



Please read this first

- ❁ Take your rabbit straight home; do not leave her alone in the car. Rabbits overheat faster than just about any other domestic companion animal.
- ❁ After you get home, put her in a quiet, safe place with water and a litterbox with hay in it, and plain rabbit pellets if you already have them. Don't bother her until she gets used to the smell of her new home. Rabbits are easily stressed, and this can make them ill.
- ❁ If you don't have basic supplies already, then go shopping right away! Leave bunny at home in her carrier in a safe, quiet, cool place. Make sure she has water and newspaper/towels in the carrier while you are out shopping. Take this packet with the coupons and suggested products list with you. Not all pet supply places know what is good for rabbits.
- ❁ You are entitled to a free veterinary exam when you adopt a rabbit from a shelter - ask the shelter staff or call the number below for more information.
If you think your rabbit may be sick, call a veterinarian experienced with exotics immediately. Rabbits are prey animals and as such are programmed to hide illness.

IMPORTANT: if a rabbit does not eat for 12 hours you should treat it as an emergency.

- ❁ If you have any problems or questions, please don't just return bunny to the animal shelter! Call the Los Angeles Rabbit line at 310-713-2478 or e-mail losangelesrabbits@earthlink.net.
The rabbits are like our "shelter children" and we love them.

Thank you for adopting a shelter rabbit!!!

10-POINT PRIMER FOR NEW BUNNY FAMILIES

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- 1) Pine and cedar shavings are not recommended for use with rabbits and other small mammals. Inhaled phenols (the substances that make pine and cedar “smell good”) can cause liver changes in rabbits. Clay litters (clumping or non-clumping) are also not recommended. The “clumpers” can clump in the rabbit’s GI tract, and dust from plain clay litters can exacerbate respiratory problems.
- 2) Spaying and neutering is recommended for all rabbits. Rabbits can have a litter every 30 days, and can get pregnant within minutes after giving birth. Not only does spaying/neutering prevent unwanted litters, but it also protects female rabbits from uterine cancer (the rate as females grow older ranges from 50-80%), and permits male/female pairs to live happily together without being driven by their hormones.
- 3) Rabbits can easily be litterbox-trained—but you and the rabbit must “negotiate” this process. Start in a small area. Watch to see which corner the rabbit wants to use for urination, and place a litterbox there. Some rabbits need several litterboxes to start.
- 4) The primary component of a mature rabbit’s diet should be grass hay (Timothy, Brome, Orchard Grass, etc.). This should be given fresh daily, in large quantities. Hay can be ordered over the internet from various companies (see <http://www.rabbit.org/links/mail-order-resources.html>). Using hay as a litterbox material is ideal; it cushions the rabbit’s feet so they stay dry, and encourages the rabbit to munch on hay while he’s doing his business. To supplement hay, feed a daily salad of dark green leafy vegetables. Rabbit pellets should be given only in very limited quantities. The unrestricted feeding of pellets leads to obesity and often to bladder sludge. If you use pellets, buy only perfectly plain ones; do not be tempted by the “fancier” pellets with their eye-catching seeds, nuts, corn, and other “tidbits.” These ingredients are simply not good for your rabbit over the long term, and some of them are downright dangerous.
- 5) Be sure to “bunny-proof” the areas where your rabbit will exercise. Many — though not all — rabbits are prodigious chewers. They will chew electrical wires, carpeting, and other objects commonly found in any household. Although many people keep rabbits outdoors, this is not recommended. Indoor rabbits live healthier, happier, longer (7-10 years or more) lives.
- 6) Never attempt to “punish” or “discipline” a rabbit. These tactics will often create fear and defensive biting. If you need help with a behavior problem, contact your local HRS representative or visit the HRS web site: www.rabbit.org.
- 7) Rabbits need veterinarians skilled in rabbit medicine. Many wonderful vets are expert with other species, but are not knowledgeable about rabbits, and may administer inappropriate or harmful drugs in their efforts to help. To find a rabbit-savvy veterinarian in your area, contact your local HRS representative, or search the HRS web page: www.rabbit.org
- 8) Anorexia and /or watery diarrhea in rabbits should be considered emergencies. Seek expert veterinary care immediately.
- 9) Rabbits are not recommended for small children. Rabbits are prey animals by nature, and are easily frightened by children’s handling. Rabbits are often dropped by children, resulting in broken legs and backs. An adult should always be the rabbit’s primary caretaker, and should carefully supervise any children interacting with the rabbit.
- 10) The most common rabbit veterinary problems are: ear mites, ear infections, urinary tract infections, abscesses, tooth problems (incisor malocclusion and /or molar spurs), uterine cancer (in unspayed females), upper respiratory infections (watch for sneezing or runny eyes/nose), gastrointestinal slowdown or stasis, changes in balance or gait. A skilled rabbit veterinarian should be consulted for any of these problems.



\$\$ Bunnies on a Budget - in L.A. \$\$

Rabbits are not inexpensive companion animals, especially in the city. But you don't have to spend a fortune on everyday care to be a good bunny parent. Here are some ways to save money on bunnies and to plan for unexpected costs.

