

Rabbit Care Help Sheets

Handy pages of expert advice & instruction for caring for your beloved bunny.

BEHAVIOR



DIET



HOUSING



DANGERS



FUN



ILLNESS



10-POINT PRIMER FOR NEW BUNNY FAMILIES

Mary E. Cotter, Ed.D., Licensed Educator, House Rabbit Society (mec@cloud9.net)

- 1) Pine and cedar shavings are not recommended for use with rabbits and other small mammals. Inhaled phenols (the substances that make pine and cedar “smell good”) can cause liver changes in rabbits. Clay litters (clumping or non-clumping) are also not recommended. The “clumpers” can clump in the rabbit’s GI tract, and dust from plain clay litters can exacerbate respiratory problems.
- 2) Spaying and neutering is recommended for all rabbits. Rabbits can have a litter every 30 days, and can get pregnant within minutes after giving birth. Not only does spaying/neutering prevent unwanted litters, but it also protects female rabbits from uterine cancer (the rate as females grow older ranges from 50-80%), and permits male/female pairs to live happily together without being driven by their hormones.
- 3) Rabbits can easily be litterbox-trained—but you and the rabbit must “negotiate” this process. Start in a small area. Watch to see which corner the rabbit wants to use for urination, and place a litterbox there. Some rabbits need several litterboxes to start.
- 4) The primary component of a mature rabbit’s diet should be grass hay (Timothy, Brome, Orchard Grass, etc.). This should be given fresh daily, in large quantities. Hay can be ordered over the internet from various companies (see <http://www.rabbit.org/links/mail-order-resources.html>). Using hay as a litterbox material is ideal; it cushions the rabbit’s feet so they stay dry, and encourages the rabbit to munch on hay while he’s doing his business. To supplement hay, feed a daily salad of dark green leafy vegetables. Rabbit pellets should be given only in very limited quantities. The unrestricted feeding of pellets leads to obesity and often to bladder sludge. If you use pellets, buy only perfectly plain ones; do not be tempted by the “fancier” pellets with their eye-catching seeds, nuts, corn, and other “tidbits.” These ingredients are simply not good for your rabbit over the long term, and some of them are downright dangerous.
- 5) Be sure to “bunny-proof” the areas where your rabbit will exercise. Many—though not all—rabbits are prodigious chewers. They will chew electrical wires, carpeting, and other objects commonly found in any household. Although many people keep rabbits outdoors, this is not recommended. Indoor rabbits live healthier, happier, longer (7-10 years or more) lives.
- 6) Never attempt to “punish” or “discipline” a rabbit. These tactics will often create fear and defensive biting. If you need help with a behavior problem, contact your local HRS representative or visit the HRS web site: www.rabbit.org.
- 7) Rabbits need veterinarians skilled in rabbit medicine. Many wonderful vets are expert with other species, but are not knowledgeable about rabbits, and may administer inappropriate or harmful drugs in their efforts to help. To find a rabbit-savvy veterinarian in your area, contact your local HRS representative, or search the HRS web page: www.rabbit.org
- 8) Anorexia and /or watery diarrhea in rabbits should be considered emergencies. Seek expert veterinary care immediately.
- 9) Rabbits are not recommended for small children. Rabbits are prey animals by nature, and are easily frightened by children’s handling. Rabbits are often dropped by children, resulting in broken legs and backs. An adult should always be the rabbit’s primary caretaker, and should carefully supervise any children interacting with the rabbit.
- 10) The most common rabbit veterinary problems are: ear mites, ear infections, urinary tract infections, abscesses, tooth problems (incisor malocclusion and/or molar spurs), uterine cancer (in unspayed females), upper respiratory infections (watch for sneezing or runny eyes/nose), gastrointestinal slowdown or stasis, changes in balance or gait. A skilled rabbit veterinarian should be consulted for any of these problems.



9 COMMON RABBIT MYTHS

Myth 1: Rabbits are great, low-maintenance starter pets.

Reality: Although they don't need to be walked like dogs, rabbits are anything but low-maintenance. Their quarters need daily cleaning, and fresh food and water must be offered daily, including a salad of well-washed, dark-green leafy vegetables. Certain rabbit health problems can become chronic and can require regular (and sometimes expensive) veterinary treatment. To complicate the picture, veterinarians skilled in rabbit medicine are often hard to find.

Myth 2: Rabbits only live a year or two, so no long commitment is necessary.

Reality: Well cared-for indoor rabbits can live 7-10 years, and some live into their teens. This is approximately the same life span as some breeds of dogs, and requires the same long-term commitment.

Myth 3: Rabbits do not need veterinary care the way dogs and cats do.

Reality: Although rabbits in the USA do not require annual vaccinations, nevertheless, regular veterinary checkups help to detect small problems before they become big ones. Companion rabbits should be spayed/neutered by veterinarians experienced in rabbit surgery. This not only reduces hormone-driven behaviors such as lunging, mounting, spraying, and boxing, but also protects females from the risk of uterine cancer, the incidence of which can exceed 50% as rabbits grow older.

Myth 4: Rabbits are happiest outdoors in a backyard hutch.

Reality: Rabbits kept outdoors in hutches are often forgotten and neglected once the initial novelty wears off. Far too frequently, they are relegated to a life of "solitary confinement" and are subject to extremes of weather, as well as to diseases spread by fleas, ticks, flies, and mosquitoes all of which can adversely affect their health and their life span. They can die of heart attacks from the very approach of a predator – even if the rabbit is not attacked or bitten. Rabbits are gregarious creatures who enjoy social contact with their human caretakers. The easiest way to provide social stimulation for a companion rabbit is to house him indoors, as a member of the family.

Myth 5: Rabbits are rather dirty, and have a strong odor.

Reality: Rabbits are immaculately clean, and, once they have matured and are spayed/neutered, they go to great lengths not to soil their living quarters. They will readily use a litter-box, and if the box is cleaned or changed daily, there is no offensive odor

Myth 6: Rabbits love to be picked up and cuddled, and do not scratch or bite.

