

# Basic Rabbit Care Sheet



Your new pet bunny will require some very specific things to keep them safe and happy in your new home. Rabbits need a safe space indoors where they will be a part of the family.

## **Rabbit Housing**

We recommend you provide your rabbit with a cage that has a large exercise pen and at least 4×4 feet of space with enough room for a litter box. We also suggest heavy crocks for clean water and food, so they cannot be tipped over, and at least one space for them to hide. Many bunnies will enjoy a second level, too.

Whatever enclosure you go with, the floor should have flat areas that are not wire so your bunny won't get sores on their feet or hocks. You'll need bedding as well and a recycled, soft paper litter works well.

Keep in mind that when your new pet rabbit isn't in their home, they'll need some traction to run around, so if you have hardwood or tile floors, you might consider putting down some area rugs for the spaces where your rabbit will play. Any time outside of the cage should be supervised to prevent unwanted chewing.

## **Rabbit Handling**

At the beginning, new bunny parents shouldn't try to handle their rabbits more than necessary. Some rabbits will love to be held, but most do not. Lie down on the floor near the bunny and read a book. Eventually your bunny will be curious and want to come to see you. Pet them on the head and rub their cheeks or upper back. Most don't like to be touched near the tail area.

Once your rabbit is used to you, you can start playing games. Spend as much time as possible with your rabbit. They love attention, and are generally most active in the mornings and evenings.

## **Rabbit Health**

Rabbits can live to be 13 or more years old with quality care, but their average lifespan is less. They should be spayed or neutered, something that is usually already taken care of if you adopt from a shelter or rescue group. In fact, unspayed female bunnies have almost a 100% chance of uterine cancer, which is preventable. Your new pet bunny will need a wellness examination by a rabbit-savvy veterinarian at least once a year.

The most important thing a new rabbit guardian can do is to know his rabbit and if there is a change in behavior, particularly in his eating habits, go to the vet. Rabbits are prone to gastrointestinal illness (which can be fatal) if not treated successfully. You must be rigorous about their nutrition, and check them daily for any small changes in appetite or stools, as they can get into big medical trouble fast if their gut fails them.

Try to feed your bunny at about the same time each day, measure their food, and if you notice that they aren't finishing it in the usual time, you may need to make a trip to the vet. We also suggest daily grooming with your bunny to look underneath and through their hair for any problems. Rabbits are also very prone to heatstroke. If the weather is warm, always supply a cool, frozen liter bottle or two of ice for your bunny to lean on., especially if they are kept in a garage or outdoors.

## **Rabbit Nutrition**

The most important component of a rabbit's diet is grass hay, such as timothy hay or orchard grass. Stay away from alfalfa hay unless your rabbit is young, geriatric, or pregnant.

- 1/8 cup pellets for rabbits under 4 pounds per day
- 1/4 cup pellets for rabbits over 4 pounds

A rabbit's diet should be made up of 70% grass hay that is always available, 20% fortified pellets, 8% leafy greens, and 2% treats.

When offering greens, start slowly by introducing one type, like Italian parsley, to your rabbit's diet for a few days. If he enjoys them and does well, you can move on to other greens like fresh red leaf lettuce, cilantro or dandelion greens daily, as well. This is usually a handful per rabbit. Carrots, believe it or not, are not good for your bunny, as they have too much sugar. Your bunny might also enjoy other treats, like the Oxbow Simple Rewards Oven Baked Apple & Banana Treats, but, again, start slowly when introducing them.

## **Rabbit Training**

Most rabbits can be litter trained, but they should be spayed or neutered first. In fact, they are so smart that they basically train themselves with the right setup. Provide them a large cat litter box, line it with a few layers of newspaper, and top it off with lots of grass hay. Stay away from clay litters or pine or cedar shavings.