

GROOMING

Rabbits are by nature very meticulous animals, and will spend endless hours grooming themselves. They will generally molt or shed their coat somewhat seasonally about twice a year. Your bunny should be brushed on a daily basis, particularly during these periods of molt. A small slicker grooming brush will aid in the removal of excess fur and will prevent your rabbit from ingesting this fur which could develop into intestinal "hair balls". Because rabbits cannot vomit, fur that lodges in the intestinal tract can cause a fatal blockage. You can prevent this problem by giving him any commercial cat-furball medication twice a week (daily when he is molting).

Your rabbits' nails should be routinely trimmed with a small dog nail clipper. It would be wise to observe an experienced person perform this procedure before YOU attempt it if you have never clipped nails before. Care must be taken not to over-trim or cut into the blood vessel running through each nail.

Check your bunny for fleas and utilize a cat flea powder if necessary. Cat flea products are generally safe to use on rabbits, especially if the active ingredients are pyrethrins, but check with your veterinarian. Ear mites can also occur in bunnies, and you should check your pet's ears on a routine basis. Watch for signs of crusting, dirt, and heavy wax deposits.

HANDLING

Like humans, every rabbit has a distinct personality. Some enjoy being handled more than others. A bunny handled from a young age with gentleness and with consistency will generally respond positively to being handled and held. Children often do not know how to hold a bunny; consequently the rabbit becomes frightened or injured when he is squeezed too forcefully. Teach your child to respect the bunny's natural instinct to be close to the ground. Limit the amount of lifting and holding until you are sure that both child and rabbit are calm and confident. If a child is standing up while holding the rabbit, it is possible that the rabbit may attempt to jump out of the child's arms and be injured in the fall. Have the child sit on the floor (or the ground) with the bunny sitting beside her or on her lap so that both bunny and child can relax. A bunny can be cradled and held for increasingly longer periods, but it is important to note that he will respond best in a quiet environment. Stroking the bunny gently and speaking to him softly will initiate the best response. A bunny should NEVER be picked up by his ears. Smaller breeds may be gently grasped under the chest, with support being given to the hindquarters with the other hand, but NEVER by the ears.

BUNNY BIRTH CONTROL

Like dogs and cats, rabbits should be spayed or neutered. Breeding your bunny is not advised. Every year, thousands of adorable, adoptable rabbits are destroyed at animal shelters because no one wants them. Thousands more are abandoned in fields and roadsides to suffer and die. You may have no trouble finding homes for those adorable babies, but who will care for them once they outgrow their cute-bunny phase and the novelty wears off? The sad fact is that there are many more wonderful rabbits than there are wonderful PERMANENT homes for them. Please do not contribute to this tragic problem by allowing your bunny to have even one litter. Neutered rabbits are healthier, calmer, easier to housetrain, less aggressive, and less destructive.

Rabbits are very special animals. If you have never lived with one before, you are in for a treat. They are bright, interesting, curious, loyal and affectionate. Your bunny will undoubtedly bring you a great deal of enjoyment and pleasure over the years. Keep in mind, however, that the care of your bunny rests in your hands. May those hands always be hands of gentleness, kindness and concern. Also, may your commitment to your bunny be for the entire life-time of your rabbit.

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A BUNNY TO LOVE

A Guide to the Responsible Care of Your Pet Rabbit

by
Jean Sleeper

KINSHIP WITH ALL LIFE FOUNDATION

The popularity of rabbits as pets has increased immensely over the last few years. Their value as companion animals has burgeoned for several reasons. Rabbits make relatively few demands on an individual's or a family's life style. They are quiet and peaceful animals by nature. They do not bark, they do not disturb neighbors, and they easily get along with other small pets if introduced with care. Their exercise requirements are few, and they respond beautifully to attention and affection if they are handled frequently with gentleness and love. Rabbits are very intelligent, and can be housetrained very easily. In general, rabbits are loving and gentle creatures who will fill your world with more love and joy than you could ever imagine. Such a relationship, however, can only be founded upon mutual giving which stems primarily from GOOD CARE. Too many rabbit pets, particularly during the weeks following the "Easter bunny rush", are at the mercy of well-meaning individuals and families who simply do not know how to properly care for their new pet.

This brochure has been prepared specifically for the new rabbit owner who desires to do a "good job" in caring for his companion, and who wishes to provide his bunny with the fundamentals of GOOD CARE as well as with love and companionship.

YOUR BUNNY'S NEEDS

HOUSING

Whether your bunny is to be an "outside" or an "inside" pet, he will need a cage or a place of his own where he can find security and quiet time. If your rabbit is to be caged much of the time (such as when you are away at work or at school), the cage should be very spacious so that he can exercise, stand up, stretch out, and be unrestrained or unhampered. Beware of purchasing a small cage which a tiny young bunny will outgrow in a few months. The more spacious the cage, the healthier and happier your rabbit will be.