Reality: Although some rabbits tolerate handling quite well, many do not like to be picked up and carried. If rabbits are mishandled they will learn to nip to protect themselves. If they feel insecure when carried they may scratch to get down. Unspayed/unneutered rabbits often exhibit territorial behavior such as "boxing" or nipping when their territory is "invaded" by the owner.

Myth 7: Rabbits – especially dwarf breeds – do not require much living space.

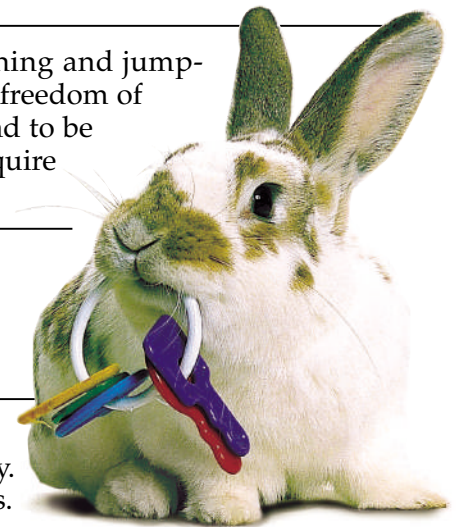
Reality: Rabbits have powerful hind legs designed for running and jumping. They need living space that will permit them ample freedom of movement even when they are confined. Dwarf rabbits tend to be more active and energetic than some larger breeds, and require relatively more space.

Myth 8: Rabbits can be left alone for a day or two when owners travel.

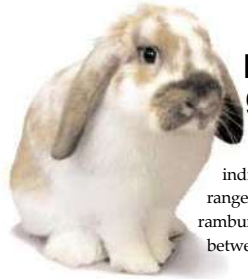
Reality: Rabbits need daily monitoring. Problems that are relatively minor in some species (e.g. a day or two of anorexia) may be life-threatening in rabbits, and may require immediate veterinary attention.

Myth 9: Rabbits do fine with a bowl of rabbit food and some daily carrots.

Reality: The single most important component of a rabbit's diet is grass hay, which should be provided, free-choice, daily. Rabbit pellets should be given only in very limited quantities.



Did you know?



Rabbits make great housepets.

Rabbits are intelligent, affectionate, inquisitive individuals. Their personalities range from bold to timid, gentle to rambunctious, and all points in between.

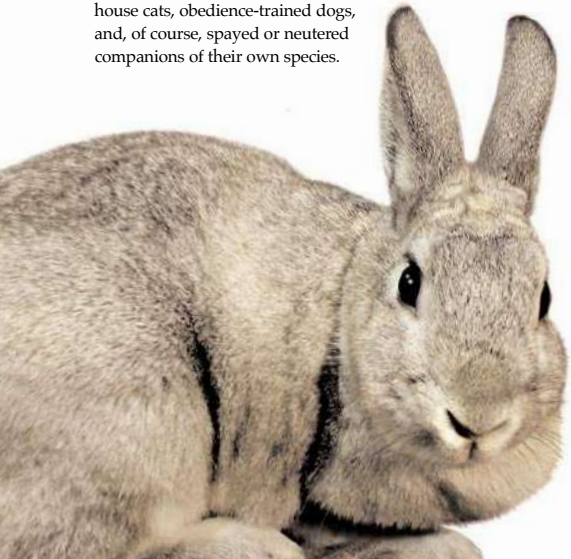
Rabbits can be litterbox trained.

Providing a litterbox with organic litter topped with hay in the corner of the rabbit's space is the best way to train a rabbit. Once he is going to the box regularly, his space can be expanded until he is free-running in an area with one or two litterboxes.



Rabbits can live with domesticated cats and well-behaved dogs.

Rabbits are social animals who thrive in the company of others — humans, house cats, obedience-trained dogs, and, of course, spayed or neutered companions of their own species.



Rabbits are better pets for adults than for children.

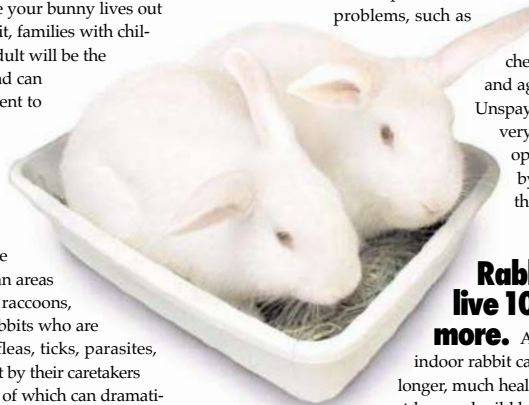
Rabbits are not for everyone. The ideal "rabbit person" is a quiet, gentle individual who is eager to get to know rabbits on their own terms. Noisy households and people who are looking for something they can carry in their arms and cuddle for hours and hours are likely to be disappointed by the subtle nature of the rabbit personality. The natural exuberance and decibel level of even the gentlest young child is stressful for rabbits. Further, children's interests change very rapidly; your 11-year-old may be 21 by the time your bunny lives out his life. When adopting a rabbit, families with children should ensure that an adult will be the rabbit's primary caretaker and can make a long-term commitment to the rabbit's well-being.

Rabbits should live indoors.

Rabbits are prey animals. Even the most urban areas are rife with predators, including raccoons, feral cats, and dogs. Domestic rabbits who are kept outdoors are also subject to fleas, ticks, parasites, extremes of weather, and neglect by their caretakers ("out of sight, out of mind") — all of which can dramatically shorten their lifespan.

Rabbits need more than just rabbit pellets for their diet.

The primary component of a mature rabbit's diet should be good-quality grass hay, such as timothy, brome, or orchard grass. Fresh water and fresh, leafy greens should be given daily. Commercial rabbit pellets, as well as treats (such as fresh fruit), should be given only in limited quantities.



