you will have babies and unless that is your goal it's better not to let them live together. If you do breed them the buck can't stay with the doe.

**The more you handle a rabbit** the easier it becomes for both the rabbit and you. When you pick them up you want to make sure they feel secure. I scoop them up under the chest and put my hand under their rump and bring them to me. Ears are not a handle and are very tender. Also, never drag them across the floor to bring them out of their cage. They can break a nail or a toe and that will make them scared to be handled by you. They will get more fractious each time if it hurts to be picked up. Most rabbits love to snuggle and will sit on your lap and watch TV while you stroke them. When you are handling your rabbit you don't want your hands dirty, smelling like food or sticky. The food smell on your hands will tempt them to nibble, dirty gets their fur dirty, sticky you will have to take a damp wash cloth to get the sticky off their fur. As time goes by you will get in the habit of fooling with him and it will be second nature. A rabbit's mouth is under their nose and they can't see what they are biting, they can only go on smell.

When you put your rabbit back in his cage always put his rear end in first. You don't want them to start trying to jump in their cage. He won't intend to hurt you but his toenails will scratch you when he jumps out of your arms. If you feel better ask your parent to cut some sock tops off and put them over your arms when you handle him. You can also just wear a long sleeve shirt. You will also have to clip his toe nails. Ask for help when you do this until you get use to it. Don't cut the toenails too short but you don't want them sharp or long. Long nails make their feet hurt, and can cause them to break a toe. Keep an eye on the underside of their feet. If they start getting bald you need to put a salve on them so they don't get worst and start to bleed. If you have ever had sore feet you know how your bunny feels. Take care of their feet and keep an eye on them to make sure it doesn't happen again. If you have a way to move your rabbit out and clean the cage, especially the floor, and let dry before putting him back in his cage that also helps.

**Dogs, cats, and varmints are dangerous to your rabbit!** Make sure your rabbit is always in a secure area so nothing can get to his cage. Opossums, raccoons, dogs and stray cats will get under a cage and take their toes off. They can also make the rabbit panic and break their back. It is always better to prevent than to figure out how to fix it after the fact.

When you are out with your rabbit, you don't want them drinking, eating, or touching noses with other rabbits. You won't know if the other rabbits are sick and you don't want to expose them to any more than necessary. If you handle other people's rabbits wash your hands before playing with yours. If the other rabbit was sick, you need to even ask a parent about spraying your clothes with a disinfectant or changing clothes.

The MOST important thing you can do with your rabbit is ENJOY! They really don't take a lot of work and they all have such fun personalities. There are rabbit shows all over the states and we have a wonderful group of youth that show, play and enjoy each other.

ARBA: American Rabbit Breeders Association. They have a website and while your membership isn't required it's not that expensive and there are more benefits, a magazine, scholarships, show schedules and more. Go on their site and check it out.

If you ever need help, answers or advice, feel free to contact me.

Have fun,

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