

Rabbit

Getting Started



Things You Will Need

- **Cage**
- **Bedding – resin free pine, aspen, or Carefresh shavings**
- **Water bottle**
- **Food dish**
- **Covered home**
- **Timothy hay**
- **Food pellets**
- **Wood chew sticks**
- **Vitamins**
- **Salt/mineral block**

Please make sure you set their new cage up before putting them in it.

It can be a little stressful going to a new home and environment.

Paradise Pet Centre recommends that you keep your rabbit in the house rather than outdoors. Rabbits are intelligent, social animals that need affection, and they can become wonderful companion animals if given a chance to interact with their human families. The majority of rabbits found in Paradise Pet Centre are locally

raised and are 8-10 weeks old when they are ready for sale. Occasionally we will get an adult rabbit that will be sold with all the money going to a charity. The most common types of rabbits are Netherland Dwarf, Holland Lop, Rex, or Regular rabbits. Netherland Dwarfs have very small ears that stand up, a full grown size of about 3 lbs. and short hair. Holland Lop have long floppy ears, a full grown size of about 6 lbs. (miniatures are about 4 lbs.) and short hair. Rex's have medium length ears that stand up, a full grown size of 3-4 lbs. and have very soft short hair. Regular rabbits have long ears that stand up, a full grown size of 4-5 lbs. and normally have short hair. The life expectancy of a healthy Rabbit is about 7 years.

FAQ'S

How long do rabbits live for?

The lifespan for a rabbit is between five to ten years.

How often should my rabbit's claws be clipped?

Clip the claws as often as necessary. The more frequently a rabbit can walk/run on a hard surface, the less frequently they will need clipping, as they will wear down themselves. A rabbit that spends a lot of time on grass or in its hutch will need its claws clipping more often. Be careful not to cut them too short as they will bleed. Blood stopper is a good idea to keep on hand. We stock this item.

If you are a little nervous doing nails, you can always bring your animal down and we will do it for you a small cost.

Do rabbits need toys?

They need mental stimulation. Without challenging activities to occupy your rabbit when you're not home, your rabbit, especially a solitary rabbit, will get bored. This could lead to depression

and/or excessive destruction. The creative use of toys can extend your rabbit's life by keeping him interested in his surroundings, by giving him the freedom to interact with those surroundings, and by allowing him to constantly learn and grow.

NUTRITION

Rabbits are typically 8-10 weeks old when they are sold and are sensitive to nutrition change during the 3-4 weeks socializing period when they first get home. They would either be on Paradise Pet Centre bulk rabbit pellets or Living World Extruded Rabbit Pellets so check in the cage where the rabbit came from to know what type to recommend. If the food is changed too quickly they will develop diarrhea and this could prove fatal. The rabbit must go home with the same food that it is being fed in the store or the sale will be refused. If you have a customer refusing to purchase a small bag of food when buying a rabbit, get your manager to talk to them. They should have these pellets available all the time with a small handful of Alfalfa Hay every day. Once the rabbit is about 6 months old it can be switched to Timothy Hay to help control body weight. Alfalfa Hay is a growth food and Timothy Hay is a maintenance food. Liquid vitamins are recommended to go into the water every day, and a salt lick help prevent biting. Fresh fruit and veggies can be offered in very small quantities after the rabbit is through the 3-4 week socializing period. The foods fed in Paradise Pet Centre are premium quality and complete diets so the fruit and veggie portion are considered treats.

THE BENEFITS OF SPAY AND NEUTER

Although most rabbits will use a litter box, hormones may cause un-neutered males and un-spayed females to "mark territory." Spaying or neutering your rabbit improves litter box

habits, lessens chewing behavior, decreases territorial aggression, and gives your rabbit a happier, longer life. Have your rabbit neutered between ages 3 1/2 to 6 months, depending on sexual maturity, by an experienced rabbit veterinarian. For rabbits more than 2 years old, get a veterinary checkup first.

HOUSETRAINING

Rabbits may have free run of the home. However, it's best for most--and necessary for some--to start with a cage. To make cage time learning time, fasten a litter box in the corner of the cage that your rabbit chooses for a "bathroom." As soon as he uses the box consistently, you can give him some freedom. Place one or more large litter boxes in corners of the running area outside the cage.