Most rabbits . . . like to be picked up and carried around.

As ground-loving creatures, rabbits feel most comfortable on the floor. Rabbits can be taught to accept routine handling, but there is nothing abnormal about a bunny who prefers to sit beside you rather than on your lap.

Rabbits should be spayed or neutered.

Spaying/neutering prolongs a rabbit's life and prevents or solves many behavior problems, such as house soiling, destructive chewing and digging, and aggressiveness. Unspayed females face a very high risk of developing uterine tumors by the time they're three years of age.

Rabbits can live 10 years or more.

A spayed/neutered indoor rabbit can live a much longer, much healthier life than his outdoor and wild brethren.

Rabbits need a stimulating environment and like to explore by chewing.

For their physical and emotional well-being, rabbits should be given lots of chew toys made of wood, cardboard, wicker, and paper, as well as toys to climb on and toss. Because rabbits are chewers by nature, their play-area should be carefully rabbit-proofed.



Rabbits need to see specially trained veterinarians.

Most general veterinarians are not rabbit-savvy, and it can be hard to find a skilled rabbit practitioner.

Rabbits should be adopted from a shelter or rescue group, rather than bought from a breeder or a pet store.

As their popularity increases, rabbits are paying the same price as other companion animals: every year thousands of adorable bunnies are euthanized simply because there are more rabbits available than there are responsible humans to care for them.

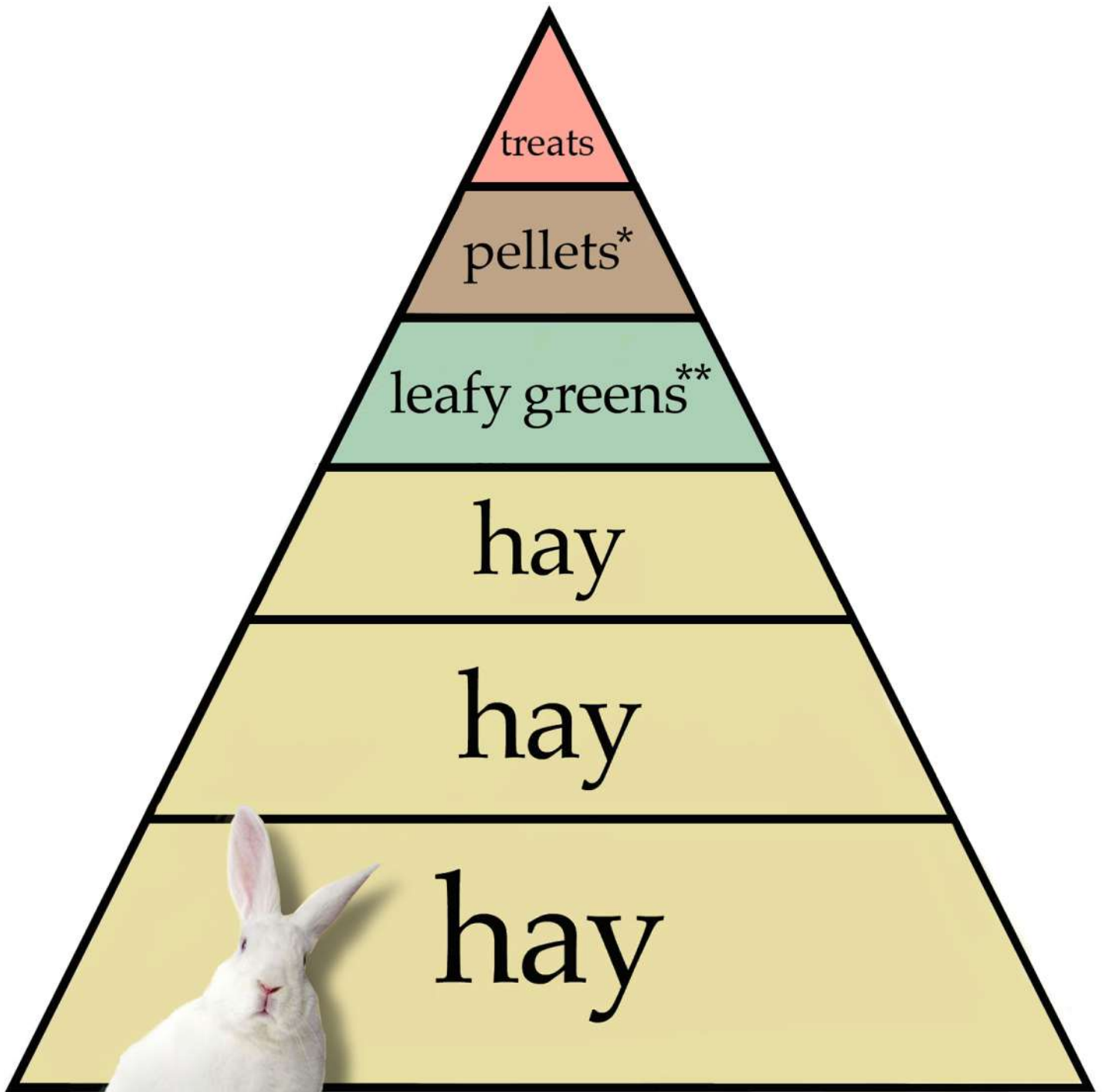


Ask us about adopting a rescued rabbit!



Courtesy House Rabbit Society, www.rabbit.org and Harelina Graphics. Photos by Ken Mark and Mary Cotter. House Rabbit Society is an international, volunteer-based non-profit organization with two primary goals: to rescue abandoned rabbits and find permanent homes for them, and to educate the public and assist humane societies, through publications on rabbit care, phone consultation, and classes upon request. To find your closest HRS representative, visit www.rabbit.org. Printing provided by Oxbow Pet Products, www.oxbowhay.com





2021 Revised Rabbit Food Pyramid

*1/4 to 1/3 cup pellets per 5 lbs. of body weight per day.
Dietary changes should be made gradually.

