

Preparing for Your Home Check

Rabbit Guidelines

Bobtails Rabbit & Guinea Pig Rescue

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We are pleased you are considering adopting rescued pets from Bobtails Rabbit and Guinea Pig Rescue.

We want them, and you, to have a happy life together. As a rescue, we have a responsibility to ensure that the rescued animals in our care go to the best lifetime homes they deserve, which is why we always carry out a home check.

Please remember it isn't an "exam" or "test". It is an opportunity to get things right for your pets from the start and we at the rescue and our home checking team are here to help and advise you along the way and answer any questions you may have.

Every one of our recommendations are set for good reasons and are to comply with RSPCA, Rabbit Welfare Association or Cavy Trust guidelines, usually backed up by veterinary and welfare research.

All of our home checkers are unpaid volunteers who freely give up their valuable spare time to help our rescued animals find the very best homes. Please ensure you are ready for your home check ie: having bolts or security fixings actually fitted, rather than "here in the bag, we'll fit them this afternoon!" or "we've just got to finish meshing the roof etc." As that will mean a wasted journey and our home checkers will have to pay another visit, we are always happy to give advice and answer any questions to get things right before your home check.

Once you have reserved your new pet(s) here at the rescue, please do your best to be ready to adopt them as soon as possible so that we can take in the next unfortunate animals that are always on the waiting list to come in.

Rabbit Guidelines

- Minimum** acceptable hutch size for 2 **small** rabbits is 6' (180cm) x 2' (60cm) x 2' (60cm) or equivalent with daytime access to a large secure run area (usable all year round) preferably no less than 6' (180cm) x 3' (90cm) x 2' (60cm). **Bigger is better!**

Rabbit Hutch Width

A relaxed rabbit will fully stretch out when resting. The rabbit hutch should be wide enough to allow your rabbit to lie with its legs stretched out at the back. This allows for plenty of room to turn around in the hutch too.

Rabbit Hutch Length

The rabbit hutch should be long enough for the rabbit to take at least 3-4 hops without bumping its nose on the end.

Rabbit Hutch Height

Rabbits stand up on their back legs to check their environment is safe and is an important part of normal behaviour. The rabbit hutch should be tall enough to allow your rabbit to do this without being hunched over or folding its ears against the roof.

- Bunnies must be able to stand up on their back legs with their ears fully upright and "periscope" inside their hutch and their run. Two bunnies must be able to lay down together stretched right out in any given direction inside their hutch.
- Please ask Bobtails rescue for advice **BEFORE** purchasing your hutch and run as if they are not of an acceptable size, you will fail your home check.

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- ✓ Think about general garden security. Make sure your fences are in good condition and that intruders (human or animal) cannot access your bunnies. Does your side gate lock? Many bunnies are stolen from gardens!
- ✓ Hexagonal “chicken wire” **is not** an acceptable fencing material for enclosing your rabbits. It is not fox proof and can be bitten through. If you are building your own hutch or run, you must use a heavier gauge mesh and make sure it is secured with U-shaped nails at areas needing strength e.g. at the corners and along each side. These should be used **in addition** to any standard staples. This is to prevent a predator from pulling the mesh away from the frame. You can buy mesh in sheets from most garden centres or in rolls from DIY centres.

- ✓ Make sure there are **easy to use bolts** on your hutch and run. “Twist” catches are not predator proof and are too easily left open. It’s no good having the bolts on the hutch if you and your family won’t use them because they aren’t well fitting or are difficult to do up as the wood expands and contracts with the seasons! So, choose larger ones that are easy to slide into place for all the family and make sure these are maintained every few months. A good range is available at www.screwfix.com. Please ensure you have a combination padlock fitted if you have young children or children visiting your home who may want to stroke/fuss your bunny, they may not shut the door securely!



- ✓ If your rabbits’ garden run is to be moveable around the garden, think about ensuring that nothing can dig into or out of your animals run by using paving slabs around the edge of it, which can be moved when the run is.

- ✓ If meshing a portable run please use heavy gauge weld mesh not chicken wire. You should also ensure the run is sturdy enough that it cannot be tipped, pushed or moved by dogs/cats/foxes. Your bunnies will need shelter from the weather and a secure area such as an upturned box and of course some toys.

- ✓ All garden runs require a secure meshed top (not plastic or fabric).

- ✓ **For the safety of your animals. If your rabbits are left to run free in the garden You will fail a home check. Foxes can and do appear when we least expect it, even if you’ve not seen one in your garden before. We never take the risk!**

- ✓ If your bunnies’ garden run is to be static in one place, you can mesh the bottom of the run but you must lay turf over the top of it so that the mesh won’t give them sore feet. The roots will grow through the wire mesh so it can be watered as normal. The turf is also easily replaced if it is dug up by your bunnies or the grass becomes sparse. Or lay paving slabs around the edge to prevent predators from digging in and your animals digging out.

- ✓ If it’s possible, you may want to attach the run to the side/back/front of the hutch and fit a lockable cat flap in your bunnies hutch so that they can access the run whenever they want to during the day and can go into their hutch if the weather turns bad or if they feel worried or threatened. This also eliminates the need to carry them back and forth to their run, which can be stressful, as many bunnies do not like the feeling of being lifted off the ground.

- ✓ It’s fine to position your bunnies run on concrete as long as they have plenty of access to fresh grazing fodder such as good quality hay and/or grass. They should also have a digging box containing earth, organic compost and soil from the garden or play sand to promote natural behaviour. You could also provide a large tray with turf planted in it for extra grazing and digging fun!