Use only positive reinforcement (treats and praise)--never punishment.

BUNNY-PROOFING

Bunny-proofing your home is part of living with a house rabbit. It is natural for rabbits to chew on furniture, rugs, drapes, and, most deadly of all, electrical cords. Cords must be concealed so that the rabbit cannot reach them. Exposed cords can be encased in vinyl tubing (found at hardware stores). By splitting the tubing lengthwise with a utility knife the cord can be pushed inside it.

Give your rabbit enough attention, safe chewables, and toys, so that she is distracted from chewing furniture and rugs. A cardboard box stuffed with hay makes an inexpensive play box. Young rabbits (under a year) are more inclined to mischief and require more confinement and/or bunny-proofing than mature rabbits.

HOUSE RABBITS AND OTHER ANIMALS

House rabbits and indoor cats can get along fine, as do rabbits

and well-mannered dogs. Dogs should be trained to respond to commands before being trusted with a free-running rabbit and supervision is needed to control a dog's playful impulses (this is especially true for puppies). Adding a second rabbit is easiest if the rabbits are neutered adults of opposite sexes, and they are introduced for short periods in an area unfamiliar to both rabbits.

BASICS OF RABBIT BEHAVIOR

It is easier to train rabbits if you understand that their behavior is usually motivated by one of three things:

- their natural need and inclination to chew and dig;***
- their need to communicate and our tendency to require words for understanding communications;***
and
- the social structure as seen by rabbits, in which all members of the family relate to them by way of a pecking (nipping?) order.***

AGE AND BEHAVIOR

Young rabbits have more energy, more need to explore, and (hopefully) less training than older rabbits have. Like puppies, bunnies love to chew. Like older dogs, rabbits may still enjoy chewing, but not to the extent they did when young. Rabbits chew to wear down their teeth, which grow continuously, but they chew non-food items because they need to explore the world through taste and texture, they need to build strong jaw muscles, and just because it's fun. Perhaps older rabbits chew less because they know the taste and texture of the world and need only food to keep their teeth worn-down and their jaws strong. In any case,

time is on your side when it comes to a rabbit's inclination to chew your great-aunt's antique buffet. On the other hand, training does not happen by itself or simply with time.

PREPARATION

Rabbits should have a home of their own (a cage) within the family home, large enough for a litter box, food dishes, toys, and them. They should be able to stretch full-length in all directions.

Ideally, a "shelf" or "loft" is provided to give opportunity for vertical jumps. In addition to restricting the time in which they are out to those times when you can watch them with your full attention, you want to restrict the space they have access to. As they become well-trained within a restricted area, you can gradually increase their boundaries.

CAGE SET UP

The basic enclosure for a rabbit should have enough space for sleeping quarters, bathroom, food and water, and things to chew on. There are lots of substrates available to choose from but in Paradise Pet Centre we use spruce shavings. The other types are Pine shaving, Shredded Aspen, Carefresh Litter, Corn Cob, Yesterdays News, Daily Scoops, or Cedar Shavings. Once the substrate is selected a house of some sort should be offered, one that can be chewed on would be best. There are lots of wooden and plastic houses to choose from and they should allow the entire bunny to be inside. Most rabbits can be litter box trained to keep the rest of the cage nice and clean. The boxes will fit in the corner of the cage, so simply put soiled shavings in the box every day and after about a week the bunny should know to go there. If this doesn't work you can try just offering shavings in the box and leave the cage bare, about 8/10 rabbits will litter train. The food dish should either be quite heavy or secured somehow to the cage so it can't be tipped over. Water is best offered in a bottle

that hangs outside the cage, a dish will get filled with debris very quickly because bunnies are quite active during the day. There should also be a hay manger offered on the side of the cage off the bottom for the Alfalfa or Timothy hay. The teeth of a bunny constantly need to be ground down by chewing, so offering mineral stones, wood chews, salt licks, or honey sticks is very important. If you have a bunny that doesn't like to chew there has to be regular vet visits scheduled so they can trim the teeth. They can actually over grow to a point where the animal won't be able to eat properly and could prove fatal.