*A rabbit's diet should consist of portioned, good-quality pellets, unlimited "grass" hay (timothy, oat, brome, orchard grass, etc.), fresh water and portioned leafy green vegetables.** Anything beyond that is a "treat" and should be given in very limited quantities.*

Babies

- Birth to 3 weeks--mother's milk
- 3 to 7 weeks--mother's milk, alfalfa and pellets
- 7 weeks to 7 months--unlimited pellets, unlimited hay
- 12 weeks--introduce vegetables (one at a time, quantities under 1/2 oz.)

Young Adults (7 months to 1 year)

- Introduce timothy hay, grass hay, and oat hays, decrease alfalfa
- Decrease pellets to 1/2 cup per 6 lbs. body weight
- Increase daily vegetables gradually
- Fruit daily ration no more than 1 oz. to 2 oz. per 6 lbs. body weight

Mature Adults (1 to 5 years)

- Unlimited timothy, grass hay, oat hay, straw
- 1/4 to 1/2 cup pellets per 6 lbs. body weight
- Maximum 1 cup leafy green vegetables per large rabbit. About a half cup for small rabbits under 5 lbs.
- Fresh fruit daily ration no more than 2 oz. (2 tbsp.) per 6 lbs. body weight

Senior Rabbits (Over 6 years)

- If sufficient weight is maintained, continue adult diet
- Frail, older rabbits may need unrestricted pellets to keep weight up
- Alfalfa can be given to underweight rabbits, only if calcium levels are normal
- Twice-annual blood workups are highly recommended for geriatric rabbits

*** Note we now recommend adult rabbits be served no more than 1 cup fresh leafy green vegetables per day. This is a smaller portion than previously recommended. We also advise that some rabbits cannot tolerate vegetables well, and these rabbits should be fed NO VEGETABLES WHATSOEVER.*

Suggested Vegetables

Select at least three or more different vegetables daily. Variety is necessary to obtain optimal nutrients, with one each day that contains Vitamin A, as indicated by an (A). Introduce vegetables one at a time. Eliminate if you observe soft stool, diarrhea, or refusal to eat, and contact your rabbit-savvy vet.

Alfalfa, radish & clover sprouts

Basil

Beet tops (A)

Bok choy

Carrot tops

Celery (must be chopped)

Cilantro

Chicory

Clover (no pesticides)

Collard greens(A)

Dandelion greens/flowers (no pesticides) (A)

Endive

Escarole

Green peppers

Kale (!)(A)

Mint

Mustard greens(A)

Parsley(A)

Spear/Peppermint leaves

Radicchio

Radish tops

Raspberry leaves

Red or green leaf lettuce

Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light-colored leaf) (A)

Spinach (!)(A)

Turnip greens

Watercress(A)

Wheat grass

(!)=Use sparingly. High in either oxalates or goitrogens and may be toxic in accumulated quantities over a period of time



Sophie, NYC Animal Care & Control shelter (A.C.C.)

Why Rabbit Adoption?

7 reasons to adopt, and not buy:



Daphne & Dasher, abandoned in Yonkers

1. Health: Rabbits that are sold by pet stores or breeders often have infectious diseases (such as coccidia, which can cause life-threatening diarrhea) due to unsanitary breeding facilities, unnatural levels of stress, inadequate nutrition, and needless antibiotics that suppress good bacteria. Often, illnesses are not detected until weeks after onset, after the rabbit's been purchased by unsuspecting customers who are then left to pay huge medical bills and/or end up with a rabbit who dies shortly after being brought home.

Ruby, A.C.C.



2. You're Saving a Life: You're giving a wonderful, rabbit a second chance, and possibly saving her from being euthanized (put to sleep), simply for not having a home.

3. Bunny Kisses: Would you like a bunny who will kiss you on the face, or make you laugh? A bunny who is good with children, or doesn't mind other animals?

Since we foster rabbits in our homes and work closely with them in the shelter, we know their personalities. Therefore, we can find you the bunny who is right for you. Pet store staffers often have neither the time nor adequate space to interact with their rabbits. And petstore rabbits are often juveniles, so true temperament is not yet apparent.

4. Spaying/Neutering: Pet store bunnies are rarely altered, which is necessary for litter-training and the prevention of aggressive behavior, and for health reasons (unspayed female rabbits have a 50-80% chance of developing uterine cancer as they age). Our bunnies

have been altered, so you not only don't have to spend the \$200 to \$400 surgery cost, you don't have to deal with the bunny's recovery from the operation, either.

Kevin, Manhattan stray



Bill and Marty, Queens strays

5. Help and Support: We at House Rabbit Society are trained to educate you on care, behavior, and safe handling of your rabbit. You will be able to call us anytime with questions or concerns that you may have. We will even help you safely bond your bunny with another, if you wish.

6. Stop the Overpopulation Problem: You may think that you are rescuing a rabbit when you purchase her from a pet store with deplorable living conditions. Make no mistake, however: the store owner will happily take your money, and replace that rabbit with another one purchased wholesale from a breeder. These breeders operate like puppy mills, and have no regard for the domestic rabbit overpopulation problem. The better way to help *all* of the rabbits who suffer as a result of this crisis is to not purchase from a pet store — period. If the public would stop buying rabbits, the mills will have to stop breeding them, plain and simple.

Holly, Long Island stray



7. Variety & Choices: We have wonderful bunnies of all types, sizes, ages. At any given time, we have access to far more choices than any pet store, and we have the training and desire to help you find the right one for you.



