

## ----- Feeding

Rabbits eat & digest grasses. They don't efficiently process fatty foods, high protein foods, or many plants. Rabbits have very sensitive GI tracts that can be easily disrupted so it is important to maintain them on a healthy diet & not change it. A little care taken by you in feeding your pet will go a long way. Hay (grass hays such as timothy or oat hay) should be available at all times. Some rabbits may not take much hay at first. Adding fresh hay a couple of times a day may help. Commercial rabbit pellets are quite high in calories. As a result, house rabbits fed unlimited pellets may end up with obesity & related health problems, as well as an excess of other nutrients. They are rich & balanced in nutrients, but should be monitored (1-2cup a day) Depending on the size of the rabbit, 1-2 cups of fresh veggies should be given per day. Suggested vegetable include carrots with tops, parsley, broccoli, collard greens, mustard greens, dandelion greens, turnip greens, endive, romaine lettuce, kale & spinach. Beans, cauliflower, cabbage, & potatoes may cause problems & should be avoided. Iceberg lettuce has almost no nutritional value so should be avoided. Rhubarb should also be avoided (toxicity). Wash vegetables well, & only feed dandelions that are known to be pesticide free (try a health food store for organically grown dandelion greens).

**Seek veterinary attention if your pet changes behavior or becomes inactive; this may indicate the pet has an illness.**

**As a pet owner, you are responsible for proper pet practices. Be prepared to take an ill pet to a Veterinarian & know which Veterinarian in your area can treat your pet.**



## check-list ✓

### Your pet Rabbit requires...

- Hutch or Cage of appropriate size & wire gauge
- Water bottle(best), dish or bowl
- Substrate or bedding material
- Cave/Den/Hiding spot
- Wood blocks or items for chewing
- Hay & Food dish for Rabbit appropriate pellets
- Dish for added vegetables



## Rabbits

- (breed dependent) anywhere from 20 cm (8 in) in length & .4 kg in weight to 50 cm (20 in) & more than 2 kg.
- Life Span: 10- 12 years on average.



## ----- Temperament

A domestic rabbit is any of the several varieties of European rabbit that have been domesticated. Selective breeding of rabbits began in the Middle Ages, when they were farm animals. By the 16th century, several new breeds of different colors & sizes were being recorded. Breeds were created or modified for the purpose of exhibition, food, fur, or wool (including coat color & texture, size, body shape). The rabbit's emergence as a household pet began during the Victorian era. There are over 60 rabbit breeds recognized worldwide. Care requirements have been greatly altered; some need grooming a few times a day without fail, others have a tendency to develop dental problems. Temperaments can vary slightly with breed & gender, also having the pet spayed or neutered helps pacify & is highly recommended to prevent "breed like rabbits" syndrom. Male rabbits are called bucks; females are called does. A term for an adult rabbit is coney (derived from the Dutch word konijn), while rabbit referred only to the young animals. Some rabbits have been bred to be tiny & are referred to as dwarfs. They are essentially the same as their larger cousins.

A pet rabbit is neither like a pet cat nor a pet dog. Pet cats & dogs will take an immediate liking to you or not be afraid. This will happen with a pet rabbit too, but it will take much longer. Treating the rabbit gently is very important & will encourage trust. If you feed your rabbit with the correct diet & allow it to exercise enough, the veterinarian is someone you may never have to visit. Males may 'force out' young males as they mature should you breed them. They will need to be separated as nasty fights erupt. They are ideal for periodic visits, play or petting sessions. Bring the rabbit out of it's cage carefully so the experience is pleasurable for them & they will learn not to be afraid. Younger rabbits are easy to train & take a little less time to acclimatize, while older ones may take a little longer to get used to a new home. They need a fair amount of exercise & should be allowed a chance to run around a larger space (like a room) as often as possible. A well treated house rabbit will become rather docile after a period & enjoy being pet.

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## Housing



Rabbits are safe, hardy & a good pet choice. They are smart & take well to people.

Domestic rabbits can be raised outdoors or indoors. Accommodations can range from an outdoor hutch to an indoor cage or pen to the free run of the house (like a cat). Rabbits do require a sizeable cage, but the larger the cage, the less cleaning, & more exercise & entertainment for the rabbit. One Rabbit will need about 4-6 sqft with an added 1.5 sqft for any additional (they are very social & live in groups). Keep in mind that the cage should provide enough space for a hiding area, feeding area (pellet dish & water bottle), & an area for voiding. Any cage should have a solid, washable bottom. The sides can be made of wire, & a cover to prevent other animals from entering the cage. Rabbits will need an environment they can stand up in to exercise their backs. They must have items they can gnaw away at also. (try sugar free shredded wheat as a treat)

- **Substrate:** Aspen kiln-dried shavings are the best bedding material. A 1-2 inch lining over the bottom of the entire cage should be provided. Do not use Cedar shavings, because they contain toxic oils, which can lead to respiratory difficulties & disease. In addition, sawdust bedding should never be used, because the dust causes eye irritation & respiratory problems. Hay can also be used.
- **Decoration:** Hardwood branches, blocks, etc are good things to have in your enclosure to give your rabbit something to gnaw & chew. Hiding boxes are needed for rabbits, it prevents stress by giving them time away from prying eyes & a safe secure sleeping den.
- **Water:** The water bottle is best as a constant water source. Rabbit water bowls need to be sturdy to avoid tipping (they can drink a fair bit)

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## Health



Some Rabbits have tooth problems, & may have to have their teeth clipped on occasion. Always keep track of the length of the incisors, & be sure to provide plenty of chewable foods to help wear down the teeth. Monitor what your rabbit is eating. Always watch out for abnormal behavior in your rabbit. If they are well fed & exercised they should never need serious attention. If you notice something different, it may be time to take your pet to the veterinarian. This may include a sudden loss in appetite, sudden weight loss, suddenly wanting to be confined to the cage, extremely aggressive behavior, or anything that may seem abnormal. If you notice that your rabbit has diarrhea do not wait. Your pet requires medical attention. If you are not sure of what it is, at least call the veterinarian. Having your pet spayed or neutered is recommended. They are prolific as soon as they are mature enough. Also, it lowers aggressive behavior in males (like it does in dogs) & helps prevent cancer in females (like cats). Eating some of their own feces is natural behavior & is a form of self nutrition as they must redigest previously eaten food.

## Behavior & Interaction

Rabbits have very fragile backbones. Never pick up your rabbit so that its hind legs are left dangling. The rabbit might kick violently, possibly fracturing its backbone. Put one hand below its hind legs for support & the other below its chest & then lift it. The entire weight of the rabbit must be supported by your hands. Never lift the rabbit by its ears, that is a complete myth. Rabbits can be house-trained, if started early enough, it will soil only one area. If your rabbit is free to roam in the house, you will need more than one for multiple rooms as they tend to look for corners as waste areas. Rabbits are growing in popularity as a house pet because they make little noise. You will also need to rabbit proof the house, they may gnaw electrical cables, wood work, eat paper & dig at carpet edges or mouldings. You can raise your rabbit outside. Be sure to have an enclosure that will protect the rabbit from predators. (wire bottom over the ground - they are natural tunnelers & will dig out easily) Hiding spots & a cover should be provided. Rabbits are quiet, friendly & have good memories. Once the rabbit knows that you mean no harm, they will take to you. The older the rabbit gets, the tamer they become. They lick you or gently gnaw your scalp to show affection. They will very much enjoy sitting in your lap while you watch TV.

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