TYPES OF CAGES

There are 3 types of cages for Bunnies:

- Wire cages**
- Zoo Zone cages**
- Outdoor hutches**



Wire cages are the most popular cages because most of them come with other supplies in a starter kit.

They will have an epoxy coated wire top that fits into a plastic tray bottom. If the epoxy is chewed off the wire top it is recommended to be replaced, but offering a lot of chew toys will discourage this behavior. This type of cage is easy for the rabbit to kick shavings and other debris out, so there will be daily cleaning required. There is typically a door on the top of the wire but it is easier to take the whole top off when you need to handle the bunny. Some styles will have a door on the side that the bunny should be able to hop out on its own.



Zoo Zone cages are the best indoor environment for a bunny. The top of the cage has plastic sides to keep all the debris inside the cage, and the opening to get into the cage is the whole length and width of the cage. Instead of having this little door to get the rabbit out of the whole top comes right off which makes it much easier.

The dishes that come with the cage click into the side of the cage so they cannot be tipped over, and there is a hay manger that hangs over top of the dishes to control the mess. A litter box is also supplied and this click into the side opposite the food so it cannot be tipped or moved. There is also a water bottle attachment supplied so the water can hang on the outside of the cage keeping the water source free of debris.



Outdoor Hutchs can be used for bunnies that will be over 4lbs. at their adult size. These are made out of cedar to repel mites and ticks and have legs to keep the cage area off the ground. There should be a completely closed in part of the cage for sleeping and then an area for exercise on the other side. There is also access to the covered in area and the play area to get the bunny out if you want. For cleaning, there is a tray that slides out from the front which hangs under the cage to catch the droppings. For a bunny to live outside in the winter it is recommended to offer either a heat light or heated mat in the covered in area. It should also be kept outside to experience all the seasons so it can grow the proper coat of fur.

MAINTENANCE

Depending on the size of rabbit compared to the size of the enclosure it should be cleaned once or twice a week. If you can

litter box train your rabbit it will make cleaning much easier, every couple days remove and replace the contents of the litter box. Otherwise you would have to remove all the shavings in the cage once or twice a week and clean the cage bottom with Urine Off. This is the best cleaner to use on the cage or even on the rabbit if it smells. It is an enzyme based cleaner and could be consumed with no side effects. Food and water should be checked every day because rabbits do use a lot of water and sometime the bottle will leak soiling the cage. Once the cage is cleaned you can put fresh shavings, litter, food and water, and the house back into place.

CHEWING AND DIGGING

During the training time, do nothing but concentrate on the rabbit. Open the door to her home and let her (or them) come out when she chooses. You may offer toys or treats from your hand, but don't interfere with her if she wants to explore. And watch her carefully throughout the time she is out of her cage. If the rabbit starts to chew on something you don't want chewed, offer an appropriate alternative. Block whatever he was chewing on so as not to be temptation

The same thing applies to digging. If the rabbit loves to dig in the carpet, build a small "corner" or "tunnel" with carpeting on the bottom (frequently replaced) and give this to him to distract him. Or make a digging box by blocking the end-opening of a covered litter box and cutting a hole in the side. The rabbit will go in, turn so her body runs the length of the box (providing she is large enough that her body doesn't fit cross-wise). The digging material will be flung against the sealed end of the litter box and remain contained. Use something totally dust-free and safe in the

digging box. Rabbits, being the incredibly intelligent little creatures that they are, quickly learn.

COMMUNICATING WITHOUT WORDS

Rabbits need to communicate with their humans, but of course, their communication is without words. One obvious example of such communication is struggling when they are picked up. This is simply (and obviously) saying "I don't like being picked up! Put me down! PLEASE put me down! I don't feel safe when you take control of my body this way!" There are few instances where it is appropriate for humans to force their will on a companion of another species in this way. Obviously, if a rabbit's teeth must be examined or clipped because of malocclusion, it is necessary to hold her against her will.