Maria, Westchester stray

“He’s like a Golden Retriever in a white bunny suit!”—MC

“I’m blessed to be owned by her!”—NK

“Every white, red-eyed bunny I’ve ever met has been a doll!”—CS

“I love his larger-than-life personality!”—LW

“I will always have a New Zealand White in my family!”—EM

“I love that she knows her name and races to me when I call her!”—LW

“I wish I could rescue them all!”—BH

“Forget the others, he seemed to say at the shelter. ‘I am your bunny!’”—NC

“Everyone who meets him is amazed at how sociable he is!”—IF

“Her huge spirit shines like light through her ruby eyes!”—GP



In celebration of the ruby

Did you know that ruby-eyed bunnies (a.k.a. albinos or New Zealand Whites) are some of the most intelligent and affectionate pets around? However, because some folks don’t like the color of their eyes, these poor bunnies sit for months or even years in shelters, unadopted and unloved. Take a minute and read what experienced “ruby lovers” have to say about these oft-overlooked treasures!

“Red eyes used to spook me, but now they seem more expressive than any other color!”—DS

“She demands affection and kisses me when I lie down to accommodate her!”—LB

“He waits for me at the door like my dog used to!”—MN

“To me, those eyes are gems, just like my Booboo is!”—JB

“When I get home from work, he comes bounding over!”—PW

“I used to think they all looked the same, but now each looks so distinct!”—LS

“The bigger they are, the harder you fall – in love with them, that is!”—KL

“They are so loving and really seem most appreciative of having a home with us!”—LK

**Treat yourself to a real gem:
Adopt a ruby-eyed bunny!**
www.rabbit.org



HE'S NOT A CHILD'S TOY.

HE'S A REAL, LIVE, 10-YEAR COMMITMENT.

It's Easter time again. Pet store windows are filled with adorable baby bunnies. Your kids are begging you to buy one. It's so hard to resist. After all, you think, wouldn't this be the perfect, low-maintenance "starter pet" for a young child?

Think again! Every year, many thousands of rabbits are abandoned to shelters or released outdoors (a sure death sentence for a domestic rabbit) often because of misunderstandings on the part of the parents who bought them for their kids.

Rabbits are prey animals by nature. They are physically delicate and fragile, and require specialized veterinary care. Children are naturally energetic, exuberant, and loving. But "loving" to a small child usually means holding, cuddling, carrying an animal around in whatever grip their small hands can manage—precisely the kinds of things that make most rabbits feel insecure and frightened. Rabbits handled in this way will often start to scratch or bite simply out of fear. Many rabbits are accidentally dropped by small children, resulting in broken legs and backs. Those rabbits who survive the first few months quickly reach maturity. When they are no longer tiny and "cute," kids often lose interest, and the rabbit, who has no voice to remind you he's hungry or thirsty or needs his cage cleaned, is gradually neglected.

Parents, please help. If you're thinking about adding a rabbit to your family think about this: pet rabbits have a lifespan of 7-10 years. Don't buy on impulse. Wait 'til after the holiday. Make an informed decision by learning about rabbit care first. Consider adopting a rabbit from your local shelter or rescue group. For the rabbit's health and well-being (as well as for your child's) make sure an adult will be the primary caretaker and will always supervise any children in the household who are interacting with the rabbit. Domestic rabbits are inquisitive, intelligent, and very social by nature. A rabbit is a delightful companion animal as long as you remember: he's not a child's toy. He's a real, live, 10-year commitment!

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON RABBIT CARE AND ADOPTIONS
IN YOUR AREA, CONTACT YOUR LOCAL HUMANE SOCIETY OR
VISIT THE HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY AT WWW.RABBIT.ORG.**



9 REASONS TO KEEP YOUR BUNNY INDOORS




- 1)** Outdoor rabbits are exposed to extremes of weather: heat, cold, thunder, lightning, high winds (which can damage or destroy housing). Of these, heat is particularly dangerous: rabbits succumb very quickly to high temperatures, and need to be kept cool in the summer. In extremely cold weather, drinking water freezes and rabbits can become dehydrated.
- 2)** Outdoor rabbits are prone to insect/tick bites and fly strike (flies laying eggs on the rabbit and the larvae burrow into the rabbit's flesh).
- 3)** Outdoor rabbits are exposed to parasites and diseases carried by other animals; e.g., raccoons carry *Baylisascaris procyonis*, which rabbits can pick up on the ground and ingest (by grooming their feet), and which can then migrate to the rabbit's brain, where it is fatal.
- 4)** Outdoor rabbits often become the victims of poisoning from pesticides, herbicides, and/or fertilizers. Even if your neighbor uses them, rain will wash the chemicals onto your property. In many areas, ground and air spraying of toxic chemicals is used because of the threat of West Nile Virus.
- 5)** Outdoor rabbits often are often neglected or forgotten once the novelty wears off. Their food and water may become infested with insects, bacteria, or molds. They do not get the human interaction they need in order to develop trust, and often become extremely hard to handle as a result.
- 6)** Outdoor rabbits are "out of sight," if not "out of mind," and this makes it almost impossible for owners to become adequately familiar with their bunny's "normal behaviors." When you are not thoroughly familiar with your bunny's normal behaviors, it is difficult to recognize subtle signs of illness/injury in time to prevent emergency visits.
- 7)** Outdoor rabbits experience fear from unfamiliar sounds, from which they cannot escape (e.g., lawnmowers, leaf/snow blowers, tree chopping), smells, unfamiliar visitors (e.g. neighborhood children, passersby, etc.).
- 8)** Outdoor rabbits often become the victims of predators (dogs, cats, hawks, raccoons, snakes), and can suffer fatal heart attacks from even the approach of a predator.
- 9)** Outdoor rabbits (especially those housed in hutches) often get little or no exercise. Rabbits that are let loose in a yard for exercise face all of the above dangers, as well as road hazards and the risk of getting lost if they escape from the yard.





HOW TO SET UP A CARRIER

Most rabbits do not like traveling, so making sure they are safe and comfortable is important.

	<p>Carrier</p> <p>Find a carrier that is appropriate for your rabbit's size. We recommend hard plastic carriers as your rabbit cannot chew through them, and they are nice and sturdy.</p>
	<p>Newspaper</p> <p>Place a thick section of newspaper flat on the bottom of the carrier. The newspaper will act as an anchor for the towel, and keep the towel from slipping around the carrier.</p>
	<p>Towel</p> <p>A bath -sized towel folded up should sit on top of the newspaper, which will anchor your rabbit. This creates a comfy mattress so your rabbit is not sliding around all over the place.</p>

TIP: Have your carrier set up and ready to go in case of an emergency.

