

Rabbit Care Guide

DIET & FEEDING

Grass hay (such as timothy hay) and fresh water should always be available to your rabbit. In addition, adult rabbits should be fed 1/4 cup of food pellets daily per 5 pounds of weight. Avoid any pellet mixes with added treats (such as fiesta or muesli mixes) as rabbits will pick through the pellets and eat only the treats.

Rabbits need roughly 1 cup of fresh leafy greens or herbs daily. Fruits should be given only as treats as they are high in sugar, which can lead to obesity and other health issues. Follow any feeding or diet directions from your veterinarian if your rabbit is underweight, overweight, or has any other conditions.

Young rabbits (under 6-8 months) should be fed an alfalfa-based pellet labeled as "Young Rabbit Food". Baby rabbits can also be offered alfalfa hay in addition to unlimited grass hays. After 3 months old, fresh greens should be introduced slowly in small amounts, one veggie at a time. Feeding fresh leafy greens or fruits to rabbits under 3 months old can cause GI upset.

BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

Most rabbits do not enjoy being held, so pick up your rabbit only when necessary, such as vet visits. If the rabbit gets agitated when being picked up, wrapping them in a towel (making a "bun-rrito") can help secure a rabbit safely. When picking up a rabbit, be sure to support their hindlegs and backside so they don't kick and injure you or themselves.

Just like dogs and cats, rabbits show how they are feeling with their body language. Getting low to the ground when interacting with them, such as sitting on the floor, is best. Rabbits are naturally shy, so moving slowly, speaking softly, and going at their pace is the quickest way to gain their trust and help them out of their shell. Offering treats, fresh leafy greens, or fruit is a great way to befriend them.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS

Bring your rabbit to a rabbit-savvy or exotic veterinarian annually for wellness visits, vaccinations, and to check their dental health.

If your rabbit stops eating or defecating for 6-12 hours contact your vet as this can be a sign of GI stasis which is an emergency. Other signs of illness include hair loss, lethargy, a head tilt, inappetence, or diarrhea. Rabbits should have their nails trimmed every 4 to 6 weeks, and rabbits with long hair or wool (like Lionheads or Angoras) should be groomed at least weekly.

HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT

An indoor 4 ft x 4 ft exercise pen is the recommended minimum for a single rabbit. The pen should be big enough for the rabbit to do zoomies, run around, and stretch out to lay down comfortably. The pen should be placed away from drafts and extreme temperatures, as rabbits are susceptible to heat stroke in temperatures over 80 degrees.

Your rabbit should have regular time out of their pen. Be sure to move any cords or houseplants out of reach and block off any areas you don't want the rabbit to get access to (such as under the couch or bed).

Provide a large litter box lined with paper-based bedding or kiln-dried wood. Place hay inside of it (or above it in a hay feeder). Clean the litter box often to encourage good litter habits and to ensure they always have access to clean hay to eat. Use heavy ceramic dishes for the water & food pellets so they cannot flip the bowls, and make sure to clean the water dish often. Water bottles are not recommended for rabbits, it is more natural for rabbits to drink from a dish, and they tend to stay more hydrated this way.

You can add bedding to the bottom of the rabbit's pen such as low-pile rugs but monitor them to be sure they don't chew it. Alternatively, you can use hay or grass-based mats marketed for small animals which are safe to chew on. Many owners also offer tile for the rabbits to lay on to help cool themselves down during warmer months. Most rabbits enjoy hides and tunnels as well as a variety of rabbit-safe toys to aid in wearing down their teeth and providing enrichment. Most items made of plain cardboard can be used to make hides and tunnels such as cardboard cat scratchers, hides, tunnels, and boxes. Woven hay hides and tunnels are fantastic for them to chew on and climb around.

Rabbits are social and can do well with other rabbits, but they should be spayed or neutered first and carefully introduced. The bonding process for rabbits can be a few weeks before they can live in the same enclosure. Before this they should live in side-by-side enclosures where they can see and smell each other, but not directly touch.

RABBIT SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- Enclosure or pen (Minimum 16 sq ft)
- Grass hay (timothy, orchard, oat, etc)
- Hay-based food pellets
- Bedding (fleece, low-pile carpet, grass/hay mats)
- Large litter box
- Paper or kiln-dried wood pellet litter
- Heavy ceramic food & water dishes
- Nail clippers (cat claw trimmers work)
- Rabbit safe toys
- Fresh leafy vegetables
- Plastic carrier for vet visits