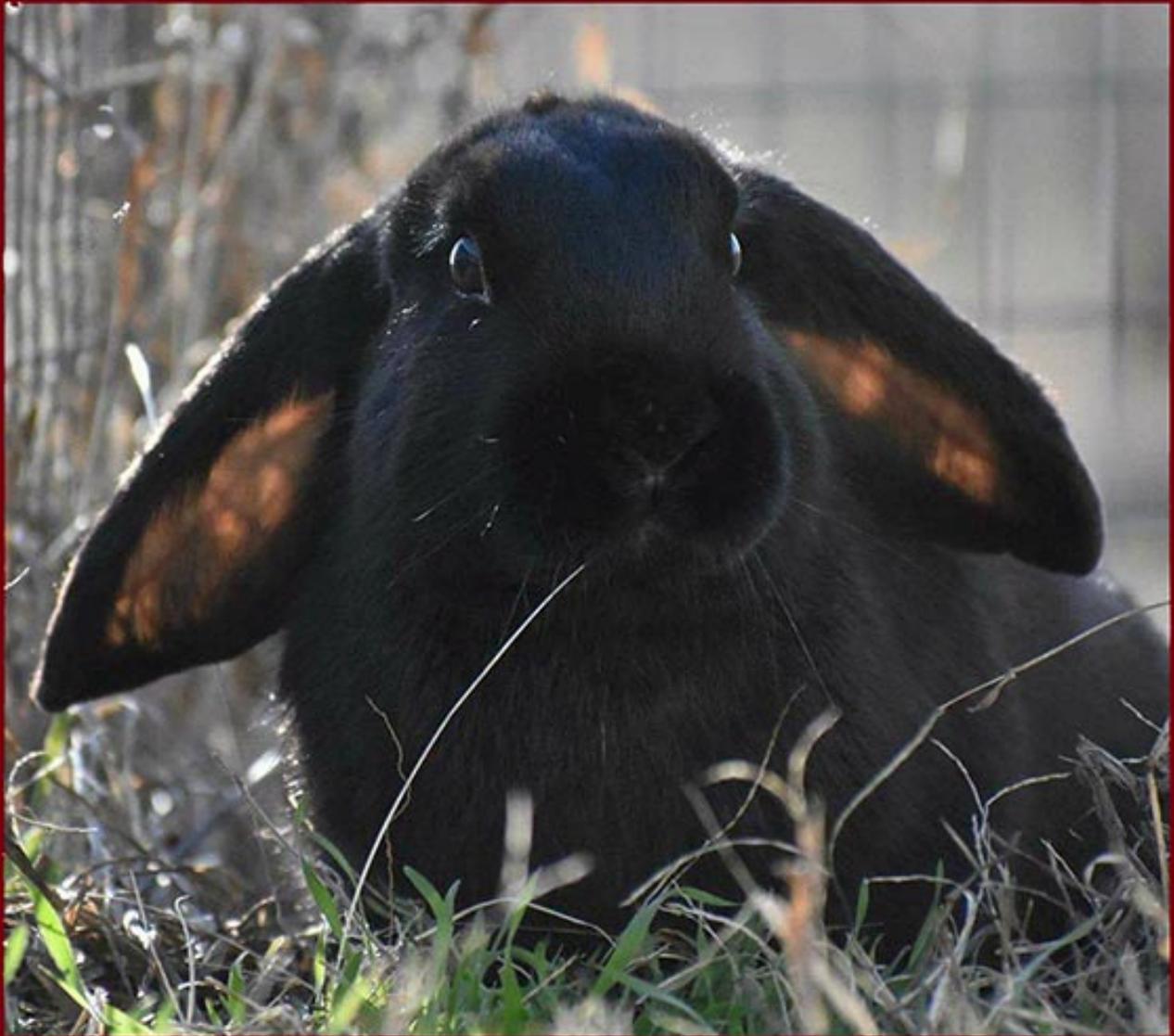


# **BASIC BUNNY CARE**



**Heartland Rabbit Rescue**

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- **Rabbits are the 3<sup>rd</sup> most surrendered and euthanized animal (behind dogs and cats) in our nation's shelter system.**
- **Rabbits are not rodents but belong to their own order called lagomorphs.**
- **Rabbits are very intelligent, curious, loving and social animals.** They can easily learn their names, be litter box trained, and form close bonds with their humans.
- **When rabbits are spayed/neutered and live indoors, they live an average of 8-12 years.**
- **An unspayed female rabbit has an 80% chance of getting uterine cancer (which is often fatal).**
- **A female rabbit can have anywhere from 1-14 babies and their gestation period is only 30 days. She can get pregnant again the same day she gives birth and the boys are fertile as early as 3 months and the females can get pregnant as early as 4 months.** This is another reason why spaying/neutering your rabbit is so important.
- **Rabbits are crepuscular meaning they are most active at dawn & dusk.**
- **Rabbits need hay 24 hours a day.** Hay is very important for their digestive systems.
- **Rabbits' ears help regulate their temperature.**
- **Rabbits cannot throw up.**
- **Rabbits' teeth grow continuously throughout their life and therefore it is in their nature to chew.** It is important that they always have things to chew on to help grind down their teeth (such as hay, untreated willow, cardboard, untreated wood toys, etc.).