Use coupons. Use coupons. Once you get in the store, be sure to get on their mailing list to continue to receive notices of discounts and coupons.

Buy in bulk. Buy gallon jugs of white vinegar for cleaning the litterbox (at Smart & Final, 99 Cent store, etc). Get paper towels in quantity for cleaning and keeping veggies dry.

Buy hay by the bale or in bulk from the horse stables or feed stores to save big bucks on hay and litter. A bale of oat mix or Timothy hay costs from \$11-13 and will last a long time. But if you only have one or two bunnies, you will want to buy hay by the bag so it will be fresh. See your local rabbit rescue group or buy a couple of flakes from a feed barn. You can get away with very small amounts of bunny litter if you use lots of hay on top.

Shop at discount stores. Go to stores such as Smart & Final, Big Lots, Target, or Ross where you can find big trays (for litterboxes) for less. The concrete mixing tubs at Home Depot are large and inexpensive. Make sure the tubs or trays are made of hard plastic—you don't want bunny to chew and swallow his box! Use vinegar when you clean the box and you'll never have to replace it.

Get sheets to cover your plastic desk/chair mats at a thrift store or a yard sale.

You can save money on the hard plastic mats by shopping at discount stores. These are the mats used under desks and chairs in offices to prevent wear on the carpet. You use the spikes on the underside of the mat to hold the sheet firmly in place.

Network. Get to know other people in your area who have rabbits. Once you see that they take good care of their bunnies, you can ask to exchange bunny-sitting services and help each other find deals on products for your bunnies.

Comparison shop. If you've ever bought Oxbow Bunny Basics T at different stores, you know that the price can differ by a lot. Find out where to find your products at the lowest cost (don't forget to factor in the cost of gas). But don't switch pellets on your rabbit—she can get sick from a sudden change in diet. Find a healthy bunny pellet that you can afford and stick to it.

Buy only the basics. If you're on a strict budget, don't buy bunny those pet store treats (not good for her, anyway!). Give her a small piece of carrot or fruit for a treat instead. Tempting as it is to buy toys for your bunny, you can make your own toys with untreated wood from a lumber yard, toilet paper rolls, or cardboard boxes.

Ask for donations. Go to grocery stores and farmer's markets and ask if you can have free carrot and radish tops. Some grocers throw away the outer leaves of Romaine lettuce. But don't feed anything to your bunny that you wouldn't eat yourself, or you will have a sick bunny and vet bills are not cheap! Ask your friends and neighbors to save newspapers for your bunny's litter box.

Try alternative products: Purchase wood pellets (the kind used in wood stoves and available at select hardware stores) to line your litterbox with under the hay. The stove pellets are extremely absorbent and they are relatively inexpensive (less than \$5 for a 40-lb bag). If you line your litter boxes with newspaper, you will only need to use a thin layer of stove pellets. You have to put lots of hay on top, though.

If you are really broke, you can **use newspaper and hay in place of bunny litter.** You will definitely have to change the bunny box daily in that case.

Before using any alternative product, research first to make sure it's truly safe for bunnies. Consult with more than one educator or experienced rabbit person.

Start a savings account for your bunny's medical expenses. Veterinary care is one area where you really cannot skimp, but you can compare prices (politely) for specific procedures or medications. Reward the kind veterinarians who give you a discount by referring additional clients.

Get your bunnies neutered!!! This will save tons of money caring for the rabbits your rabbit will otherwise give birth to. Even if you have a single female rabbit, you will save money by getting her spayed now to prevent cancer. There is financial help for low-cost bunny neuters. Call Actors & Others for Animals at 818-755-6323 for more information.

Do research on veterinary care so that you avoid doing any unnecessary procedures or paying too much for medications. You don't have to pay \$150 to get rid of ear mites. Ask your veterinarian if you can treat your rabbit at home instead of bringing bunny back in and paying for additional office visits.

Don't expect your vet to give away her time for free.

If you have several rabbits, **consider joining an on-line rabbit group** so that you can ask for advice from others who may have experienced the same problem with their rabbit(s).

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To Buy For Bunny:

Exercise Pen or wire **Puppy Gate** to block off an area in your home for the rabbit to live in. 36" or taller for most, but 30" pens can work if a sheet is clipped over the top during the first week or so to prevent the rabbit from jumping over. Make sure the bunny cannot stick its head through the wire or get stuck. Pens are not recommended for outdoor housing; they are not predator-proof but trap bunny so she cannot get away.

Outdoor housing is not recommended. If the rabbit must live outdoors, purchase or build a large hutch (minimum 2' x 4' per rabbit) with solid flooring and a secure lock.

Litterbox: the bigger, the better! We like large cat boxes with rims.

Litter: paper- or aspen-based litters are good; other litters can be dangerous. Some brands of safe litter: *CareFresh and Aspen Supreme* pelleted litter. Pine shavings cause respiratory and liver damage; clumping litters can clog a rabbit's digestive system; clay litters also cause respiratory problems.

Hay: alfalfa for babies, oat blend, timothy, orchard grass hays for adults. Make sure to transition the rabbit onto alfalfa hay slowly if she is not used to it. Hay is a must for all healthy rabbits.