A minimal cage for a 6-7 lb. rabbit should be at least two feet wide by 18 inches high by 2 ft long (3 to 4 feet would be even better). Be certain that the cage is sturdily constructed (no chicken wire) with floor meshing made of 1 x 1/2 in. wire to minimize the risk of injury.

A large cage, however, is not a substitute for running time outside the cage. Your rabbit needs physical and social stimulation, which no cage can provide. Also, you will be missing the best part of getting to know your rabbit if he is left alone in a hutch or cage all the time. Your relationship with him will be less rich than if you allow him to spend time with you as a member of your family.

A sitting board should also be provided. This board can be of plywood or pine or any other wood (except redwood which is toxic), and it should be 6-8 in. square or larger, provided that the board fits through the door of the rabbit cage or hutch. The sitting board will prevent the bunny from getting sore hocks or feet from being on the wire too much of the time. The board will also provide chewing material which is essential for allowing the rabbit to file down his teeth, which grow continuously. The board should periodically be cleaned with warm water and a mild bleach solution and allowed to dry in the sun.



SANITATION

Keeping the cage or hutch CLEAN is extremely important in the prevention of disease. For an outside hutch, remove all droppings daily, or if you have a metal tray for your cage, carefully clean out the tray daily. From time to time use a mild bleach solution to thoroughly cleanse and disinfect the cage and tray, and then rinse thoroughly. A good sanitation program alleviates burdensome fly problems and generally leads to a healthier and happier animal.

HOUSETRAINING

Rabbits are easy to houstrain, returning to the same spot in the cage each time that nature calls. Place a litterbox in the cage so that cage-time will also be learning time. Have at least one litterbox outside the cage as well. Praise your bunny and give him a treat whenever you see him in the litterbox. Place a small amount of hay in one corner of the litterbox to encourage him. Some rabbits almost houstrain themselves; others require time and patience. Praise for doing the right thing and prevention through confinement and supervision are the keys: punishment has no place in houstraining.

TEMPERATURE

The indoor bunny is very fortunate since he does not have to tolerate the extremes of heat and cold or the boredom and isolation that some outside bunnies must endure. The outside bunny's cage should have a sturdy roof, and be placed in a protected area of the yard sheltered from rain, wind, drafts, dampness, and especially from the direct sun during the hot summer months. Many pet bunnies die each year simply because many people do not realize that rabbits cannot tolerate excessive heat. Rabbits cannot perspire, and the only way that they can cool themselves is by their ears. If you live in an area where temperatures reach 85 degrees or higher during the summer, here are some suggestions for keeping your bunny cool:

- a) Freeze a couple of gallon jugs of water in your freezer. On hot days, place one of the jugs inside the rabbit cage. A rabbit will usually lie against the jug to keep cool.
- b) Hang wet towels on the sides of the cage and wet the roof down to cool your bunny. This method, however, is not as effective as the frozen jugs. Neither method is a guarantee against overheating. Please check your rabbit frequently if you must leave him outdoors during hot weather.

FOOD AND WATER

Your rabbit should always have a fresh supply of water every day, either in a water bottle or a crock that cannot be easily overturned. Clean the crock or water bottle frequently, use a mild bleach solution and warm soapy water to remove any algae which might start growing. Rinse carefully after cleaning.

Your bunny will also need a fresh supply of commercially prepared rabbit pellets daily. Do not over-feed or allow uneaten rabbit pellets to remain in the dish day after day. The pellets lose their nutritional value if exposed to light for any length of time. For this reason, your supply of rabbit food should be kept in a water/air tight container away from the sun and moisture. The amount of pellets you should feed your bunny will vary with the age, weight, and activity level of each animal. Consult your veterinarian regarding suggested amounts. Your rabbit will also enjoy a small quantity of fresh hay daily, which helps to provide the proper roughage. He will also enjoy a small quantity of grain such as rolled barley, rolled oats or groats. The protein content is high in these grains, so it is important NOT to over-feed, especially when your bunny is quite young. Small pieces of well washed carrots and apples may also be given as treats; start these slowly, especially with young rabbits, since fresh fruits and vegetables, particularly greens, may cause diarrhea if given in excess.

Check your rabbit's TEETH regularly to be certain that he is not suffering from a condition called malocclusion (improper bite) which prevents him from eating normally. A rabbit's normal bite is similar to a person's — the top teeth slide over the lower teeth. If a rabbit is suffering from malocclusion, the lower teeth slide over the top teeth and he is not capable of eating properly. The rabbit's teeth grow continuously, and malocclusion prevents them from being filed down through normal chewing. A bunny suffering from malocclusion must be taken to a veterinarian for the teeth to be properly trimmed, and this procedure will have to be repeated on a regular basis for the life of the rabbit, otherwise he will starve to death.