**THINKING ABOUT GETTING A RABBIT?  
GET THE FACTS FIRST!**

1. **The average yearly cost of having a pet rabbit is MORE than that of a cat or small dog.**  
Is the cost of caring for a rabbit in your budget?
2. **Rabbits live an average of 8-12 years.** Who will take care of it when your child goes off to college?
3. **Consider allergies ahead of time.** Make sure no one in your family is allergic to bunnies or hay. A bunny MUST have hay 24/7. This is the most important part of their diet. A hay allergy may mean a bunny is not the right pet.
4. **Most bunnies DO NOT enjoy being picked up or held; this is because they are prey animals.** Most often, instincts tell them that when they are lifted off the ground a predator has them.  
*\*Make sure you have realistic expectations of having a rabbit for a pet. In most cases, a rabbit is not a good pet for a household with children under the age of 5.\**
5. **Baby bunnies are super messy until they are spay/neutered.**  
There are also important health and behavior reasons you should get your rabbit spayed/neutered. A spay/neuter surgery typically costs \$75-\$300.
6. **Despite what you may be told, it is hard to be 100% sure if a baby is a male or female until they are fully developed at 3-4 months old so be careful if you get more than one bunny.** If you accidentally end up with a boy and a girl they could start having babies as young as 4 months old!
7. **Domestic rabbits NEED to live indoors.** Rabbits that live outdoors have a much shorter average life span (1-3years). Temperatures over 80 degrees can cause heat stroke. Outdoors they are susceptible to predators. Even if a predator cannot get to them, just the act of it trying to get to your bunny or being nearby can literally scare them to death (heart attack). Your bunny can also get parasites outdoors.
8. **A cage is not big enough for a bunny, is hard to clean and the wire bottoms hurt their feet.** They should have a minimum of 4ft x 4ft for their home. Puppy exercise pens work well and are much easier to clean. This is just enough room for their litter box, food and water bowls, a bed with a box to hide under and a space to stretch out. Wire bottom cages frequently cause sores on the bottoms of their feet and disfigured toes from falling through.
9. **All bunnies need a minimum of 3-4 hours of exercise outside of their enclosure daily (but still indoors).** Be sure their exercise space is bunny-proofed (it is in their nature to dig and chew). They should also be safe from any other pets (dogs, cats, etc.).
10. **Consider any other pets in the household.**  
Rabbits can get along with other pets in the home depending on both the nature of the other pet and the rabbit. If you have a dog or cat that is high energy and has a high prey drive (wants to chase birds or any other wild animals) then a rabbit is NOT a good choice. Not only is it dangerous for the rabbit but it will constantly live in fear.



## LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

**Your rabbit should live INDOORS & NOT IN A CAGE.**

### **Why should my rabbit live indoors?**

While you may believe the outdoors would be a natural place for a rabbit to live, domestic rabbits are only cousins to the ones you see in the wild, and are unable to live outdoors happily and healthily over a long period of time.

- **Predators**

Determined predators, like coyotes and hawks, can break into hutches; raccoons can open them. Hutches or cages do not provide enough protection to make it safe to leave the rabbit outdoors 24 hours a day or unsupervised.

With their acute senses, a rabbit can sense the presence of a predator, even in your neighbor's yard. Also, just the presence of a predator can cause the rabbit to panic and injure themselves or literally die of shock.

- **Heat**

Temperatures of 80 degrees or higher can cause a rabbit to easily overheat and die from heat stroke.

- **Can get worms and other parasites**

- **Flystrike**

- **Average Life Span Decreases**

- **Other Dangers:**

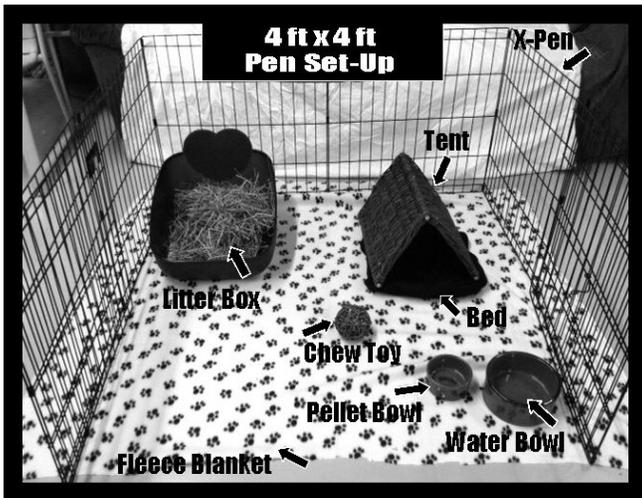
Poisonous plants, toxic pesticides or fertilizers, bacteria, exposure to weather, and diseases spread by insects.

- **Unhappy and Less Social**

The stress from living outside (predators, weather, poor health, etc.) plus the lack of socialization and intellectual stimulation they would otherwise receive indoors as part of a family, results in a less healthy, less social, and unhappy rabbit.

## Size of enclosure:

A rabbit needs a minimum space of 4-6 times their size along with enough head room to stand on their hind feet. We recommend a space no smaller than a 4ft x 4ft exercise pen.



The enclosure should be large enough to contain a litter box, a willow tent or cardboard box to rest under, food and water bowls, toys, etc., and still have enough room to stretch out.

**Keep in mind, the more space the better!**

## Why use an exercise pen and not a cage?

- \* **Less Expensive**
- \* **Much easier to clean** (can sweep floor and no wire bottoms to clean)
- \* **Portable**
- \* **Easily reconfigured** to include or exclude furniture, corners, and walls
- \* **No wire flooring!** Wire flooring is uncomfortable for your rabbit, can easily cause sores on their feet, and eventually may cause disfigured toes.
- \* **Cages are too small**

## Location of your rabbit's enclosure:

**Find someplace that is frequently visited.** Avoid drafty or super-noisy areas. Rabbits are social animals and enjoy being talked to or receiving a quick pat on the head as you pass by. (Your living room or dining room might be good place for your rabbit.) Rabbits like to be housed where all the action is, where you spend the most time.

## **EXERCISE**

**Rabbits need exercise daily!** Give your rabbit as much exercise as you can. Try to let her/him out of their enclosure for **at least three hours per day**.

### **Play area must be bunny-proofed:**

Your home or the larger/open area your rabbit will have access to during playtime **NEEDS TO BE BUNNY-PROOFED** so your rabbit can be allowed free run of the area. Find out how to bunny-proof your home in the next section of this care packet.

### **Why exercise is so important for your rabbit:**

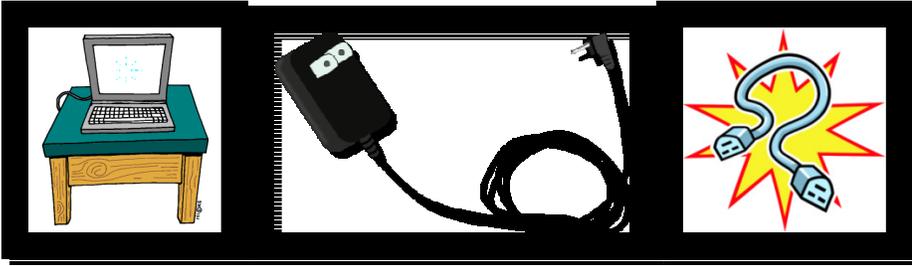
Daily exercise promotes mental and physical health.

