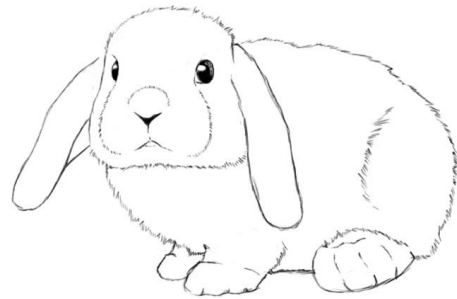


Rabbit General Care and Husbandry

Diet

- Fiber is crucial to your rabbit's diet and keeps their digestive system functioning properly. **The majority of your rabbit's diet should consist of unlimited amounts of hay**, which can consist of any of the following varieties: timothy, oat, brome, prairie and meadow. **AVOID alfalfa**, as it is too high in calcium for rabbits.



- A hay canister is a good way to provide unlimited access to hay without a mess.
- Fresh fruits and veggies should also be included in your rabbit's diet. These should be introduced slowly at first to prevent digestive problems such as diarrhea, and should not be introduced until the rabbit is 8 months or older. Thoroughly wash all fruits and veggies before offering them to your rabbit. It is recommended that you feed 1 cup of veggies per 2 pounds of body weight per day. It is also recommended to feed at least 3 different types of veggies per day to vary the nutrition. Fruits should be offered very minimally just as treats, or not at all if your rabbit is overweight. **Please see HSCC chart for a comprehensive list of vegetables and fruits.**
 - Provide high quality timothy hay based pellets in moderation (~1/8 cup per day) in a ceramic food dish.
 - Providing fresh water is essential - offer a stoppered water bottle attached to the enclosure, as well as a ceramic water dish.
 - Avoid plastic dishes because of chewing

Consult with your veterinarian before adding anything new to your rabbit's diet!

Housing/Equipment

- Provide housing that is as large as possible, especially if you do not plan to have the rabbit loose in your home. If housed in a cage, be sure that it is at least 3 times the length of the rabbit when fully stretched out so they have room to hop around.
- Cages with solid floors are best- wire floors can cause foot and leg injuries.
- Cages with wire sides are highly recommended in order to provide adequate ventilation. **DO NOT** house your rabbit in an aquarium.
- It can be very dangerous to house your rabbit outdoors as they can easily freeze or overheat, especially in Vermont where the temperatures are always fluctuating. Fun Fact: Did you know that rabbits lack the ability to sweat?
- Provide at least one hiding house / tunnel as a place to hide and feel safe.
- Provide bedding material, appropriate material included fleece blankets, "Care Fresh" small animal bedding, aspen shavings, and newspaper.
- **DO NOT USE pine or cedar shavings** because they are aromatic and can cause respiratory problems, or clay / clumping cat litter because they may ingest it which is very dangerous.

Litter:

- Rabbits can be easily litter box trained. Some options for litter include:
 - Line the box with newspaper and add hay
 - *Yesterday's News* brand litter
 - Pellet stove wood that is hard wood and contains no accelerant
 - Aspen wood shavings

Rabbit proofing your home:

- Rabbits chew things in order to maintain dental health, as their teeth continuously grow through out their lifetime. They will chew on wood, electrical wires, and just about anything they have access to. Rabbit proofing protects things in your home from being destroyed, protects your rabbit from harm, and provides safe chewing toys as an alternative to chewing items in your home.
- Remove any items from the floor and keep them out of reach, including indoor plants.
- Chewing of wires is common, and very dangerous because of burning and electrocution.
- Some ways to prevent wire chewing are picking them up and keeping them out of reach, using PVC piping or another type of hard plastic tubing and cutting a slit in it lengthwise and tucking the wires into it to keep them out of reach, or using a taste deterrent spray on the wires that tastes bad so the rabbit will not want to chew on them.
- The best way to prevent chewing of wires is to monitor and keep the rabbit away from the wires, you can do this by spraying them with a water sprayer, or you can even clicker train them to come to you for a treat if they get too close to the wires!
- Provide safe chewing toys like commercial wooden pet toys found at a pet store, cardboard, dried pine cones, or untreated dried wood or twigs.
 - Apple tree branches are a favorite! But, avoid cherry, peach, apricot, plum, and redwood because they are all poisonous