Help! My bunny's sick and I can't reach my vet!

by Mary E. Cotter, Ed. D., in consultation with Gil Stanzione, D.V.M.



I. Broken or bleeding toenails

If your bunny has broken a nail, or if you have cut too close to the blood vessel, apply pressure with a clean towel for a couple of minutes, til the bleeding stops. If you like, you can use styptic powder (available in drug stores), plain flour, or even a bar of soap rubbed on the end of the nail to help stop the bleeding. If the nail breaks off right at the base, clean the area thoroughly with Nolvasan (you can get it through your vet), and apply a thin coat of regular triple antibiotic ointment, such as Neosporin (not Neosporin Plus, or any other product that contains cortisone!!!) Try to keep your bunny in as clean an environment as possible til you can see your vet -- to prevent dirt from contaminating the injury site. Be sure to see your vet for followup care to this second kind of break, since bacterial infection can travel to the bone and cause serious problems.

II. Broken bones

Take your bunny to any emergency clinic, so that the bone can be stabilized til you can see your regular rabbit vet. If the emergency clinic needs to anesthetize your bunny to do xrays or to stabilize the leg, isoflurane is the preferred anesthesia for rabbits. If you cannot get to an emergency clinic, do your best to severely restrict your bunny's movement til you can get to your vet. This will help to prevent further injury. Make sure your bunny has easy access to food and water so that he does not have to move around to get to it.

III. Runny eyes

Runny eyes do not usually constitute an emergency, but if your rabbit sustains trauma to the eye, resulting in a serious corneal scratch or ulcer, you should get veterinary treatment as soon as possible. If you can get to a veterinary emergency clinic, the eye can be stained to assess the damage, and the emergency vet can administer antibiotic drops (usually tribiotic ophthalmic drops) or ointment, to tide you over til you can see you own vet. Do not put any medication into your bunny's eye unless it is given to you by a qualified vet for that purpose. Many people attempt to treat their rabbits' eyes with leftover dog/cat/human drugs, often with disastrous consequences. If your bunny's eye is oozing or sticky (often appearing "glued shut"), you can use warm compresses to loosen the gunk and clean the external area around the eye. Bunnies are usually very appreciative of this effort, and will often tilt their heads to "cooperate" with you.

IV. Anorexia

The most common causes of anorexia are: 1) teeth problems, 2) gas pain, 3) gastrointestinal problems. When you cannot reach your vet, you can attempt to differentiate the cause of your bunny's anorexia by carefully watching his behavior.

a. Teeth problems

Your bunny approaches food -- maybe even picks it up and starts to eat it -- but then backs off or drops the food without finishing it. He seems hungry, but unable or unwilling to eat -- even treats. His activity level is more or less normal. When you rub his cheeks, you might see a pain response from spurs on his upper molars. If the problem is not accurately diagnosed and corrected soon, your bunny may start to exhibit symptoms of gas pain or gastrointestinal problems (see below) -- simply from not eating normally.

What you can do until you get to your vet:

You can force-feed him (canned pumpkin, baby-food veggies, mixed, if possible, with ground pellets or "pellet dust") by using a feeding syringe. You can give him subcutaneous fluids. If he develops gas from not eating properly, follow the suggestions below.

b. Gas pain

Your bunny is sitting hunched and still. In some instances, he may stretch out fully, giving the appearance that he is trying to press his belly to the floor. You offer him treats, and he is totally uninterested. Sometimes (though not always) you can hear very loud "gurgling" sounds coming from his belly -- even from across the room. In fact, his gut sounds, heard through a stethoscope, can be deafening. You may hear loud tooth grinding -- a sure sign of pain (this sounds quite different from the soft grinding that indicates pleasure; it can sometimes be heard clear across a room). His stomach may (or may not) feel overly-stretched and taut. A bunny with gas pain often has a low body temperature (e.g. 97; normal is 101-103).

What you can do until you get to your vet:

Take his temperature!! If his temp is lower than normal, warm him up! You can do this by offering him a wrapped hot-water bottle or a heating pad, set on low -- as long as the wire is well-protected so he cannot chew it, and as long as he can easily move off the heating pad if he gets too warm. (WARNING: Heating pads can cause severe burns and injury when misused. Some vets, who see these injuries frequently, discourage the use of heating pads altogether for this reason. Do not use any setting other than "low" for your rabbit. The pad may not feel warm to you, but it will to your rabbit!!) You can also warm him with you own body heat: hold him in your arms, close to your body, for extended periods of time (an hour, or even longer). Give him Phazyme (pediatric simethicone) -- two or three 1-cc doses, one hour apart. Give him frequent and long (10 - 15 mins., or as long as he will tolerate) tummy massages, at least part of which can be with his hindquarters raised. Take his temperature periodically to monitor the effects of your efforts to warm him. Whatever else you do, fuss over him. There is ample anecdotal evidence (from many HRS fosterers and others) to suggest that bunnies who are "fussed over" do better than those who are not. You can also give subcutaneous fluids, as instructed by your vet -- around 30 cc for a two pound rabbit, 50cc for a four pound rabbit -- two or three times a day -- til you can get to your vet. Sub-Q fluids will help to keep him well-hydrated. You can warm the sub-Q fluids by putting the bag into a pan of water, bringing the water to a boil, an "cooking" the fluid bag for several minutes. Test the temperature on your wrist before administering the fluids. Lukewarm is best.

c. Gastrointestinal problems

Very similar in presentation to gas pain: your bunny sits in a "bread-loaf" position, unwilling to eat and often unwilling to move. His fecal production will change: his stool will become much smaller in size or he will stop producing stool altogether. His body temperature will usually drop. There may be either loud gut sounds, or an almost total absence of gut sounds through a stethoscope.