- **Mental Health:**
  - Your rabbit is less likely to be depressed or to become frustrated.
  - Rabbits can easily become frustrated if confined to their pens, resulting in behavior that can be mistaken for being aggressive.
- **Physical Health:**
  - They are less likely to be overweight or to suffer from muscle atrophy.
  - Exercise helps rabbits maintain a healthy GI tract.

## **RABBIT-PROOFING YOUR HOUSE**

Rabbits chew to exercise their minds, not just their teeth. Providing lots of entertaining alternatives for your bun to chew on is the best deterrent for a destructive rabbit. Spaying and neutering should also decrease this behavior.

## CORDS & WIRES



Computer Cords

Phone Chargers

Etc.

Preventing rabbits from chewing on electrical cords is of utmost importance, since rabbits can be badly burned or electrocuted. The consequences of biting into an electric wire are too severe to risk relying on training alone. Instead, you must take action to move the cords safely out of reach. Some ways of doing this follow.

- PVC TUBING:

This is the strongest material you can use to protect your wires.

It may take some effort to string the wires through the tubes unless you buy tubes with wide diameters.

- PLASTIC TUBING:

Plastic tubing from a hardware or aquarium store (similar to that used in fish tanks) can be slit lengthwise with a blade and the wire can be tucked safely inside.



There is also a product called *Critter Cord* made specifically to protect your pets from chewing on cords. You can purchase 6-10 feet of Critter Cord for around \$12.

\*\*\* Bunnies can chew through this if they really want to, though. A harder, black, pre-slit type of tubing is also available. \*\*\*

- DECORATIVE WIRE-CONCEALERS:

These stick to the base of walls and come in strips, corners, etc., so they can follow the shape of the wall. This is a more costly and time consuming method than the clear plastic tubing above, but is more permanent and rabbit proof, as well.

- HIDE THE CORDS:

Of course, wires can be run under or behind furniture or carpets in order to hide them.

## REMOTE CONTROLS



Keep remote controls out of your bunny's reach. They love the buttons!

## HOUSEPLANTS



Most houseplants are toxic. Putting them on high furniture may not keep a rabbit away. Hang them from the ceiling if you have an active bunny, but watch for falling leaves. If you are unsure which plants may be toxic, you should assume they are unless you know that you, yourself, can eat them RAW safely.

## PEOPLE FOOD & OTHER PETS' FOOD



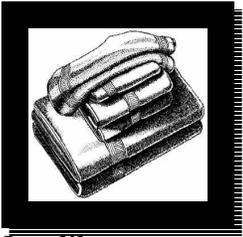
A Rabbit's digestive systems is very sensitive and therefore should never be fed anything other than their hay, pellets, rabbit-safe greens, and rabbit-safe treats. This also includes the importance of keeping these things out of reach from your rabbit. Being vegetarians their body is unable to process many foods that are okay for people or other pets. If you are ever unsure whether or not something is safe to feed to your rabbit, it is better to play it safe and NOT feed it to them!

## HIGH PILE CARPETS/RUGS

Not all rabbits will chew and dig on carpet but the higher the pile (the longer the fibers are or the shaggier it is), the more tempting it will be for your rabbit.

In addition to not wanting your carpet or rug ruined, chewing or digging on these can be hazardous to your bunny. Digging on the longer fibers makes it easier for one of their nails to get caught/snagged and be painfully torn or ripped as they try to get it free. Chewing on a higher pile carpet (and if swallowed) could potentially cause a blockage in their intestines since they are unable to digest this – especially when they are longer fibers. And unlike dogs or cats, a rabbit is rarely known to survive surgery on their intestines. That is why prevention is key!

## TOWELS



Just like carpet, towels have longer fibers and become stringy when chewed on. It is not recommended for towels to be placed in your bunny's enclosure. Fleece or bed sheets seem to be the best fabrics to use in your bunny's room.

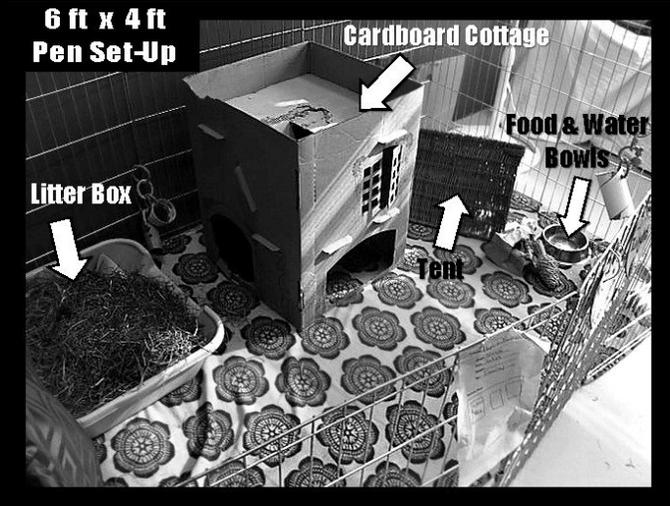
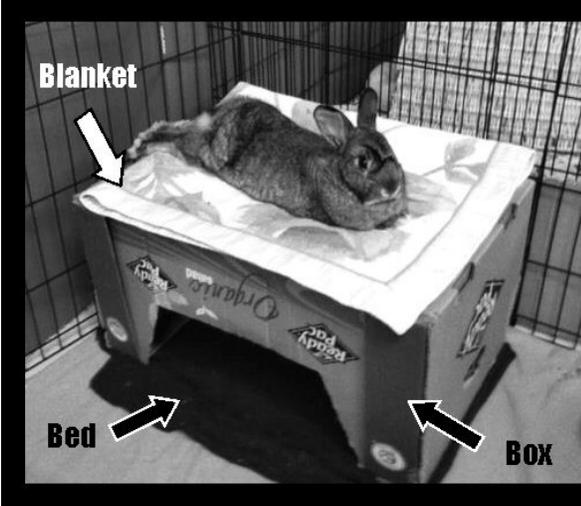
### OTHER THINGS TO KEEP AWAY FROM YOUR RABBIT:

- \* BOOKS
- \* PLASTIC BAGS
- \* CLOTHES ON THE FLOOR
- \* HOUSEHOLD CLEANERS

# CARING FOR YOUR RABBIT

## What needs to be in their enclosure?

- \* **Non-tip water bowl** (heavy crocks work best)
  - \* **Non-tip food bowl** (stainless steel or heavy crock)
  - \* **Large plastic litter box**
  - \* **Hay**
  - \* **Bunny safe litter**
    - Bunny safe litter: Carefresh, Unscented Yesterday's News, or Wood Stove Pellets (while it is made out of pine, the harmful phenols have been baked out during the sterilization process).
    - Please do not use cedar or pine shavings (the phenols can cause respiratory problems and can even cause liver damage that may eventually prove to be fatal).
    - Please do not use clumping litter (once ingested, even if not intentionally ingested, this litter can cause impaction in the intestines).
  - **Willow Tent or Cardboard Box to hide or sleep under**
  - **Bed** (as long as they don't chew it)
  - **Toys**
  - **Flooring** (blanket, plastic carpet runners with a blanket on top, low-pile rug, grass mats)  
Most bunnies do not like moving around on flooring that provides poor traction like hardwood or tile. Providing them with their own blanket or low-pile rug solves this problem and gives them a more comfortable place to lay. Just be sure your rabbit isn't chewing and eating their blanket or carpet!
- Note:* You can find low-pile 5x7ft rugs for under \$20 at your local Wal-Mart or Home Depot. Goodwill is a great place to find inexpensive blankets or sheets for your bunny.
- **Additional items that are optional:**
    - hay rack
    - tile (one or two square pieces of tile offers your bunny a cool place to lay)



## CLEANING

**The safest cleaning solution is 1/4<sup>th</sup> (of the spray bottle) white vinegar diluted with 3/4<sup>th</sup> water.** Put the mixture in a spray bottle for ease of use in cleaning your rabbit's house, the litter box, or the floor.

Be aware that many other kinds of cleanser or disinfectant will be toxic for your rabbit. Rabbits have very sensitive respiratory systems. However, you can soak plastic items in bleach if they need to be disinfected, as long as you rinse them thoroughly and let them air out well before returning the items to your bunny.

A broom and dustpan will also come in handy when cleaning your bunny's room. Just be sure to store them out of reach when not in use.

- **Litter Box**

**Change the litter box daily.** The cleaner you keep the box and rabbit area, the more likely it will be that your bunny will use the litter box. Spray the box with diluted vinegar and wipe clean. Soak the litter box in the vinegar solution to get rid of stains. Lining the bottom of the litter box with newspaper will make cleaning easier and provide extra absorption.

- **Water and Food Bowls**

**Fresh water every day is a must!** Wipe the water bowl with a paper towel and rinse it out to remove hair and any other debris daily.

Water and food bowls should be cleaned with a mild dish soap and water periodically to avoid bacteria build-up

- **Flooring and Bedding**

Sweep/mop floor and replace any soiled linens as needed (excessive hair, accidents, etc.).

### *Cleaning Tips:*

Some rabbits need their personal space (their pen) and can be territorial when it comes time for you to clean. It is nothing personal. It's just their way of saying, "This is my space so don't touch it!" You may try to do the pen cleaning while your rabbit is having exercise time and is outside of the pen.

Rabbits can be very particular when it comes to their space and their things. When you have finished cleaning, do your best to put things back where they were.

## **LITTER-TRAINING**

By nature, rabbits choose one or a few places (usually corners) to deposit their urine and most of their poop. **Here are some suggestions to help you train your rabbit to use the litter box.**

- **Spay/Neuter:** Once your rabbit is spayed or neutered, she/he will be more likely to use her/his litter box. This can make a big difference in their litter box habits!
- **Litter Box Size:** The bigger their litter box is, the better they tend to be about using it. There should be enough room for the rabbit to sit comfortably and have half hay and half litter.
- **Clean the Litter Box Daily:** The cleaner you keep the litter box and enclosure, the more likely it is that your rabbit will use the box.
- **Location of Litter Box:** Place the box in the corner of the enclosure that she/he pees in. If your rabbit continually urinates in a spot where there is no litter box, put the box where she/he will use it, even if it means rearranging the enclosure. Starting with multiple litter boxes can also help with litter training.
- **Keep the hay in their litter box:**  
Rabbits like to graze and poop at the same time so keeping hay in the litter box helps to litter train them and they tend to eat more hay.
  - \* Another option is hanging a hay rack right above the litter box – but be aware that most hay racks do not hold even a day's worth of hay.

### **Pooping outside of the litter box:**

Almost all rabbits will drop pills around their enclosure to mark it as their own. This is not failure to be litter-trained. It is very important for your rabbit to identify the enclosure as his/her property so that when he leaves the area for playtime in other areas of your house, he will distinguish the family's area from his own and avoid marking it.

To encourage this, respect your rabbit's enclosure as their own personal space. Don't do things to his/her enclosure that he/she doesn't like while they are in it. Try not to force him in or out of it; coax him.

### **Expanding their space:**

Whether you are expanding their space for playtime or wanting to make their room larger, it is best to start small. Start with the enclosure and a small running space, and when your rabbit is sufficiently well trained in that space, gradually give him more space. If you give too much freedom before they are ready, they may forget where the litter box is and could lose their good habits.

**A Sudden Loss of Good Litter Box Habits** and/or frequent urinating can be a sign of a medical problem involving their bladder. If this is the case, you need to see your vet.

## **SUGGESTED TOYS**

*Try to always have a chew toy and houses available for your bunny.*

- **Paper Bags** (no handles)
- **Cardboard Boxes** (remove any tape, great for climbing and digging)
- **Cardboard Concrete Forms** (for running through)
- **Cardboard Roll from Paper Towels or Toilet Paper** (avoid ones that have lots of glue left over)
- **Pine Cones** - **must be** untreated, washed, and baked.
- **Sea Grass or Maize Mats** – **must be** untreated.



