

Things to do with your rabbits

Rabbits are great fun, and can become very affectionate. Here are some ideas for how to have fun with your bunny!

- **Get down on the floor - rabbits are ground-loving animals!**
- **Find out your rabbit's favourite foods, and hand-feed him.... many rabbits will come when called if they know they'll get a treat!**
- **Gently scratch your rabbit's forehead**
- **If you need to move your rabbit (for example, from hutch to run) carry him in a box, not in your arms**



IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT A RABBIT YET....

Rabbits are great fun, but they're not the best choice of pet for everyone. Another type of pet might suit you better, so do your homework before making your choice!



DOES EVERYONE IN YOUR FAMILY WANT A RABBIT?

If you're under 10, you will need adult help to look after a rabbit properly. If you're 11 or older, you'll probably leave home before your rabbit dies of old age (rabbits live 8-10 years and sometimes longer). So it's very important that your parents want a rabbit too, because they will probably end up looking after it!

DO YOU WANT A CUDDLY PET?

Rabbits are affectionate and fun pets at ground level, but most bunnies don't like being picked up and held. Don't choose a rabbit if you want a cuddly pet!

WHO'S GOING TO PAY THE BILLS?

Rabbits can be expensive pets! As well as buying a hutch and run (or indoor cage) you will need food and bedding, and don't forget vets bills - are your parents willing to pay? Rabbit insurance is a great idea to help cover the cost of unexpected vets bills if your bunny is ill or injured, but you will still have to pay for routine healthcare such as neutering and vaccinations.

HAS ANYONE IN THE FAMILY GOT HAYFEVER, ASTHMA OR ALLERGIES?

Rabbits must have hay to eat, and they shed ("moult") lots of fur several times a year. If you have asthma or allergies, try looking after a friend's rabbit for several days before buying your own - a pet that makes you ill won't be much fun!

NOTE TO PARENTS:

- Tens of thousands of rabbits end up in rescue centres every year because "the children lost interest". Please, please don't get a rabbit unless **you** are prepared to look after it for the next ten years - because that is what is very likely to happen!
- Never allow pre-school children to interact with a rabbit unsupervised. If they try to pick the rabbit up, they are likely to be scratched or bitten and the rabbit can be injured or killed if dropped. Teach young children to sit on the floor and stroke rabbits using the back of their hands.

What are the alternative to rabbits?

If you want a small furry pet, but decide a rabbit isn't the right choice, think about:

RATS

brilliant pets, enjoy being handled.
Live 2-4 years

HAMSTERS

popular pets, but often dislike being handled.
Live about 2 years.

GERBILS

lively and quick moving. Live about 3 years.

GUINEA PIGS

tolerate being handled but probably don't enjoy it.
Live 4-7 years.

CHINCHILLAS

some tolerate being handled. Live 10-15 years.

CHIPMUNKS

these are pets to watch, not handle! Need very spacious cages and live on average 5-7 years

For more information, read the RWF leaflets:

Hey look at me, I'm a Houserabbit (indoor rabbits)

Rabbits need SECS (outdoor rabbits)

Bunny Buddies (why rabbits need company - and how to introduce two rabbits)

Feeding your pet rabbit (healthy eating!)

Having your rabbit neutered

Bunny MOT (health care needs)

"I have only been a member since January of this year (2005), but already my membership has been invaluable. It is so great to know that there are like minded people either on the end of a phone or an email who are only too happy to help with queries or problems. The more people who join, the more likely we are to be able to spread the word that rabbits deserve better!"

Tracey Poole, Cambridge



This leaflet is brought to you by the Rabbit Welfare Fund - the charitable wing of the Rabbit Welfare Association.

If you love rabbits, please consider supporting the Rabbit Welfare Fund. You can make a donation, or you may like to join the RWA. As well as fund-raising activities, most RWA members

kindly make a small donation to the RWF in addition to their annual RWA membership fee. RWA members receive a fabulous quarterly magazine packed with health, behaviour and care advice to help you to build a wonderful relationship with your bunny - whether she/he lives indoors or out.

To contact the RWA/Rabbit Welfare Fund:

Ring the RWA National Helpline on 0844 324 6090

Write to us at PO Box 603, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 5WL.