Fresh Produce: visit your local farmer's market or health food store to buy organic produce (parsley, Romaine lettuce, dandelion, etc.- see recommended vegetable list). All produce must be washed thoroughly to remove pesticides and herbicides. Vegetables keep best in a well-regulated refrigerator in plastic bags with a towel inside to absorb moisture. Don't feed wilted or rotten veggies; if in doubt, throw them out (or better yet, compost)!

Bunny Pellets: purchase a timothy-based pellet for adults (rabbits 8 months and over, done growing) and an alfalfa-based pellet for babies and growing bunnies. Select plain pellets, with no nuts, seeds or colored bits.

Water/Food Dishes: heavy crocks or clip-on dishes. Crocks are usually preferable to water bottles--they can be easily cleaned and bunnies drink more water from a crock. Food dishes should be small, water dishes, large.

Toys/Treats: hard plastic toys such as jingle balls and barrels for cats and birds make good bunny toys. The rabbit should not be able to ingest or get caught on any element of the toy. Pet store treats are usually not recommended for rabbits (check the ingredients before buying). Small pieces of fresh fruit (see recommended fruit list) or dried applewood twigs are better for bunny.

Hideaway: wooden nest boxes or cardboard houses for bunny to jump and hide in.

Carrier: hard plastic carriers that have a top opening are preferred. Artificial lambswool prevents bunny from slipping and absorbs moisture in the carrier.

Grooming Products: a nail clipper, small flea comb, and hamster brush. A slicker brush can be ok for longer-haired rabbits but use gently—the metal tines can hurt bunny's delicate skin.

Flea Products: for 'outdoor bunnies' or those in contact with cats and dogs that go outdoors, many exotic veterinarians recommend *Advantage*. The 0-9 lb. cat tubes are recommended to prevent overdose. Half the recommended dose is usually effective and safer for the bunny. Because rabbits groom themselves and each other constantly, care must be taken to follow the instructions on the packet. Kitten flea powder with artificial carbaryl is usually safe. NEVER use flea collars, dips, *Frontline* (all potentially fatal) or other flea products that have not been extensively tested on rabbits.

Cleaning Products: gallon jugs of white vinegar, paper towels, hand vacuum and/or broom. When you change bunny's box, pour a thin coat of vinegar on the bottom of the box, let it soak for a few minutes, then rinse; you'll have no odor and no build-up. Vinegar also works miracles in getting urine off linoleum, tiles and wood and helping litterbox-train your bunny. You will want to keep bunny's living quarters scrupulously clean. Rabbits don't tolerate molds and must have a clean environment, but they are also sensitive to cleaning products such as bleach and other caustic cleaners.

What NOT to buy:

- **Wire Cages.** Wire cages cause hutch sores and are usually too small to provide humane housing.
- **Harnesses.** Most harnesses are not constructed properly and bunny can strangle, get loose, or break her back from a sudden stop. Harnesses cannot protect the rabbit or caretaker from predator attacks.
- **Hay Racks.** These don't provide the amount of hay bunny needs. Rabbits can get their feet caught in wire hay racks and hang.
- **Seed & Nut Treats** - fattening and potential choking hazards.
- **Yogurt Drops** - too sugar-laden.
- **Vitamin Drops** for the water.
- **Exercise Balls & Wheels** - not suitable. These are dangerous for rabbits.
- **Chew Blocks.** Bunnies prefer organic apple twigs or willow.



Keep a Cool Bunny!

If you want to keep your bunny, keep her cool.

Temperatures over 80° Fahrenheit can be dangerous for a rabbit. In hot weather, please observe the following to protect your bunny from overheating:

- * NEVER leave a rabbit unattended in your vehicle. Even with the windows down, cars heat up fast. When you transport your bunny to the veterinarian or pet-sitter, make sure you bring along frozen water bottles to place in the carrier in case of emergency. Avoid traveling with your rabbit in the middle of the day.
- * Housing a rabbit in an outdoor hutch is not recommended. If you absolutely cannot keep your rabbit indoors during the summer, make sure the hutch or outdoor run has adequate ventilation and is shaded throughout the entire day. When the outside temperature reaches 80° F or higher, place a jug of frozen water in the hutch to keep bunny cool. Use a plastic jug or liter bottle 2/3 full of water and put it in the freezer overnight, and be sure to have an extra water bottle or two ready to swap out. Your rabbit will lie against the frozen water bottle(s) to cool off and drink the moisture off the sides of the bottle. Mistlers can also be used to cool the air around the rabbits (don't train the misters on the rabbits unless it's very hot). But keep in mind these measures may not be enough to protect your outdoor bunny if the temperatures get too high.
- * If your bunny lives indoors but you do not have air conditioning, keep her cool on hot days by placing bottles of frozen water in her living area. Cross-ventilate when possible by leaving windows partly open.
- * Provide water in heavy crocks if possible, rather than in water bottles - rabbits drink more water from an open dish. The water crock must be heavy to prevent your rabbit from tipping it over. You can add ice cubes to the water to keep it cool longer while you are away at work. Water must be easily accessible; make sure if you do use a bottle that it's at a comfortable height and your rabbit can drink (about 6-8 inches from the bottom of the cage or fence for an average-sized adult rabbit, lower for babies).
- * Place a ceramic tile or marble slab in the corner of your rabbit's living area. The tile provides a cool spot for bunny to lie on.
- * Rinse a towel with cold water, wring it out, and hang it in front of a fan so the cool air blows through it. Don't train the fan directly on the rabbit, and make sure she doesn't have access to the fan or electrical cord.
- * If you go on vacation, choose an experienced pet-sitter who knows how sensitive bunnies are to the heat.
- * Symptoms of overheating include: listlessness, wet nose and mouth, hot ears, mouth breathing, convulsions or frantic activity. To treat an overheated bunny, wipe cool water on her ears and wrap her in a cool, wet towel before rushing her to a rabbit-savvy veterinarian.