- **Willow Chew Toys** – **must be** untreated.
- **Cardboard box full of shredded paper or straw for digging**
- **Phone Book** (remove covers and any glossy pages)
- **Hard Plastic Baby Rattle**
- **Hard Plastic Baby Keys**



- **Hard Plastic Ball with Bell Inside**
- **Bunny-Safe Wood Twigs** – **must be** untreated.  
(Stay away from cherry, peach, apricot, plum and redwood, which are all poisonous!)
- **Create a Fort or Tent** - by *draping a blanket for your bunny to explore under.*

# YOUR RABBIT'S DIET

## **An Adult Rabbit Should Be Eating:**

- **HAY:** Unlimited Timothy Hay
- **PELLETS:** Only 1/8 – 1/4 cup of Timothy Pellets per day.

*Never feed pellets that have nuts, seeds or cereal looking items added in, these are high in sugar and carbohydrates.*

- **GREENS:** Try to serve a mix of three or more \*bunny-safe vegetables each day. The salad should be about the size of your bunny's head.
- **TREATS:** No more than a baby carrot sized treat per day.  
\*Make sure the treat is safe for your bunny!

## **DO NOT Feed an Adult Rabbit:**

- **Alfalfa Hay and Alfalfa Pellets should not be given** unless you have a bunny under six months old or an elderly rabbit having trouble maintaining her weight.

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## **A Rabbit Under 6 Months Should Be Eating:**

- **HAY:** Unlimited Alfalfa Hay
- **PELLETS:** Unlimited Alfalfa Pellets
- **GREENS:** After 4 months they can have a small amount of fresh veggies. The salad should be about the size of your bunny's head.
- **TREATS:** After 4 months they can have no more than a baby carrot sized treat per day. \*Make sure the treat is safe for your bunny!

\* = Refer to our lists of “Edible Vegetables & Fruit” and “Foods to Avoid” on the following pages.

# Edible Vegetables and Fruit

Those listed in **BOLD** are high in Vitamin A. Serve one a day.  
(CF) = Common Favorite.

## Most Common Edible Vegetables:

- Arugula
- Basil
- Bok Choy**
- Cilantro (CF)
- Collard Greens**
- Dandelion Greens** (CF)
- Endive**
- Kale (use sparingly)
- Lettuce, Red/Green Leaf**
- Lettuce, Romaine** (CF)
- Mint
- Mustard Greens**
- Parsley** (CF)  
– many prefer Italian Parsley over curly.
- Wheat Grass** (CF)

*Note: Most rabbits can handle vegetables that are high in calcium or oxalates, as long as the vegetables are served in **moderation**, and the bunny doesn't have kidney or urinary tract problems. If you have a healthy rabbit, do not hesitate to serve him wonderful vegetables such as kale in moderation.*

## Most Common Edible Fruit/Veggie Treats:

- Apple – avoid seeds
- Banana
- Blackberry
- Blueberry
- Carrot
- Grapes
- Mango
- Melon
- Orange (no peel)
- Papaya
- Peach
- Pear
- Pineapple
- Raspberry

*Note: Any food that is high in sugar, such as fruit, should be served as a treat only: one serving per day, no larger than your thumb.*

## Foods to Avoid

Do NOT feed these foods to your rabbit.



### Vegetables & Foods to Avoid:

- ⊗ Avocado
- ⊗ Bamboo shoots
- ⊗ Beans, dried
- ⊗ Beans, raw: lima, kidney, soy
- ⊗ Bracken Fern
- ⊗ Cabbage
- ⊗ Cassava
- ⊗ Chocolate
- ⊗ Coffee beans and plant
- ⊗ Corn in any form
- ⊗ Dog/Cat Food
- ⊗ Grains
- ⊗ Honey/Seed Sticks
- ⊗ House Plants (Most are toxic)
- ⊗ Lettuce, Iceberg
- ⊗ Meat
- ⊗ Millet
- ⊗ Nuts
- ⊗ Onions
- ⊗ Peas, dried
- ⊗ People Food
- ⊗ Potatoes, including peels
- ⊗ Refined Sugars
- ⊗ Rhubarb
- ⊗ Sweet peas
- ⊗ Sweet Potatoes
- ⊗ Tea leaves
- ⊗ Whole seeds
- ⊗ Yogurt Drops
- ⊗ **ANYTHING MOLDY!**

### Notes:

- Flowers from the local nursery probably have pesticides on them. Don't serve them unless you know they are organic.
- Any food that cause loose or mushy stool should be removed from the diet immediately!

## SPENDING TIME WITH YOUR RABBIT

In order to spend quality time with your bunny that you BOTH will enjoy, you will first need to understand what your bunny is trying to tell you!

### WHAT IS MY BUNNY SAYING TO ME?

#### **LICKING:**

*A definite sign of affection and trust.*

#### **CHINNING:**



*A rabbit's chin has scent glands. They rub their chin on items to indicate that they belong to them. It is one way a bunny marks his/her territory (even you!). It can also be a sign of affection/ownership, "You belong to me". Don't worry it's nothing humans can smell.*

#### **BUNNY HOP/DANCE:**



*A sign of pure joy & happiness! Often called a Binky. Your rabbit will jump in the air, kick out their feet and shake their head and bottoms.*

#### **PLAYING:**

*Rabbits like to push or toss objects around. They also race around the house, jump on and off the low objects and just generally be silly. Rabbits need this type of playtime on a daily basis.*

#### **NOSE BUMPING/NUDGING:**

*Your rabbit's way of saying, "Out of my way, please," or, "Hey, pay attention to me!"*

## **FLOPPING:**



*A bunny who is flopped on his/her side feels safe and content.*

## **THUMPING/STOMPING:**

*A thump means your rabbit is frightened, mad or trying to tell you that he/she feels there is danger.*

## **LUNGING:**

*Usually done out of fear or anger. Generally, means stop doing what you are doing and back off.*

## **TEETH CHATTERING:**

*A rapid, soft chattering sound from the teeth. Generally happens when your rabbit is being patted or cuddled. A very pleasing sound of contentment and trust.*

## **TEETH GRINDING:**

*Louder and slower than teeth chattering, teeth grinding is usually farther apart and often accompanied by other signs of discomfort such as protruding (bulging) eyes, hunched position or uncomfortable position. A sign of illness, fear, nervousness or discomfort. Usually a sign that bunny is ill or in distress. Observation is warranted.*