Log onto our websites

<http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk>

<http://www.rabbitwelfarefund.co.uk>

Contact the National Helpline to order bulk supplies of leaflets or send SAE for single copies.



You and your Bunny

Rabbit Welfare Fund
Write to us at PO Box 603,
Horsham, West Sussex RH13 5WL.
e-mail: hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk
Registered Charity Number 1085689

You and your bunny



Already got a pet rabbit?

How to check you're doing everything possible to keep your rabbits happy and healthy.

Thinking of getting

Here are all the things to think about first!



HOW TO "THINK RABBIT"

If you love rabbits, and want to look after them as well as possible, you need to look at life from a rabbit's point of view!

1 Pet rabbits are just like wild rabbits. They're programmed to be scared of being eaten by foxes and other predators - even if they are safe in your home or garden! That's why they have big ears to listen for danger; and bulging eyes so they can look all around them.

WHICH MEANS.....

Rabbits don't like loud noises or sudden movements, so don't terrify your pets with loud music and rowdy games. Keep toddlers away - their jerky movements are very scary to bunnies!

2 Rabbits don't like being picked up (the only time a wild rabbit gets picked up is if it is about to be eaten by a fox...) and they have large teeth and claws, which they'll use if they are scared or angry.

WHICH MEANS.....

Don't pick up your rabbit unless you have to! Pet rabbits can - and should - learn to accept being picked up (they need regular health-checks) but it's better if an adult does this. If you have small hands, your fingers may dig in and hurt your rabbit even if you are picking him up correctly. Make friends with your rabbit at ground level instead!

3 Rabbits are very social animals: they need company!

WHICH MEANS....

A rabbit living by itself will get bored and lonely. It's much better to get two. A male/female pair is easiest, but both will have to be neutered! If you only have one bunny, you must work extra hard to make sure you give it plenty of attention, every day.



4 Rabbits are active - in the wild they run about for several hours every day

WHICH MEANS ...

Rabbits shouldn't be kept in cages/hutches all the time, or they develop weak bones. Do your rabbits have plenty of space to run around in?

Rabbits can live indoors as houserabbits, or, outdoors in a large hutch plus access to an exercise run. There are lots of options: indoor cages of different designs; adapted wooden playhouses for the garden; and even space-age insulated plastic igloos! Whichever you choose, your family will need to adapt part of the house and/or the garden to your pets. Why not go along to a garden centre, or look on the internet for some ideas?

5 Rabbits love to chew and dig - it's what they do when making burrows!

WHICH MEANS...

Pet rabbits need things to chew (e.g. hay; apple or willow twigs; kitchen roll inner tubes) and somewhere to dig. You can make a "digging box" by putting peat into a cardboard box and cutting a hole half way up the side; let your rabbit play in a sandpit; or just accept he is likely to burrow in the garden!

6 Rabbits are inquisitive, and love exploring. This is because wild rabbits always need to know the quickest way back to their burrow, and where to find the best food.

WHICH MEANS....

Rabbits like to climb into (and on!) new toys. So give them cardboard boxes, large pipes, or bits of rolled up carpet to play with. They also like searching for tasty food, so you can hide tidbits and watch your bunnies hunting for them!

7 Rabbits like somewhere to hide - wild rabbits use their burrows both as a safe haven in times of danger, and as a place to relax in safety

WHICH MEANS...

Bunnies need a dark hidey-hole where they can chill out in peace. Never force your rabbits to come out of his hidey-hole: they will become frightened of you, and may bite or scratch in protest.

8 Rabbits are designed to eat grass, grass, and more grass....

WHICH MEANS....

Pet rabbits should eat mainly grass or hay. You can give fresh leafy greens as well. Rabbits should only have very small amounts of packaged rabbit food. But remember - never change your rabbit's diet suddenly, or you might cause serious tummy upsets. Make any changes to his diet over at least two weeks.

9 Wild rabbits don't live very long... but a well cared for pet rabbit can live a very long time - 10 years or more!

WHICH MEANS....

You need to find a good rabbit vet! Even healthy bunnies need to see the vet regularly (just like you, they need to be immunised against deadly diseases) and if your rabbit is ever injured or ill he will need rapid veterinary care. It's also a very good idea for pet rabbits to be neutered.



I need looking after properly!