Rabbit Care



Rabbits make wonderful animal companions in the home. But contrary to common belief, they are **not** "low maintenance" pets. Please read this care sheet to learn the basics **before** you decide to adopt a rabbit!

Neuter Your Bunny! ■ Neutering not only helps curb overpopulation of domestic rabbits, it dramatically decreases the chance of reproductive cancers, makes litterbox training easier, and reduces chewing and territorial behavior, such as spraying. Shelter rabbits that are not already neutered should be neutered **IMMEDIATELY**. Contact your veterinarian or local rabbit rescue organization for a referral to a veterinarian.

Litterbox Training ■ Most rabbits can be litter-trained and allowed supervised freedom in the house. Start with a large cat litterbox; put newspaper and/or rabbit-safe litter on the bottom and cover it with lots of fresh timothy or oat hay. Since a rabbit usually urinates in one corner of his space, this is where you place the litterbox. Once the bunny uses the box reliably, you can let him out into a larger area, putting out a second box. Keep bunny confined to a 4' x 4' space until he is very good with his box.

Handling ■ Handle with care! Rabbits have fragile skeletons and can be seriously injured if dropped or allowed to fall. When picked up, a scared rabbit may kick out with her powerful hind legs and fall to the floor, breaking her back. A child struggling to hold a wiggly bunny could be badly scratched or bitten and the rabbit injured. For this reason and others, children should always be supervised with rabbits. Also, because rabbits are prey animals, they would rather not be picked up, but prefer that you meet them at their level and pet them on the floor. To pick up a rabbit correctly, place one hand under the rabbit behind the front legs and the other hand just above the bunny's tail. Hug the rabbit against your body firmly but gently.

NEVER pick up a rabbit by the ears—this is very painful and can cause permanent injury.

Never chase your rabbit, use force or yell—that will only teach her to fear you. Always be sensitive and gentle with your rabbit!

Diet Your rabbit's diet should include lots of fresh hay (timothy or oat for adults; alfalfa hay for babies), plain commercial rabbit pellets (no nuts, seeds, etc.) and fresh, washed vegetables and leafy greens. Romaine lettuce, carrot tops, dandelions, parsley, radish leaves, broccoli leaves, and cilantro are all good. Treats include small slices of apple, pear or other fruit, or pieces of carrot. Do not feed human treats like crackers and cookies. Fresh water should be available at all times in a bowl or a water bottle. Please note: Rabbit digestion is very sensitive, so you must introduce new foods gradually. Young rabbits age 3 months and under should only be fed hay, rabbit pellets, and water, and **NO FRUIT**. See our diet sheet for more information.

Location ■ Rabbits do not tolerate heat, dampness, or drafts. Your rabbit should be in a quiet, safe location close enough to human activity so she doesn't become lonely.

Indoor Housing ■ Secure puppy or rabbit pens 30-36" tall are best for indoor "starter" housing. If bunny jumps out, you can clip a sheet across the top of the pen for a couple of weeks until she establishes boundaries. You can put linoleum or plastic chair mats over your carpet or flooring during "potty training" and to prevent bunny from chewing or digging the carpet. If you must cage your bunny, the cage should measure a minimum of 2' x 4' per rabbit, and the rabbit must get daily exercise time. The cage should allow adequate ventilation (no aquariums!). Rabbits need a solid surface, such as a board, in part of their enclosure to prevent foot sores and discomfort from standing or resting on wire mesh. Caged rabbits should have a nest box for hiding.

Indoor Bunny-Proofing ■ Cover phone and electrical cords in plastic tubing (consult a hardware store). Don't let rabbits chew rugs or carpets; they can ingest fibers. Keep the floor clear of anything that can harm your bunny, including but not limited to: houseplants, candles, staples, and children's toys. Young bunnies usually want to chew, dig, and get into trouble. The good news: once your bunny is past adolescence, she will calm down!

Rabbit Care

Outdoor Housing ■ ...is not recommended.

Rabbits are prone to heat stroke (anything over 85 degrees is life-threatening) and can be killed by raccoons, hawks, dogs, feral cats, fly strike and other predators. Rabbits are great escape artists: they can burrow under backyard fences or squeeze out of very small openings, never to be seen again. If your rabbit must live outdoors in a large hutch or condo be sure he is off the ground, sheltered, and in the shade. Hutches should be a minimum of 2' x 4' per rabbit, and securely fastened with locks at the door and roof to protect bunnies against raccoon attacks. Outdoor housing must be enclosed on all sides—no open tops or dirt floors!