## **GRUNTING:**

*Grunting is your rabbit's way of expressing displeasure with you. Often simply a rabbit's way of telling you to be careful or leave me alone. Could also be warning/expressing wish for private time; possible tantrum; possible fear; possible sign that something hurts. "Not now, please", "I don't feel so hot" or "This is MY house." Pay attention to posture and body language.*

## **SQUEAKS:**

*Higher pitched than grunts and usually more rapid; often accompanied by cowering into a corner or running around the house/cage. A definite sign of anxiety, nervousness, and/or fear; may increase if you pick your rabbit up. A quiet and gentle approach is warranted.*

## **SHRILL SCREAM:**

*This is a sign of intense fear or pain.*

## **NIPPING:**

*Meaning can vary: "Don't do that!", "Hey there...pat me!", "You are in my way. Please move.", "OUCH!", "I am (sick/hurt), please help." May occur while grooming you or another rabbit. Pay attention to context and body language. If you are holding your rabbit and he/she nips you it generally means I have had enough, please put me down. If you don't listen, a bite may follow.*

## **BITING:**

*Biting and nipping are different. A bite will generally draw blood and is done out of anger or fear.*

### **DON'T TOUCH MY STUFF:**

*Rabbits are often displeased when you rearrange their enclosure as you clean. They are creatures of habit and when they get things just right, they like them to remain that way. Some rabbits are more particular than others are. Don't be surprised if the moment you are finished your rabbit comes in and throws things around until it is the way he/she like it.*

### **TERRITORY DROPPINGS:**

*Droppings that are not in a pile, but are scattered, are signs that this territory belongs to the rabbit. This will often occur upon entering a new environment and will cease once the rabbit is acclimated to his/her new environment.*

### **WIDE EYES/THIRD EYELID OUT:**

*When your bunny's third eyelid (located in the inner corner of the eye) is out or if their eyes are extra wide compared to what is normal for them, this means they are frightened.*

## **SPENDING TIME WITH YOUR RABBIT CONTINUED...**

Now that you can understand what your rabbit is telling you,  
the next step is to learn how to interact with them.

### **Approaching A Rabbit:**

The safest initial approach with rabbits is to begin by stroking the top of the head. Do not offer your hand for a bunny to sniff the way you would to a dog because rabbits cannot see directly in front of their noses. Doing so may result in your fingers being mistaken for food or it could startle the bunny resulting in a nip.

### **Interacting With Your Rabbit:**

Rabbits are prey animals and as such are frightened when lifted off the ground. Therefore, you should learn to **interact with your rabbit on his or her level; the ground**. In this manner, you can interact with your bunny without frightening or restraining him. This is a great way to get to know his personality.

- When you are on the ground wanting to interact with your rabbit, do so when they are out for playtime (not in their room which should be their private safe space).
- It is best to sit and wait for them to come to you. Following them when they hop away will only irritate them or scare them.
- Sit or lie down on the ground to read a book or watch TV. Your bunny will most likely come check you out at some point. When they come to see you, you can reward them to teach them that time with you is a positive experience. (*Rewards include head rubs, a piece of a treat, greens, or even hay. This is a great way to bond with your bunny just be careful you don't feed too many treats!*)
- Talk to your bunny! They learn to recognize you by your voice and will find comfort in your soothing tone. Bunnies love to listen!

### **Things That May Scare Your Rabbit:**

Running

Stomping

Carrying Boxes and other large objects

Chasing  
Sudden loud noises

## **PICKING UP YOUR RABBIT**



While it is important to know how to pick up your bunny (for grooming, nail trims, to put in their carrier, etc.) you also need to remember that almost all bunnies do not enjoy being picked up or held, so only do so when necessary.

A rabbit's spine is extremely fragile, so great care must be taken when handling your new friend. If your rabbit straightens out their back and kicks violently, he can break the spine and paralyze himself, so please be careful.

Bunnies should NEVER be lifted by the ears or scruff of the neck.

### **How to Safely Pick Up Your Rabbit:**

Start off by petting your rabbit on top of the head. Once he/she settles for head rubs, gently slide your dominant hand under your bunny's chest and use your other hand to cup his/her bottom and bring them in towards your body. (Cupping their bottom is important in providing support for their backs.) Their tummy and feet should be facing/resting against you and his/her head under your chin. For beginners it is recommended to keep your hand under your bunny's armpits/chest while you hold them. This will provide you with more security/control if your bunny struggles. If your bunny is used to being picked up, once you have securely picked them up and they are settled, you can move your hand from under their chest to over the shoulders.

### **If Your Rabbit Struggles:**

If your rabbit struggles a lot, it is best to squat down and release the rabbit rather than attempting to contain her/him. You want to prevent her/him from jumping from heights because she might break her/his back.

### **NEVER "Trance" Your Rabbit:**



For a long time bunny owners practiced and promoted "trancing" or "hypnotizing" bunnies as an easy stress-free way to trim nails and a relaxing and enjoyable experience for bunnies. This is not true for the bunnies.

While the bunny may appear to be relaxed, they are actually experiencing what is known as Tonic Immobility. Tonic Immobility is "a short-term reversible paralysis which can be readily induced in susceptible 'prey species' such as rabbits."

Studies have shown that during Tonic Immobility, a rabbit's brain is still very much active and throughout (and even directly after) the "trancing" process, the rabbit experiences high blood pressure and a high heart rate proving that not only is this not a relaxing experience, but an extremely stressful one at that! It is not recommended that you ever "trance" your bunny.

## GROOMING

One of the easiest ways to groom your bunny is to sit in a chair and have a towel or pillow on your lap and place the bunny on top of the towel or pillow. Be sure to have their brush or comb within reach along with a garbage can for all the loose hair.

- **BRUSHING:** Comb/brush your bunny at least once a week.



*Longhaired rabbits or rabbits that are shedding should be brushed more often. A warning sign that your bunny is ingesting too much hair and needs to be groomed is if you see poops linked together. (Rabbits are not able to throw up so ingesting too much hair can lead to a blockage.)*

- **NAILS:** Your bunny's nails need trimmed every 6-8 weeks.



It is easiest to trim your bunny's nails with two people. One to hold the bunny and the other to clip the nails. You will also want to have some styptic powder or cornstarch nearby just in case you cut the quick.

