

## **How To Give The Best Care For Your Rabbit**

### **BEAUTIFUL BUNNIES**

Rabbits are bright, affectionate, inquisitive, gentle and playful, whilst still retaining a charming sense of wildness. They are sociable creatures, enjoying the company of people, rabbits and other animals.

However, it is a misconception that they are the 'ideal first pet' for young children or are low maintenance and inexpensive. Being timid & sensitive animals, they are not generally content to be picked up and cuddled. They do love to be stroked but preferably whilst sitting beside you.

Whilst they make excellent family pets, it is important that adults accept that they will be the ones responsible for providing the majority of the care needed. That cute baby bunny may well require your time and devotion for 6 to 10 years!

### **Adopt a bunny...**

There are also benefits to adopting a bunny (or two). Welfare charities and rescue centres have many unwanted bunnies of all ages, shapes and sizes. Bunnies over a year are often easier to litter train and less destructive, especially when neutered. Older ones are often more willing to be petted, as they are less active. Also, it is easier for you to match the right personality to your family.

### **BUNNIES NEED COMPANY**

If you are away from home in the day or your rabbit is kept outdoors, you must provide him with companionship. It is recommended that one or both of your bunnies are neutered, as this reduces aggression and it is essential to do so if you are to prevent mating. When introducing bunnies to each other, do so on neutral territory. It is normal for them to chase and have scuffles, so you must supervise them initially. Rabbits can also bond well with guinea pigs, cats and dogs.

### **HABITAT**

If you chose to house your bunny outdoor, then provisions must be made for his comfort and safety. People often buy small hutches to go with their small bunny, but bunnies grow and so does their need for space.

Rabbits need a large, solid wooden hutch, treated with waterproof protection, covered with good quality roofing felt and constructed with strong, rigid, wire mesh. Make sure that the hutch is not only long and wide enough, but also high enough to allow your bunny to stand upright if he wishes.

Make sure your hutch and run are in a sheltered spot, away from the glare of the sun and the cold draughts. Ideally, you should move your rabbit into a garden shed or outbuilding at night time, to protect him from the cold weather and predators, such as foxes and cats. If this is not possible, always check your rabbit is locked securely (with proper bolts!) in his hutch at night and it is covered with tarpaulin. Rubber carpet underlay is an excellent insulator in Winter.

### **GOOD HOUSEKEEPING**

Use generous amounts of newspaper to absorb the wet, with plenty of clean, soft straw and fresh meadow hay. Woodchip and sawdust should be avoided, as it can irritate rabbits' eyes and nasal passages. Wet bedding and hard droppings should be removed daily, with a full clean at least once a week, using a suitable disinfectant.

Keeping your bunny's hutch clean is essential for his health and comfort. The time and effort required for this continuous task is often underestimated and it is frequently the reason that people get fed up with their

bunnies.

Take pleasure in the nurture and care that you give to your little companion; he relies on you. He may not be able to show you how much he appreciates your care, but he really does!

## **EXERCISE**

Adequate exercise is essential to a bunny's well-being.

You need to supply him with a good sized run in addition to his hutch. It must be long enough and wide enough to allow him to have a good scamper.

Again, the construction must be solid, with a roof and sheltered area. Ideally, it should rest on a concrete base, covered in newspaper and straw for easy cleaning.

A supervised run around a secured garden is also most enjoyable for him. Do not leave him unattended though, as he is very vulnerable to predators.

*PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE HIM IN HIS HUTCH ALL DAY!!  
He will become frustrated and depressed.*

## **FEEDING**

Daily diet should include: fresh hay, with two portions of different vegetables, and smaller amounts of carrots and fruit. Also, apple and pear twigs, dried grass and dandelions are a great source of fibre. In addition to the diet above, a handful of dried mix or pellets can be provided too. If you have grass in your garden, your bunny might like to graze.

Fresh water must be available at all times.

## **THE HOUSE BUNNY**

Traditionally, rabbits have always been housed outside. Although they can experience a wonderful outdoor life, they can be neglected, as tending to them in the rain and cold becomes less appealing and being out of sight can sometimes mean 'out of mind'.

It is becoming more common now, for people to keep bunnies as house pets. Some bunnies are completely free range and sleep in a dogs bed, rather than a cage!

## **LITTER TRAINING**

Rabbits tend to urinate in one or a few specific places and they are fairly easy to litter train. Start with a single tray in your bunnies pen or living area and at least one other in his exercise area. Fill it with newspaper, covered with hay and straw or a paper-based litter. Do not use wood-based or clumping litter.

Rabbits like to nibble on something as they 'go to the bathroom', so leave his food bowl or a treat in one corner, while encouraging him to use the litter tray.

If your rabbit urinates on the floor, simply add another tray. Later you can remove these extra trays, as he should only use one or two.

Be prepared, rabbits do need to re-ingest their soft droppings for nutrients.

## **INDOOR ACTIVITIES**

Rabbits need to chew and dig to keep their teeth and toenails trimmed. If they live indoors, it is wise to cover wallpaper and cover carpets with secured rugs or sea grass mats. Wrap wires and cables in plastic tubing and move houseplants out of reach.

Here are some ideas for indoor playtime:

- Closed cardboard box with doors, clay tubes
- Balls or cubes with holes for treats
- Chew toys: apple twigs, pine cones, maize.
- Loo roll tube, yoghurt pots, balls for nudging
- Box of hay, straw or shredded paper to dig
- Litter tray of sand or soil to dig and roll in

## **HEALTHCARE**

As well as preventing unwanted litters, neutering can be beneficial to rabbit's health, ie. preventing potentially fatal conditions such as reproductive cancers and infection of the womb (Pyometra). It also improves litter training, prevents spraying and reduces aggressive and destructive behaviour; allowing two bunnies to live peacefully together.

A male rabbit (buck) can be neutered from 3/4 months and a female (doe) from 5/6 months.

The two most important vaccinations that your rabbit should have are for Myxomatosis and VHD. Ask your vet for more information.

## **HEALTHCHECKS**

Regularly check your bunny for the following possible health problems:

- discharge from eyes or nose
- wet chin or front paws
- dirty bottom (prevention of fly strike)
- loss of fur or sore feet
- overgrown teeth or nails
- swellings or signs of parasites
- loss of appetite or change of behaviour

Any of these problems would require immediate veterinary attention. A rabbit's health can seriously deteriorate within hours.

Although a rabbit prefers not to be held it is essential that he accepts being handled, in order that he can be checked. Lift him up by supporting him under his forelegs and bottom and holding his back feet securely to prevent kicking.

**AS CUTE AS THEY ARE, PLEASE THINK VERY CAREFULLY BEFORE TAKING ON A BUNNY.**

**ARC – Animal Rescue & Care**

<http://www.animalrescueandcare.org.uk>