Exercise ■ If your bunny lives in a pen while you are at work, she will need "run time" several hours each day out of the pen, in a bunny-proofed room or hallway. Rabbits do not require outdoor exercise; if allowed outdoors, your rabbit must be in a predator-safe enclosure covered on all sides, and in the shade. Hutches bunnies also need supervised exercise time.

A Honey for Your Bunny ■

Rabbits are herd animals and like to have friends of the same species. If you're away all day at work, consider getting your rabbit a bunny friend for companionship. Neutered boy-girl pairs get along best, although neutered littermates of the same gender often stay friends. Bunny matchmaking can be dangerous, so always consult with a rabbit rescue group for tips on bonding, before you put one rabbit into another rabbit's territory.



Never Put Un-neutered Rabbits Together ■

Adult males will fight; adult females will fight; one of each will lead to an unwanted pregnancy.

Dogs, Cats and Other Animals ■ Never expect a dog, cat, or other animal to behave around a

rabbit. Gentle, indoor cats usually work out a good relationship with rabbits, but the introduction must be slow and supervised. Dogs must be quiet, obedience-trained, and well behaved for them to have a safe relationship with a rabbit. Most dogs cannot be left alone with a rabbit. The mere sight of a ferret or snake can cause a rabbit to have a heart attack. Always carefully supervise and protect your rabbit from other animals!

Veterinary Care ■ Finding a veterinarian who specializes in rabbits and knows how to treat them can be difficult. Consult a rabbit volunteer or go to www.rabbit.org for a referral. Be aware that rabbit veterinary care can be expensive.

Medical Emergencies ■ Rush your rabbit to the vet if you see: lack of appetite; diarrhea; few or no fecal pellets; listlessness; crusty ears; overgrown teeth, mucus around the eyes or nose; urine-soaked fur, straining to urinate; lump or swellings; head tilt; or any sudden behavior change. Rabbits don't show illness like cats and dogs, so any perceived problem should be treated as an emergency. One skipped meal could mean your rabbit is in grave danger.

Grooming ■ Trim rabbit nails, front and back, every six to eight weeks. Comb your bunny gently with a fine-toothed flea comb about once a week—more if he is shedding, to prevent fur balls. Rabbits cannot cough up fur balls like a cat. If your bunny gets fleas, carefully groom with a flea comb, dipping it in soapy water as needed. "Advantage" (but not necessarily other, similar products) has been used on rabbits with success; follow directions and keep bunnies separate until completely absorbed. NEVER use a flea dip or a flea collar—these are toxic to rabbits. Rabbits are clean animals and should generally not be bathed. Rough fur, "dandruff," or loss of fur can mean fur mites or ringworm—see your vet, as these conditions can easily be treated with medication.

To Buy for Bunny:

- ✓ Exercise pen, baby gate/pen, or predator-proof housing
- ✓ Hard plastic carrier for emergencies, trips to the vet
- ✓ Heavy crocks for food and water
- ✓ Wooden box or cardboard house to play and hide in
- ✓ Hamster brush, kitten flea comb, nail trimmers
- ✓ First aid kit (consult with a rabbit-savvy veterinarian)
- ✓ Plastic chair mat or linoleum to protect your carpet
- ✓ Hay (from a feed or pet store), veggies, pellets
- ✓ Bulk white vinegar to clean the litterbox
- ✓ Toys (from a rabbit supply company)
- ✓ Hand broom and dustpan; dust vacuum

Rabbit References ■ Read more on rabbit care! Check out www.rabbit.org and the following books: *The House Rabbit Handbook* by M. Harriman, and *Rabbits For Dummies* by A. Pavia

Indoor Housing – The X-Pen Option



- X-pens are dog exercise pens that can be purchased at local pet supply stores. They cost as much or less than a large cage. You can find small animal exercise pens, too, on-line and at some stores.
- 36” tall pen is suggested. If you think your bunny can escape over the top, just clip a sheet to the top of the pen creating a roof (this can be removed after a few weeks) or purchase a taller pen.
- Pens can be adjusted to fit various spaces/size.
- Set-up - use hard waterproof flooring (i.e. hard plastic desk mat, linoleum) to protect floor, wrap old sheet tightly around flooring, set-up pen on top of sheet/flooring. The setup in the photo above shows rabbits on seagrass mats over a linoleum floor. Add litter box layered with litter and fresh hay (oat or timothy), toys, water dish, dish for pellets etc.

Why an X-Pen environment? If your rabbit is not able to live in a larger indoor bunny-proofed room or area, then an X-Pen is the next best thing.

- Room for bunny to exercise a bit.
- Easier for human companions to interact with the rabbit; bunny does not “defend” against you like in a cage.
- Room for large toys, cardboard boxes, tunnels, hide-aways.
- Much easier to clean than a cage especially when the rabbit is spayed/neutered and litter box trained.

Don't forget - Bunny still needs exercise time outside of the pen!