- **SCENT GLANDS:** Check and/or clean scent glands as needed.  
(A wet q-tip works best.)

**CHECK YOUR BUNNY OVER:** It is a good idea to check your bunny over anytime you are already handling them for grooming. Be sure to report anything abnormal to your vet right away.

- \* Check ears for any wax buildup
- \* Check eyes and nose for any discharge
- \* Check teeth and gums
- \* Run your hands over your bunny's entire body feeling for any lumps or bumps

### **DO NOT GIVE YOUR BUNNY A BATH!**

Bunnies don't need baths! Like cats they are quite clean and groom themselves.

*If your rabbit has a dirty bottom, you should see your vet to determine the cause because this is not normal and can lead to irritated/inflamed skin, an infection, or even fly-strike. You can spot clean by dripping water on the area and soaking with warm water until you can lift off the feces using a damp cloth. You can also consult your vet about a gentle bunny-safe shampoo to help protect and soothe irritated skin. NEVER submerge your bunny in water.*

## VETERINARIANS

Not all veterinarians are knowledgeable about rabbit care, even if they claim they are, so it is important you make an effort to find a rabbit-savvy vet for your bunny now, **BEFORE** she or he gets sick.

It is also a good idea to have an emergency back-up for when your vet isn't available.



### **SPAY/NEUTER:**

The neutering/spaying of rabbits is of utmost importance! Altered rabbits are healthier and live longer than unaltered rabbits.

**At what age are they ready to be fixed?** Females can be spayed as soon as they sexually mature, usually around 4 months of age. Males can be neutered as soon as the testicles descend, usually around 3-1/2 months of age.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Neutered males should not be put in contact with unspayed females for at least 3 weeks after neutering as they are still fertile during this time.

### **Benefits of spaying/neutering your rabbit:**

#### **Health**

Females Rabbits: The risk of reproductive cancers (ovarian, uterine, mammarian) for an unspayed female rabbit is virtually eliminated by spaying your female rabbit. Did you know female rabbits have an 80% chance of developing uterine cancer? Uterine adenocarcinoma is a malignant cancer that can affect female rabbits over two years of age. The best prevention for this disease is to remove the reproductive organs (ovaries and uterus) in a surgical procedure commonly called a spay.

Male Rabbits: Your neutered male rabbit will live longer as well, given that he won't be tempted to fight with other animals (rabbits, cats, etc.) due to his sexual aggression. Male rabbits can also develop disease of the reproductive organs (the testicles) but with much less frequency than females.

#### **Prevents Pregnancy**

One of the most important things responsible pet owners can do is to spay/neuter their pet to prevent unwanted litters and to avoid contributing to the problem of pet overpopulation. Did you know rabbits are the third most surrendered and euthanized animal in our nation's shelter system, behind dogs and cats?

#### **Behavior**

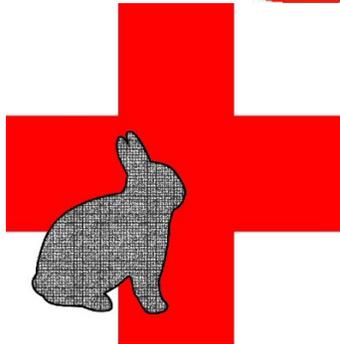
They are calmer and more loving once the undeniable urge to mate has been removed. In addition, rabbits are less prone to destructive (chewing, digging) and aggressive (biting, lunging, circling, growling) behavior after surgery.

#### **Litter Box Habits**

Unaltered rabbits (both males and sometimes females) will spray. However once spayed/neutered, they are much easier to litter train, and much more reliably trained.

## HEALTH

Need to Know !!



**You should take your rabbit to the vet once a year for a checkup.**

*The vet should check inside the ears, look at the eyes, weigh them, feel for any lumps and bumps, look at their teeth, etc.*

- **Rabbits in the USA DO NOT need vaccines.**
- **Always make sure any medications prescribed are safe for rabbits!**  
*A few of the medications that are TOXIC to rabbits include: Amoxicillin (NEVER give orally), Oral Penicillin, Frontline (Fipronil)*
- **Not Eating:**  
**Skipping a meal can be the first sign of illness in your rabbit.** Since rabbits are prey animals, they hide their illnesses. If your rabbit isn't eating (a good test is offering them their favorite treat/food), consult your vet ASAP.

Not eating is often a sign of G.I. Stasis or Bloat, both of which need medical attention right away. The longer you wait, the more critical your bunny's health becomes.

*\* For more tips on what to do if your bunny is not eating, visit our website: [www.tranquilitytrail.org](http://www.tranquilitytrail.org) and click on our "Bunny Care" tab located on the left side of your screen.*

- **Eating Less than Their Normal Amount:**  
This can mean a few different things. It could be a sign that something has upset their stomach (such as a new medicine), their teeth or mouth may be bothering them, or they could be in the beginning stages of G.I. Stasis or Bloat. Eating is critical to your bunny's health and survival, therefore if your rabbit is not eating their normal amount of food you need to consult your vet right away.

- **Poop:**



**Your rabbit's poop can tell you a lot about their health.** As a bunny parent, you will need to pay attention to their poop daily (another reason you should change their litter box daily). It can often warn you of a health problem before it becomes too serious.

**What to watch for:**

\* Smaller than Normal Poop

*(Can mean a blockage in their intestines or stomach may be forming or that they are ingesting too much hair and need to be groomed.)*

\* Poop Linked Together

*(Warning sign that your rabbit is ingesting too much hair and needs more frequent grooming.)*

\* Mushy Poop

*(Mushier than normal poop often indicates something has upset their stomach. This could be a new vegetable, treat or medicine. Discontinue feeding them anything that appears to have upset their stomach; if this does not resolve the problem consult your vet. If it appears to be a medication consult your vet before you stop administering the medication.)*

\* Diarrhea *(Consult your vet right away.)*

\* No Poop

*If your rabbit is not pooping you have an emergency on your hands. This often means they are in stasis, have a blockage, or bloat. Take them to your vet right away! The sooner you catch it the better their chances are of recovering. If you are unsure they are not feeling well, try feeding them a treat or greens. If they refuse or are only able to eat tiny amount then you know they are telling you something is wrong.*