What you can do until you get to your vet:

Follow suggestions for addressing gas pain (above): warmth, belly massage, gas-relief if necessary, subcutaneous fluids. For further information, please read the document on GI stasis available at:
<http://fig.cox.miami.edu/Faculty/Dana/ileus.html>

WARNING: If there is any chance your bunny has a GI blockage, do not attempt to force-feed him! This will only make the problem worse. Your most important job is to monitor his body temperature, and to keep him as comfortable and as well-hydrated as you can til you can see your regular bunny vet.

V. Head tilt

Your bunny loses his balance, and his head starts twisting toward the ceiling; he looks like something out of "The Exorcist." He is dizzy, unable to regain coordination. If he tries to walk or hop, he falls over and starts rolling around. In some cases, his eyes dart back and forth very rapidly, and the iris appears to be almost "vibrating."

What you can do until you get to your vet:

PAD YOUR BUNNY'S ENVIRONMENT!!! Your main job til you can get to your vet is to prevent your bunny from hurting himself while he's seriously uncoordinated and/or rolling. Prepare a box (or other carefully restricted environment) for him, thickly padded with towels or fake sheepskin. The idea is to provide him with a totally cushioned and absorptive environment that will restrict his rolling and uncontrolled movements til he can get full treatment. A head-tilt presentation can be very frightening for owners. Many dog-and-cat vets will tell you that a head-tilt bunny should simply be euthanized. The experience of many excellent rabbit vets, however, has shown that, with a dedicated owner (treatment may extend over a period of months) and a bunny who is a "fighter," head tilt can be treated very satisfactorily, and many (if not most) bunnies can make a full, or close-to-full, recovery. NB: Head-tilt bunnies often continue to have lusty appetites, but their lack of coordination makes it very difficult for them to eat or drink. Help your bunny to eat or drink in any way you can: hold the water bottle near his mouth, or carefully syringe water into him through the side of his mouth (watching to make sure he is not aspirating it!), hold his food (vegetables, hay) for him, and offer it piece by piece, etc.

VI. Severe diarrhea

"Diarrhea" is not the same thing as soft, mushy stool, that sticks to a bunny's butt (this is usually excess cecal production). It is brown, watery discharge, which is often profuse. The bunny may be limp and very weak. Because it causes such rapid dehydration, diarrhea can be life threatening. If you can get to a veterinary emergency clinic, your bunny can receive subcutaneous fluids. If there is no such clinic near you, please ask your vet now -- before an emergency arises -- to teach you how to administer fluids at home. This kind of diarrhea is generally the result of parasites (coccidia) or inappropriate antibiotics administered by well-meaning (but not well-informed) vets. See your own rabbit-savvy vet as soon as possible for proper diagnosis and followup treatment.

VII. Bites

Bunnies often inflict serious bites on one another, if they are not properly "bonded." Bacteria introduced into the bite wound can travel through the bloodstream and "seed" other body areas, eventually producing abscesses. For this reason, you should definitely ask you vet to check any but the most superficial bites. **WHAT YOU CAN DO TIL YOU GET TO YOUR VET:** If there is serious bleeding, apply pressure til a clot forms. Gently wash the area around the bite wound with Nolvasan (chlorhexidine) solution. Apply a very thin layer of regular Neosporin (triple antibiotic ointment); do not use Neosporin Plus! If the bites are extensive, try to get to an emergency veterinary service. The emergency vet can clean and dress the wounds. Most bunny bite wounds can be treated by shaving the hair and applying topical ointment and dressing until you can see your regular vet. If the emergency vet feels systemic antibiotics should be administered because of the extent of the bites, make sure that oral penicillins and derivatives (such as amoxicillin) are not used. Micotil and cephalosporins should also be avoided. Some bunny-friendly antibiotics: Baytril (and other fluoroquinolones, such as Orbax, Dicural, Ciprofloxacin, Maxaquin), Trimethoprim Sulfa (aka: Sulfatrim, Bactrim, Tribriksen, TMP-SMZ), chloramphenicol (take extreme care not to touch it when administering it; it can cause aplastic anemia in some people), Gentocin (and other aminoglycosides -- though these need to be used carefully to prevent ear and kidney damage). Although penicillin is not ordinarily a drug of first choice for most bunny ailments, injectable Pen-G Procaine can be very useful for specific kinds of problems.

VII. Sudden fever

If your bunny spikes a sudden, very high fever (we have seen fevers as high as 106 or 107 -- literally off most thermometers), cool him down by swabbing his ears with alcohol or wet-towel-wrapped ice cubes. You can also dip your fingers into ice water, and gently stroke his ears for several minutes at a time. Try to get his temperature down to around 104 (normal is 101-103), i.e., a fever that is useful to his body, rather than harmful. Extra cooling can be achieved by taking chilled cans or frozen vegetable boxes from your refrigerator, wrapping them in towels, and packing them around your bunny. Administer subcutaneous fluids as soon as possible, as instructed by your vet. See your vet, ASAP, for a thorough examination, diagnosis, and followup.

IX. Heat stroke

Cool your bunny as above, and administer sub-Q fluids as instructed by your vet. See your vet ASAP.