Alternatives to the exercise pen: put a baby gate or Dutch door across the doorway to one room, and bunny-proof that room; section off a corner for your bunny; build your own rabbit habitat using 1” x 2” welded wire and untreated lumber.

Bunny-Proofing: the act of protecting your rabbit from herself and protecting your belongings from your rabbit. Cover electrical cords in cable wrap—rabbits will die from a bad electrical shock. Remove house plants from the rabbit room. Make sure that books, candles, papers with staples in them, chemicals, strings and fabric, food that your bunny is not used to, and all other hazards are out of bunny's reach.

For more information, go to www.rabbit.org or Google “bunny-proofing.”

A Rabbit in the House

Part I—Box Training



Rabbits are remarkably fastidious and clean in their habits. Thus it should not come as a surprise that rabbits will also learn to use a litter box, and that they prefer to use it in a specific place, usually in a corner of their territory.

During the two weeks following neuter surgery, or when you first bring your adopted bunny home, confine him to a puppy pen with linoleum or a hard plastic desk mat underneath, or large dog crate with solid, moisture-proof flooring and a large litter box in the corner. Not a little triangular box, but a BIG cat box or cement mixing box made from hard plastic. Line the litter box with rabbit-safe litter (see our suggested products page), then top off with handfuls of grass hay, such as oat blend or timothy.

Whenever you see your rabbit hop into the box, praise him. Rabbits are quite sensitive and respond well to positive reinforcement. Don't scold your bunny for not using the box. Instead, clean up urine with white vinegar, which completely removes the smell, and sweep up fecal pellets, placing them into the box where they belong.

Trouble-shooting:

- *Bunny goes everywhere besides the box, and tends to nap in the box.* Your rabbit is sending you a clear signal that s/he needs a second box, one to sleep in, one to “go” in.
- *Bunny's hopping all over and leaving pellets all over, too.* The biggest mistake new bunny parents make is to give the rabbit too much space, too soon. Wait until your bunny's box habits are as good as they are going to be, before letting him or her run “free” in the home.
- *Bunny has picked a spot to use for the “bathroom” and goes there religiously. It isn't the spot you had in mind.* Once a bunny has made up his mind that the latrine is located in a particular area, it's hard to convince him otherwise. Just put a litter box there.

Tips to help speed up and improve box training:

- use a paper towel to soak up “accidents” and place it in the litter box
- keep the floor outside the box scrupulously clean
- provide a bigger litter box and/or a second litter box with soft litter and no hay
- use a brand of rabbit-safe litter that has very little odor of its own
- put fresh hay in the box several times daily to encourage bunny to hop in

Within a few weeks of training, most neutered rabbits will use the litter box. The occasional stray “bunny pellet” can usually be expected, although some rabbits have perfect box habits.

After thorough box-training, rabbits can be given more space in a bunny-proofed area of the home and are on their way to becoming well-behaved house bunnies.

A Rabbit in the House

Part II—Bunny-Proofing

Once your rabbit has learned to use the litter box, you can give him or her more freedom in your home—provided you have rabbit-proofed. Rabbit-proofing involves protecting your rabbit from electrocution, carpet fibers, poisonous plants, strings, candles, lead paint, and so on. As an added benefit, rabbit-proofing also protects your valuable material possessions, your antique furniture, rare books, and expensive gossamer curtains.

Thorough rabbit-proofing is critical to your rabbit's safety: rabbits cannot cough up (regurgitate), and operations on their digestive systems are rarely successful. Electrical cords are irresistible to most rabbits and very dangerous. Don't count on "training" your rabbit not to chew cords; rabbits are smart and quickly learn that when you are not in the room, they can get away with anything. Providing distractions in the form of rabbit-safe chew toys, such as untreated willow chews and cardboard houses, may help. But the only certain way to prevent harm to your rabbit is to create physical barriers between your rabbit and hazards in your home.

Consider reserving one rabbit-proofed room for your bunnies with a baby gate across the doorway, or construct a completely safe "rabbit living room" with puppy exercise pens. To rabbit-proof a room, lift all electrical cords out of reach or cover them completely with cable wrap or metal channels that your rabbit cannot chew through.

Is your rabbit chewing under the bed? Tack hardware cloth to the box spring.
Is your molding under attack? Attach Plexiglas or untreated aspen to the molding.
Rabbits digging at the corner of the carpet? Place ceramic tiles or grass mats in the corners.

Replace carpeting with tile or wood flooring if at all possible (that's better for you, too: carpets harbor molds, bacteria and allergens). Block off the entertainment center altogether instead of attempting to cover all those wires.

Remove all dangerous or destructible objects from the floor and bottom bookshelves and replace with rabbit-impervious items, such as hard plastic boxes or metal filing cabinets, or install glass or acrylic (Plexiglas) on the bottom shelves. The good news: rabbits can't jump or reach beyond 3 feet. So once you have rabbit-proofed below that level, you're home free. Just don't leave any chairs pulled out!

Michelle Kelly is the president of Los Angeles Rabbit Foundation. For more information on rabbit-proofing, please e-mail larabbits@earthlink.net.