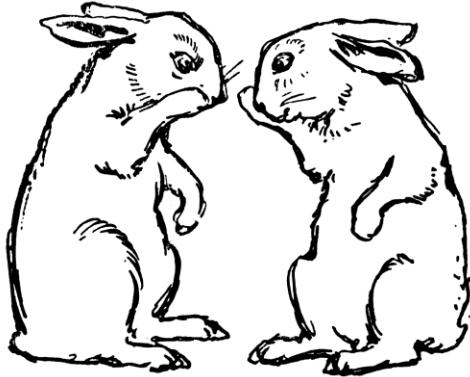
Enrichment:

- Rabbits are playful, intelligent animals that require daily enrichment or they can become easily bored and destructive.
- Rabbits love toys which provide them with mental stimulation as well as exercise.
- Some good options include:
 - Laundry detergent caps: MUST be thoroughly rinsed.
 - Plastic baby toys
 - Jingle balls
 - Wood or plastic rings
 - Paper bags
 - Cardboard boxes
 - Cardboard rolls stuffed with hay
 - Shredded newspaper (great for digging)
 - Untreated wood chew sticks such as apple
- If caged, rabbits require 2-4 hours outside of their cage daily.
- Rabbits are crepuscular, which means they are most active at dusk and dawn, so try to provide play time in the morning and evening.

ALWAYS supervise your rabbit during play time and remember to “rabbit proof” your home!

Introducing Rabbits:

- If you are looking to add a rabbit to your home and you currently have one, it is important to consider your rabbit's personality. It can be very difficult to bond two rabbits with dominant personalities.



- Male-female pairs tend to bond easier than male-male pairs. Make sure both of the rabbits are spayed and neutered. This will not only prevent pregnancies but will reduce aggressive behaviors.
- Once you have chosen a potential match for your rabbit, you should separate them initially using wire crates or exercise pens. Look for positive signs such as lying next to each other on either sides of the barrier, relaxed and grooming, before moving forward with a slow introduction.
- Introducing the rabbits on neutral territory is highly recommended to avoid any territorial behaviors. Rabbits are territorial by nature.
- Some signs that the bonding process is going well include:
 1. Sniffing/snuggling.
 2. Ignoring/pretending to have no interest in each other which can indicate a good personality match.
 3. If one rabbit chases the other or attempts to mount it, and the other rabbit runs away as opposed to confronting the other rabbit. This will need to be heavily supervised at first as this could indicate a dominant-submissive match, which can work but could also lead to one rabbit being "bullied".

Grooming:

- Rabbits fastidiously groom themselves and rarely if ever need to be bathed.
- Brushing your rabbit is important, particularly during molting or shedding. This will help prevent them from ingesting too much hair, which can lead to gastrointestinal problems.
- Rabbits also need to have their nails trimmed. Ask your veterinarian if you need assistance.

Health:

- A rabbit's front teeth grow continuously. It is important to provide items to chew on so that the teeth don't overgrow. Check your rabbit's teeth regularly to be sure they are healthy and the proper length.
- Rabbit's nails do need to be clipped about once a month. Overgrown nails are very uncomfortable and if they grow too long, they can curl into the rabbit's foot. Be sure to avoid the quick, which is the blood vessel in each nail, and only clip a little off the end. Wrapping the rabbit in a towel can help with restraint.
- Rabbits can suffer from external parasites such as fleas, lice, ticks, and ear mites, as well as internal parasites. Contact your veterinarian for proper treatment of any parasites or other illnesses- rabbits are very sensitive to certain medications so don't administer anything without the supervision of a veterinarian.

- Spaying and neutering of rabbits is essential. This will prevent territorial behaviors, spraying in males, and uterine cancer in females
- Always bring your rabbit to annual exams at the vet

References:

<http://www.rabbit.org>

<http://www.rabbitworldview.com>

The House Rabbit Connection INC. *House Rabbit Connection's Rabbit Care Guide*