- ✓ www.scratchandnewton.co.uk make waterproof and insulation covers for hutches and runs so that your pets can make full use of their space regardless of the weather. They can even make custom-made ones if your run is not one of their standard sizes. You can make your own of course for example from bubble wrap and tarpaulins, but you will need to show your home checker you have considered weatherproofing for all seasons. Therefore, even if your home check is in the summer, you will need to have your winter-proofing methods available for your checker to see. Think about where you position the hutch so that it is sheltered, free from draughts and out of the midday sun.



- ✓ www.snugglesafe.co.uk makes microwavable heat pads, which are safe for use with animals, as they cannot be chewed. The special gel inside the pad gives off heat slowly over 12 hours keeping your little ones snug and warm on colder winter days and nights. Well worth having on hand in case they are ever unwell.



- ✓ Assemble any toys/litter trays/bowls etc before your home check so that your checker can see them and check they are suitable. Ask for a list of toy ideas at the rescue if you aren't sure what to get. Be imaginative when enriching your bunnies home. Think like a bunny! They like to tunnel, dig, chew, throw & hop onto things.

- ✓ Sawdust or shavings are **not** an appropriate bedding/litter box filling for rabbits. They are dusty and very drying and long term exposure can lead to lung problems and skin disorders. A pulped paper product like Megazorb www.megazorb.co.uk or hay make a much better alternative.



- ✓ **Good quality hay** is key to your rabbit's dietary health and because poor quality hay often contains mites and fungal spores, which can lead to skin and lung problems, you should know what to look for when you buy it. Please buy your hay before your home check so your checker can assess the quality. Good quality hay will be green and have a slight moisture (but **not dampness**) to it, which means it is soft and pliable to the touch. It should be free of dust and smell sweet and fresh, like mown grass. Poor quality hay will be in yellowing, thin, brittle strands, which feel either very dry and crispy or damp. It will smell a little like dry earth or may even smell a little mouldy. Avoid this, your animals will not want to eat it and it is more than likely riddled with hay mites and fungal spores.

- ✓ Why not purchase your hay from www.willowwarren.co.uk

- ✓ Find out what kind of pelleted food your bunny has been fed at the rescue and buy some in ready. All our bunnies leave here having been fed 'Burgess Supa Rabbit Excel'. The leaflet "RWA Guide to Feeding Your Rabbit" explains the "Hay and Veggies" diet that all rabbits at the rescue follow. We hope that for your bunnies health, you will continue this when your bunny comes home so be prepared to show your home checker you understand how important the right diet is.



- ✓ Make sure you have found a suitable local vet **who takes a special interest in rabbits**. Many vets have virtually no training in rabbit care or may have a practice, which sees very large numbers of cats and dogs and very few small animals. Rabbits are much-specialised animals and many practices quite rightly consider them "exotics". Please ask the rescue centre for veterinary details.

- ✓ You can also get veterinary information if you are a member of the Rabbit Welfare Association www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk

- ✓ Rabbits need vaccinating for Myxomatosis and VHD. Some areas require the Myxo vaccine to be given twice a year, others annually.

- ✓ Your bunny will come with 4 weeks free Pet Plan Insurance please think about continuing this, rabbits are expensive! www.petplan.co.uk

- ✓ You need to think ahead about **holiday care** for your rabbits or guinea pigs and budget for them over the cost of your holiday. Please remember it is very unwise to leave your animals in the care of a friend/family member/neighbour who does not know anything about your pet or who cannot visit more than once a day. Often, it is quite subtle changes in behaviour which will alert you to your pet being unwell and someone inexperienced with your animals may miss a vital chance to get them treated. Why not use a bunny boarding facility, please ask for details of the facilities we recommend.

- ✓ **In addition, we can also offer limited boarding facilities here at Bobtails.**

When you are all ready for your home check, and you are sure you have covered all the items on the check list enclosed, please contact our Home Checking Co-ordinator by email at bobtailsrescue@aol.com or phone 020 8393 2016 to arrange a time and date for your check. You may collect your new family members as soon as it is convenient after you have passed your check.

**If you have any other questions or concerns,
please call Bobtails Rescue on 020 8393 2016
or email bobtailsrescue@aol.com**

Additional Consideration For House Rabbits

Please make sure that:

- Your bunnies have somewhere they can go to spend some “quiet time” which everyone in the family respects when your bunnies signal that they want to be left alone.
- You can show your home checker that all wires and chew hazards are protected by using chew proof trunking or are moved out of the way by running them under carpets etc.
- That your house plants are out of your bunnies reach, as many common varieties are extremely poisonous to rabbits.
- That you have thought about any other hazards such as doors, which could slam on your bunny, or doors or windows, which could be left open by accident and result in escape and/or injury.
- You have told your family and any visitors about your bunnies to make sure they don't inadvertently do anything which puts your rabbits at risk. We find a “**watch out, bunnies about**” sign is very handy for all doors to remind people who are coming and going, to be careful.
- Your household cleaning products are out of bunny reach or in a cupboard.
- Sawdust or wood shavings are **not** appropriate as bedding/litter box filling for rabbits. It is dusty, releases cedar phenols when wet and is very drying. Long term exposure can lead to your bunny developing lung problems and skin disorders. A pulped paper product like Megazorb can be used or line the tray with newspaper and fill it with hay, these are much better alternatives.
- Some bunnies are fussy about the type or shape of litter tray they use. Be prepared to have to buy a few different types of tray and clean up a few accidents until you find out what works for your new bunnies.
- Minimum indoor cage size for 2 house rabbits should be 140cms long.