Dietary Recommendations

GENERAL: A rabbit's diet should be made up of high quality pellets, fresh hay (alfalfa, timothy or oat), water and fresh vegetables. Anything else is a treat and should be given in limited quantities.

IMPORTANT *all diet changes must be made gradually.*

- Pellets should be fresh and relatively high in fiber (18% minimum fiber). Do not purchase more than six weeks worth of food at a time, as it will become spoiled.
- Hay should be available 24 hours a day. Hay is essential to a rabbit's health. Hay provides roughage, which reduces the danger of hairballs and other blockages. Apple twigs also provide good roughage.
- Salt licks are NOT necessary.
- No nuts or seeds as these are bad for a bunny.
- Variety is key for vegetables. When shopping, look for both dark leafy vegetables and root vegetables. Also try different colors as these provide your rabbit with different essential vitamins. Stay away from beans and rhubarb, spinach, cabbage and kale. For a vegetable list, see the back of this sheet.

Babies and teenagers:

- birth to 3 weeks - mothers milk
- 3-4 weeks - mothers milk, nibbles of **alfalfa hay** and **alfalfa pellets**
- 4-7 weeks - mothers milk, access to **alfalfa hay** and **alfalfa pellets**
- 7 weeks to 7 months: unlimited **alfalfa hay** and **alfalfa pellets** (plus 12 weeks see below)
- 12 weeks - introduce vegetables (one at a time, quantities under 1/2 oz.)
- **NO FRUITS!**

Young adults: 7 month to 1 year

- introduce **grass** and **oat hays**, decrease alfalfa
- decrease pellets to 1/2 cup per 6 lbs. body weight
- increase daily vegetables gradually
- fruit rations no more than 1-2 oz. per 6 lbs. body weight (because of calories)

Mature adults: 1 to 5 years

- unlimited **oat and timothy hay** (no alfalfa)
- 1/4 to 1/2 cup pellets per 6 lb. body weight, preferably **timothy-based pellets**, such as Oxbow Bunny Basics T
- minimum 2 cups chopped vegetables per 6 lbs. body weight
- fruit only as treats!

Senior rabbits:

- if sufficient weight is maintained, continue adult diet
- frail or older rabbits may need unrestricted pellets to keep weight up. Alfalfa can be given to underweight rabbits, only if calcium levels are normal. Annual blood workups are highly recommended for geriatric rabbits.

Note: when you feed a lower quantity of pellets, you must replace the nutritional value without the calories, which is done by increasing the vegetables. Also, a variety of hay and straw must be encouraged all day long. We do this by offering fresh hay a couple of times per day.

Suggested Vegetables

Select at least three kinds of vegetables daily. A variety is necessary in order to obtain the necessary nutrients. Pick one each day that contains Vitamin A, (indicated by an *). Add one vegetable to the diet at a time. Eliminate if it causes soft stools or diarrhea.

Alfalfa, radish and clover sprouts
Basil
Beet Greens (tops) *
Bok Choy
Asian Broccoli (mostly leaves/stems)
Brussels Sprouts
Carrot and Carrot tops*
Celery
Cilantro
Clover
Collard Greens*
Dandelion Greens and Flowers
Endive*
Escarole
Green Peppers
Kale(!)*
Mint
Mustard Greens*
Italian Parsley*
Pea Pods (the flat edible kind)
Peppermint Leaves
Raddichio
Radish Tops
Raspberry Tops
Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light-colored leaf)
Spinach(!)*
Watercress
Wheat grass

*contains Vitamin A

(!) Use sparingly. High in either oxalates or goitrogens and may be toxic in accumulated quantities over a period of time

Suggested Fruits

Sugary fruits such as bananas and grapes should be used only sparingly, as occasional treats. Bunnies have a sweet tooth and if left to their own devices will devour sugary foods to the exclusion of healthful ones.

Apple (remove stem and seeds)
Blueberries
Melon
Orange (including peel)
Papaya
Peach
Pear
Pineapple
Plums
Raspberries
Strawberries

HE'S NOT A CHILD'S TOY.

HE'S A REAL, LIVE, 10-YEAR COMMITMENT.