\* A Messy Bottom

*(This will require a butt-bath – refer to page 25. Consult your vet to determine the cause to prevent this from continuing to happen. Don't leave untreated, as this can lead to infection and/or fly strike which can be fatal.)*

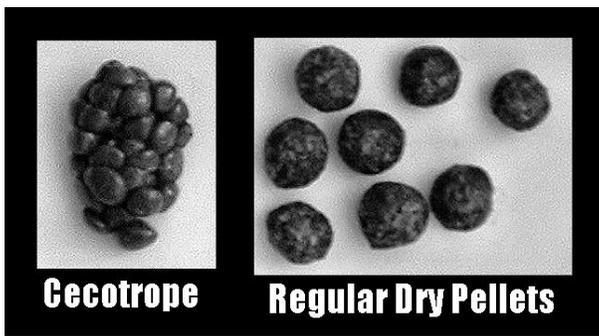
\* Mucous/Jelly-Like Substance or Strings

*(Often a sign your bunny is recovering from or about to go into stasis. Consult your vet right away.)*

\* Worms

*(You often have to be looking for them to see them. They are tiny white/see-thru threads in your bunny's poop. If your bunny has been outside on the ground, there is a possibility they could have them. If you do see one, or think you see one, put the poop with the worm in it into a zip lock bag to take to your vet. If diagnosed, your rabbit will need to be treated.)*

## **BUNNY POOP FACT: Bunnies have 2 different kinds of poop.**



They have the round dry pellets that you most frequently see and they have a soft, sometimes stinky kind of poop that looks like a blackberry called a cecotrope. As gross as it may be, bunnies eat their cecotropes which provide them with essential nutrition and beneficial bacteria. Most bunnies will eat them directly from their anus and you may never see one; but some bunnies are not so discreet about it.

\* If your bunny is overweight and can't reach, they may end up squishing and/or smearing the cecotropes in the process of trying to get to them. This can lead to health problems and therefore should lose weight.

- **Urine:**

Rabbit urine can vary in color from pale yellow to a dark orangish/red color. Any of these colors is normal.

### **When you should consult your vet:**

- \* Blood in the Urine
- \* Rabbit is Straining to Urinate  
*(This can be a sign of bladder sludge or stones which can be quite painful.)*
- \* White, Chalky Urine *(Often means there is too much calcium in their diet.)*
- \* Urine that is of a Sandy or Paste Consistency.  
*(This can be a sign of bladder sludge or stones which can be quite painful.)*
- \* Sudden Loss of Litter Box Habits – urinating outside of box  
*(This can indicate a problem with their bladder such as an infection, sludge, or bladder stones.)*
- \* Frequent Urinating - more than what is normal for them  
*(This can indicate a problem with their bladder such as an infection, sludge, or bladder stones.)*
- \* Not Urinating

- **Sneezing, weepy eyes or nose, discharge from the nose, and lethargic behavior are other signs of ill health. Consult your vet.**

- **Teeth:**

A rabbit's teeth continually grow. The front teeth must be lined up correctly in order for them to be kept trim. The cheek teeth must also be lined up; sometimes rabbits can grow molar spurs or have other teeth problems such as impaction and abscesses. **If you ever notice your rabbit drooling, having trouble eating, or having a runny eye this could be a sign of an abscess or tooth problem and the rabbit must be seen by a rabbit vet.** Some rabbits have malocclusion where the teeth don't line up. In most cases the teeth will have to be trimmed or filed, in some cases they have to be removed. It is VERY important that you find an expert in this field who has a lot of experience with rabbit teeth.

- **Lumps and Bumps:**

It is best to regularly check your bunny for any lumps and bumps, including the jaw, back, back, chest, tummy, etc. A lump could be any number of things such as an abscess, fatty tumor, cancer, etc. If you ever find a lump on your bunny you need to get them into the vet as soon as possible. While this may not be an immediate life threatening situation, an appointment with your vet within a week of finding it is recommended.

- **Ears:**

It is important to check inside your rabbits ears for wax, debris build up or infection. Look inside the ear to make sure it is nice and clean.

**Signs of an ear infection include:**

- Constant scratching at their ear (or at least more than normal)
- A normally “up” ear is down or half-way down
- Hair loss on the back of the ears and/or scabs from scratching

- **Skin:**

**Mites** - Lots of white flakes and sometimes hair loss, usually around the shoulders or lower back can be a sign of mites and will require diagnosis and treatment by a veterinarian. A skin scraping viewed under the microscope is the only way to officially diagnose mites. (Ivermectin or a kitten dose of Revolution are both bunny-safe treatments.)

**Fleas** - If you notice black dots on your rabbit’s skin, or they seem itchy, your rabbit may have fleas. See your vet for diagnoses and treatment. (A kitten dose of Revolution is a bunny-safe treatment.)

**NOTE: NEVER use Frontline on a bunny!**

**Things to have on hand in case your bunny gets sick:**

- *Baby Gas Drops (Simethicone) & 1cc syringe*
- *Metacam (A pain medicine that you must get through your vet.)*
- *Baby Food or Canned Pumpkin*
- *Lactaid Ringers Solution for subcutaneous fluids – if experienced*
- *Critical Care*

## THINKING ABOUT A SECOND RABBIT?



Rabbits are highly social creatures who love the company of others and who bond for life. Some bunnies are much happier with a companion. However, rabbits are very picky about what rabbit will be their new friend. In fact, strange rabbits will usually fight and can hurt each other badly, so any introductions must be done in neutral territory and by an experienced rabbit person. NEVER just put two strange rabbits together in the same enclosure!

### **BUNNY BONDING**

Before attempting an introduction, the rabbits should be spayed or neutered, and you should wait for a full two weeks after the surgery before proceeding with the introduction. Waiting ensures both proper healing and gives the hormones a chance to dissipate. This delay is especially important with a newly neutered male, as **a male bunny can still be fertile for three weeks after fixing.**

Taking the time, reading up, and waiting for two spayed or neutered rabbits to be introduced will ensure you the best possible chance at a loving, bonded relationship.

Sex, Age, and Breed are not determining factors on whether or not rabbits will get along. It has to do with personalities more than anything. A dominant bunny needs a more submissive friend and vice versa.

Consult with your local rabbit rescue group or shelter to arrange some bunny dates for your little one.

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