If you want a rabbit that enjoys jumping on your lap and being stroked, teach him to trust you, by never grabbing or holding him against his will when he comes to you. Use treats, nose-to-nose-touching, chin-rubbing (your chin on the rabbit's face), rubbing around the ears, etc.--whatever he enjoys--encouraging his pleasure in being with you. And if he happens not to enjoy such activities, so be it. Respect and enjoy him for who he is. After all, you want the same for yourself.

A rabbit who enjoys sitting on your lap and being stroked may nip you sharply if you get distracted enough to stop stroking her. She isn't trying to hurt you, just to remind you that she expects you to get back to the job at hand. When a rabbit nips in an effort to communicate appropriately such as in this case (inappropriate nipping will be discussed later), he probably doesn't realize how painful it is or how severe the resulting bruise may be. SCREECH one high, loud, sudden, and short screech to let the rabbit know that he really hurt you. The squeal should be loud, sudden, and high enough to startle the rabbit slightly. The next time he nips

(appropriately--i.e., for the purpose of communicating), you will be surprised at how much gentler it will be. Continue to squeal when nipped, however, until the nip is gentle enough to cause no pain or bruising. (Note: use ice on the bruise quickly.)

BEHAVIOR MOTIVATED BY SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Finally, we come to behavior motivated by the fact that any rabbit wants to be top-rabbit. Such behaviors have nothing to do with the chewing, digging, litter training, or nipping discussed above, but they can be confused with some of these. Throughout this discussion, keep in mind that your goal is to convince your rabbit that you are top-rabbit. This is not the same thing as forcing your will on him in a manner that ignores his needs and desires.

Rather, it is an important part of establishing a normal companion-companion relationship that will meet his needs as well as yours (he will be quite content accepting you as top-rabbit and himself as subdominant to you, once he sees you as naturally dominant). It even makes it possible for you to carry out your full function as his caretaker.

If a rabbit jumps onto the couch where you are sitting and nips you deliberately, she is probably trying to take the couch for her own. (This is "inappropriate nipping.") Not only should you screech, but you should firmly (though gently), return her to the floor with a sharp "No!" If she jumps back up and doesn't nip you, she's learned that she can share the couch, but not drive you off. If she jumps back up and nips again, you repeat the screech, the "No!" and the return to the floor. If she comes back a third time with a nip, it is time for her to "go to her room" (i.e., she needs to be herded back to her "cage" for a two-minute time-out). If she throws a temper tantrum in the cage, shaking the "bars" and flinging herself around, ignore her. After she's quiet again, she can come out. If she continues to try to force you from your seat,

however, she may need to stay in her room (cage) until the next time she would normally be allowed out. This same general method applies whenever a rabbit attempts to dominate you. He will be much happier when he learns that his humans are top-rabbits and he isn't.

Another behavior related to this attempt to dominate humans is the most unwelcome one of urinating on the piece of furniture where you often sit, or on your bed. This is the equivalent of one rabbit urinating in another rabbit's cage. The victim may accept the insult, agreeing to the dominance of the aggressor, or he may decide to fight it out. Neither of these is appropriate for a human. You can close the door to your bed room; controlling his access to the bed (you're dominant). But it may not be so simple to close off a chair or couch in the family room you share with your companions. The most effective means I have found to declare the dominance of the human over the rabbit in this situation is to set "Snappy Trainers" (safe, mouse-trap like contraptions that can be found in "pet stores," each with a plastic fan blade that causes it to fly into the air when bumped) along the edge of the seat. The rabbit jumps onto the seat, the Snappy Trainers fly into the air, and a startled rabbit never tries to go on that piece of furniture again. The human then has control of her chair.

SUMMARY

Training a rabbit requires commitment of time, effort, and thought on the part of the rabbit's human. It isn't just teaching the word "No!" (which will only teach the rabbit to wait until the human isn't looking). It's learning to understand the rabbit's likes and dislikes, working to provide things he really enjoys, thinking up new possibilities when old toys become boring, and making the effort to switch toys regularly to maintain interest.

Enjoy your rabbits to the fullest! Train them well and carefully, love them with all your heart, appreciate them for whom and what they are and both of you will experience the great pleasure of sharing your lives with each other in harmony.