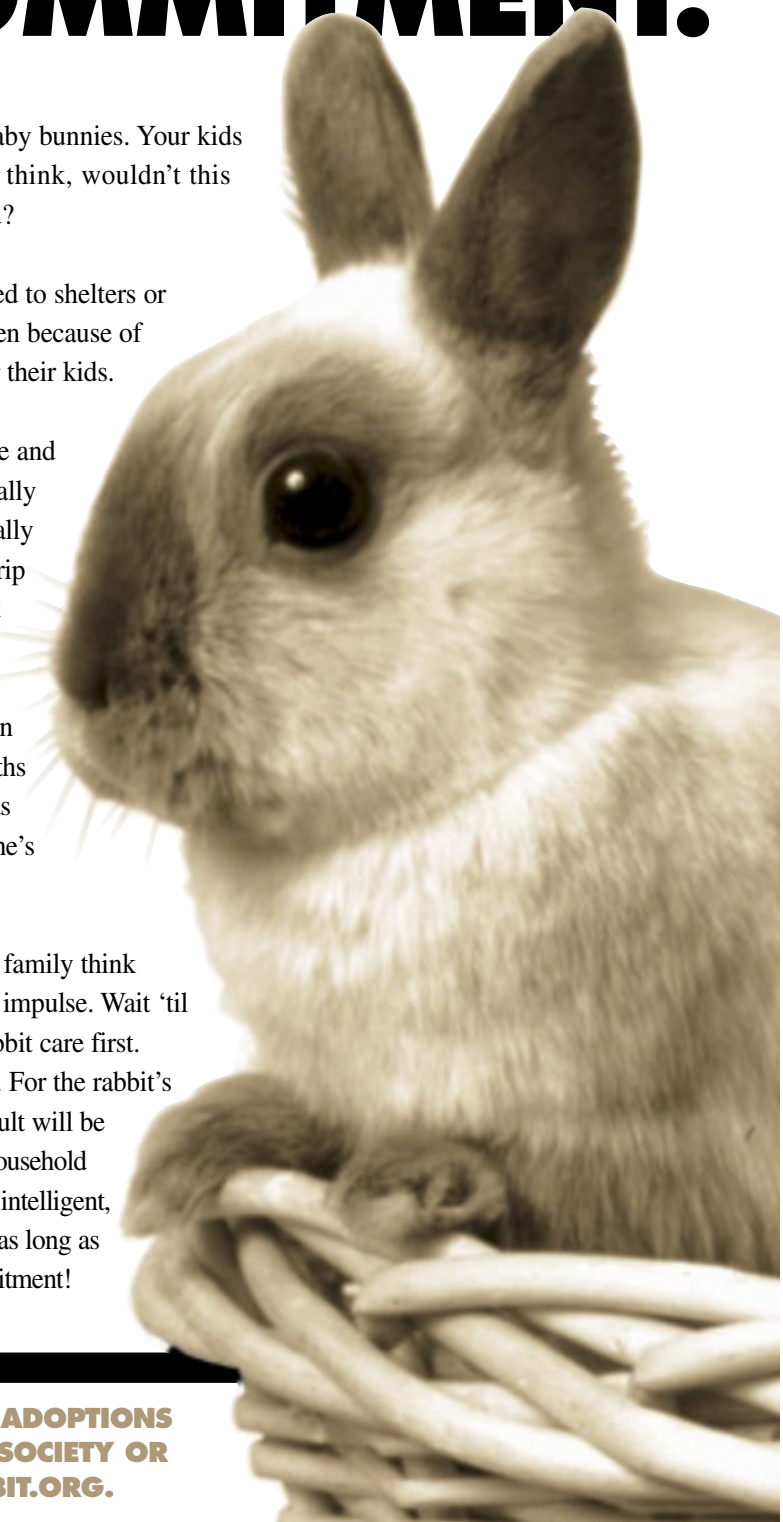
It's Easter time again. Pet store windows are filled with adorable baby bunnies. Your kids are begging you to buy one. It's so hard to resist. After all, you think, wouldn't this be the perfect, low-maintenance "starter pet" for a young child?

Think again! Every year, many thousands of rabbits are abandoned to shelters or released outdoors (a sure death sentence for a domestic rabbit) often because of misunderstandings on the part of the parents who bought them for their kids.

Rabbits are prey animals by nature. They are physically delicate and fragile, and require specialized veterinary care. Children are naturally energetic, exuberant, and loving. But "loving" to a small child usually means holding, cuddling, carrying an animal around in whatever grip their small hands can manage—precisely the kinds of things that make most rabbits feel insecure and frightened. Rabbits handled in this way will often start to scratch or bite simply out of fear. Many rabbits are accidentally dropped by small children, resulting in broken legs and backs. Those rabbits who survive the first few months quickly reach maturity. When they are no longer tiny and "cute," kids often lose interest, and the rabbit, who has no voice to remind you he's hungry or thirsty or needs his cage cleaned, is gradually neglected.

Parents, please help. If you're thinking about adding a rabbit to your family think about this: pet rabbits have a lifespan of 7-10 years. Don't buy on impulse. Wait 'til after the holiday. Make an informed decision by learning about rabbit care first. Consider adopting a rabbit from your local shelter or rescue group. For the rabbit's health and well-being (as well as for your child's) make sure an adult will be the primary caretaker and will always supervise any children in the household who are interacting with the rabbit. Domestic rabbits are inquisitive, intelligent, and very social by nature. A rabbit is a delightful companion animal as long as you remember: he's not a child's toy. He's a real, live, 10-year commitment!

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON RABBIT CARE AND ADOPTIONS
IN YOUR AREA, CONTACT YOUR LOCAL HUMANE SOCIETY OR
VISIT THE HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY AT WWW.RABBIT.ORG.**



SETTING YOUR PET RABBIT LOOSE DOESN'T MAKE HER "FREE."



IT MAKES HER "FOOD."

Domestic rabbits lack the survival instincts wild rabbits use to fend for themselves. So they become food for everything from raccoons and dogs to crows and hawks. And the “lucky” ones who don't get eaten get run over by cars or die from heat or disease. Please, before getting a bunny – or abandoning one – contact your local humane society or visit the House Rabbit Society at www.rabbit.org.