

Rabbit Handling 101

Pet rabbits are different from cats and dogs. It's essential to understand how rabbits think so you and your rabbit can live a happy life together. By catering to your rabbit's natural inclinations, you can build a trusting, loving relationship with your bunny.

Handling tip #1: The most important rule of handling your rabbit correctly is to **never** pick them up by the ears, the scruff, legs or tail. It is painful and can cause serious damage.

Handling tip #2: Remember that rabbits are fragile. Though quick and agile, rabbits have weak skeletal systems and can injure themselves easily.

How to Pick Up Your Rabbit

Rabbits do not always enjoy being picked up. Some will tolerate it, but many will struggle when you try to lift them. Therefore, picking them up can be a delicate business. Follow the tips below

Step 1: Approach your rabbit slowly and get down to their level - this will help put your bun at ease. Petting the rabbit will also have a calming effect. It is important to note that rabbits have a significant blind spot right in front of them, and you should always approach slowly from the side so your rabbit can see you approach.

Step 2: When you feel confident your rabbit is ready to be picked up, scoop them up by placing a hand under the torso and pull your bunny close to your body. Support the rabbit's hindquarters - your bunny needs to feel secure in your arms! If your rabbit struggles when being picked up, hold them firmly, but be ready to put them down. Your rabbit may think the better alternative to being held is to leap from your arms, but this can cause serious injury.

Step 3: When putting your rabbit down, slowly squat down while holding your bunny close, and let them down gently. Your rabbit may respond with a thump or may kick up their hind legs at you while scampering away. It's nothing personal, they just disapprove of being picked up.

Protip: To see the ideal way to pick up a rabbit, check out [this video on How To Handle a Pet Rabbit](#) by Mary Cotter of the [House Rabbit Society](#) and Amy Sedaris.



Rabbit Body Language

Binkying: Bunnies have a very dramatic way of expressing excitement and joy. They dance! Leaping in the air, contorting and twisting their bodies, and kicking their feet out, binkying rabbits are quite the spectacle.

Flopping: A bunny at ease will often flop in contentment, rolling over completely onto his/her side.

Licking: Bunnies show affection by licking (grooming). You'll often see pairs of rabbits grooming each other.

Buzzing/Honking: An excited rabbit may make honking / buzzing sounds while circling. This signifies happiness.

Purring/Teeth Grinding: Bunnies sometimes show their enjoyment if you're petting them by grinding their teeth. Teeth grinding can also signify discomfort or pain. Grinding due to pain is often louder and more frequent than grinding due to contentment. You'll be able to tell the difference by observing other behavior in conjunction with the teeth grinding.

Growling: Grunting or growling is a sign your rabbit is angry or stressed. You may be invading their territory, and they're telling you to back off. Aggressive behavior will most likely ensue, so watch out.

Kicking "Dirt" Up: Displeased rabbits may deliberately kick their feet up as they hop away from you. In a wild setting, this translates to kicking dirt into another animal's face. Expect to get imaginary dirt kicked up at you after a nail trimming session.

Chinning: Chinning is a rabbit's way of saying, "Mine!" They rub their chin, which has special scent glands, on objects to mark their territory.

Nose Bonking/Nudging: Rabbits explore their environment by sniffing and nudging. It may be a greeting or their first line of investigation. But nudging can also indicate a level of bossiness. Your rabbit might be telling you, "You're in my way!" They may also be trying to get your attention because you're not petting them.

Digging: Digging on your legs or feet is another way rabbits try to get your attention. "Petting me takes precedence over that important phone call!" they're saying.

Nipping: Rabbits often nip in order to get attention. In this case, they don't mean to cause you harm. To discourage this behavior, shriek every time it happens. The nips will become softer and less frequent, and eventually the behavior will be discontinued completely. Sometimes rabbits nip in an aggressive way, like if you've put your hand into your rabbit's space, and he/she's feeling territorial.

Thumping: Rabbits thump their hind legs when they sense danger. It serves as a warning signal for others in the area to watch out.

Screaming: Rabbits generally only scream when dying or in extreme pain. Seek veterinary assistance immediately if this occurs.