Stasis Treatment

If your rabbit stops eating:

- Offer them a couple different treats they would normally never refuse
- If they won't eat treats
 - 1st time: **bring them to the vet** for treatment and stock up on medication
 - Subsequent times: call vet for advice and **medicate at home**
 - Try to **keep rabbit moving** around as that helps stimulate the gut
 - **Gently massage** the rabbit's **stomach area** to help stimulate the gut
- Medication
 - Simethicone: infant gas relief drops that can be purchased at a drug store
 - Metacam: pain relief med that is prescription from the vet
 - Reglan: gut motility med that is prescription from the vet
- Dosage
 - Ask your vet to get their exact amounts, but if they are unavailable, estimate based on their weight. Better to under-dose than over-dose if estimating:



Medication		4 lbs	5 lbs	6 lbs	9 lbs
Metacam	Once a day	0.5 ml	0.6 ml	0.8 ml	1.4 ml
Simethicone	Every hour for 3 hrs	1.0 ml	1.0 ml	1.0 ml	1.0 ml
Reglan	2 to 3 times a day	1.0 ml	1.2 ml	1.6 ml	2 ml

Medicate...	Temperature...	If shaking or grinding teeth...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 dose of Simethicone 1 dose of Reglan 1 dose of Metacam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take temperature. If under 100 deg: Put bun on a thin blanket in their carrier, and put the carrier on a heating pad set on low. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rabbit is in a lot of pain and needs to get to the vet ASAP for stronger pain meds.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After 1 hour, give: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 more dose of Simethicone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep checking to make sure the pad does not get too warm. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After 2 hours, give: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 more dose of Simethicone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If overnight, keep bun on heat for up to 4 hours without checking, but move pad so it is only under half of the carrier 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After 3-8 hours, give: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 more dose of Simethicone & repeat after another 3-8 hours if still not eating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check temperature every hour. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After 8-10 hours, give: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 more dose of Reglan & repeat after another 8-10 hours if still not eating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release after his temp is over 100. If temp does not warm up, call the vet. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After rabbit recovers and is eating and pooping regularly again, give <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 dose of Simethicone 1 dose of Reglan every 12 hours after rabbit recovers for 2 days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check temp after 1 hour. If dropped below 100, put back on heating pad and repeat steps above. 	

DO NOT give **Critical Care** syringe feeding until speaking with a vet, or having bunny examined.

Recommended Rabbit-savvy Veterinarians

Before placing your rabbit under the care of any veterinarian, be sure to ask the appropriate questions to be sure your rabbit is in competent hands! Do not assume that because one veterinarian at an animal hospital is experienced with rabbits, all of the associates are.

Jennifer Saver, DVM

Erica Campbell, DVM

Catnip & Carrots Veterinary Hospital

2056 Jericho Turnpike

New Hyde Park

(516) 877-7080

Open Saturdays and Sundays!

www.catnipandcarrots.com

Heidi Hoefler, DVM

Island Exotic Veterinary Care

591 East Jericho Turnpike

Huntington, NY

(631) 424-0300

www.islandexoticvet.com

Ellen Leonhardt, DVM

Animal General of East Norwich

6320 Northern Blvd.

East Norwich, NY 11732

(516) 624-7500

www.vcahospitals.com/animal-general-east-norwich

Maggie Camilleri, DVM

Paumanok Veterinary Hospital

639 NY-112

Patchogue, NY 11772

(631) 475-1312

www.paumanokvethospital.com/

Jeff Rose, DVM

Brian Rose, DVM

Jefferson Animal Hospital

606 Patchogue Rd. (Rte 112)

Port Jefferson Station, NY 11776

(631) 473-0415

www.portjeffersonanimalhospital.com

When it's time for bonding...

Keep these things in mind.

- Go slowly. Slower than you want.
- Pen switching is annoying and unnerving to the rabbits, but so worth it.
- The calmer you are during bonding sessions, the calmer they'll be. Usually.
- Date is going well? Great! End it.
- Distractions are awesome. Salad, pellets, insane petting-fests, banana-on-head trick
- Know your rabbits. You'll know what they need in terms of pace and next steps.
- Accept insanity until it's done. No one but fellow bonders will understand your insanity.
- Read, read and read some more about bonding. It'll at the very least validate everything you're doing and feeling.
- The process isn't smoothly linear. There are walls, and breakthroughs. Have patience.
- You, as the human, are the alpha bun and the master manipulator. Keep your tone as the loving leader in the relationship. They smell fear and weakness (sort of like children).
- Re-read <https://www.longislandrabbitrescue.org/bonding.htm>
- Have confidence! And when you don't, come to us. A sounding board is the best support.
- When it's done, know you've given your bunny the best thing ever, a forever mate.



Helpful Articles on Bonding

Bonding: Finding a friend for your rabbit
<https://www.longislandrabbitrescue.org/bonding.htm>

The Most Important Word in Bonding:
PATIENCE
<https://rabbit.org/the-most-important-word-in-bonding-is-patience/>

Bonding Rabbits
<https://rabbit.org/faq-bonding-multiple-rabbits/>

Bonding Tips and Tricks
<https://rabbit.org/bonding-tips-and-tricks/>

Bonding: What to expect, What to Do
<https://rabbit.org/bonding-what-to-expect-what-to-do/>

Bonding When the Going Gets Rough
<https://rabbit.org/bonding-when-the-going-gets-rough/>

Bonding Bunnies
<https://rabbit.org/bonding-rabbits-a-how-to-from-georgia-hrs/>

Rabbit Bonding
<https://smallpselect.com/rabbit-bonding/>

You can also read past THUMP issues for articles written by adopters and volunteers on their experiences with bonding.
<http://www.rabbitcare.org/newsletters.htm>

Setup For Bonding Rabbits

Side by side living

The bunnies will live in side by side cages with three inches of space between the cage bars. They should never be able to touch noses through the cages before they are safely bonded.



Neutral space for bonding sessions

It is best to do bonding sessions in a neutral room with no furniture to hide (and fight) under. Rugs for traction and two litterboxes for time-outs and pee breaks should be present. You, the caretaker, should wear sneakers on your hands to quickly plunge in-between a fight to stop it cold before it starts.



SETTING YOUR PET RABBIT LOOSE DOESN'T MAKE HER "FREE!"



IT MAKES HER "FOOD!"

photo © Mary E. Cotter, 2002

Domestic rabbits lack the survival instincts wild rabbits use to fend for themselves. So they become food for everything from raccoons and dogs to crows and hawks. And the “lucky” ones who don't get eaten get run over by cars or die from heat or disease. Please, before getting a bunny – or abandoning one – visit www.rabbit.org