

Why a House Rabbit?

Perhaps you've just adopted your first rabbit, or maybe you already have a rabbit and would like more information to help you understand her better. House Rabbit Society, a national nonprofit organization, recommends that you keep your rabbit in the house rather than outdoors. Rabbits are intelligent, social animals who need affection, and they can become wonderful companion animals if given a chance to interact with their human families.

The Benefits of Spay and Neuter

Although most rabbits will use a litterbox, hormones may cause unneutered males and unspayed females to "mark territory." Spaying or neutering your rabbit improves litterbox habits, lessens chewing behavior, decreases territorial aggression, and gives your rabbit a happier, longer life. Have your rabbit neutered between ages 4 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 space they can call their own. This can be an exercise pen, a large dog crate, a bunny proofed room, or a very large cage or condo. To make this confined time learning time, make sure that there's a litterbox in the corner of the space 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 litterboxes in corners of the running area outside the rabbit's home base.

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 playbox. 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.

Major Health Problems

- **Intestinal blockages:** Because rabbits groom themselves constantly, they get hairballs just as cats do. Unlike cats, however, rabbits cannot vomit, and excessive swallowed hair may cause a fatal blockage. Rabbits can also develop a serious condition known as GI stasis which has many of the same symptoms and is much more deadly.
- If your rabbit shows a decrease in appetite and in the size of droppings, get advice from a rabbit veterinarian.
- **Prevention:** keep bunny brushed (less hair is swallowed); provide exercise time/space—at least 30 hours a week; give a fresh handful of hay daily; add fresh vegetables gradually to the diet.
- **Bacterial balance:** A rabbit's digestive tract is inhabited by healthful bacteria. If the "good" bacteria balance is upset by stale food or a sudden change in diet, harmful bacteria can take over the digestive track and kill the rabbit.
- **Prevention:** Keep all rabbit food in a cool dry place and make dietary changes slowly, giving a new food in small amounts. If no abdominal gurgling or loose stool results in 24 hours, the food may be offered again. If your rabbit goes outside, check for pesticides and [poisonous plants](#).
- **Infectious bacteria:** Many rabbit diseases are caused by bacteria, not viruses, and can be treated with antibiotics. If your rabbit shows symptoms of a "cold," take him to a veterinarian familiar with antibiotics that can be safely used in rabbits. Oral drugs of the Penicillin family, such as Amoxicillin, should NOT be given to a rabbit, since there is risk of destroying good intestinal bacteria.

It's Up to You

Find an experienced [rabbit veterinarian](#) before a problem develops. If your rabbit has been harassed by a predator, take him to a veterinarian even if no injuries are apparent. When it is over, keep your rabbit cool with nearby wet towels or ice.

Regularly check eyes, nose, ears, teeth, weight, appetite, and droppings.

Danger Signs

Don't waste valuable time! Call your veterinarian immediately if you see:

Diarrhea with listlessness

Sudden loss of appetite with bloat and abdominal gurgling

Loss of appetite with labored breathing

Loss of appetite with runny nose

Head tilt

Incontinence (urine-soaked rear legs)

Abscesses, lumps or swellings anywhere

Any sudden behavior change

Have List

HOUSING

- Roomy pen or other habitat
- Litterbox
- Pellet bowl or feeder
- Water bottle/crock
- Toys (chew & toss)
- Pet carrier

RUNNING SPACE

Indoors:

- Bunny-proofed room(s)
- Litterbox
- Toys (chew & dig)

Outdoors (if the rabbit will be given SUPERVISED play time outdoors):

- Fenced patio/porch/playpen (with floor)

CONSUMABLES

- Limited Timothy Hay based pellets daily (we recommend Oxbow Adult Rabbit Pellets)
- Fresh water
- Timothy, orchard grass, oat, or brome hay (for digestive fiber and chewing recreation)
- Fresh salad veggies/fruit (add gradually)
- Untreated wood (for chewing recreation)
- Multiple enzymes (digestive aid)
- Oxbow Critical Care for rabbits in digestive distress (can buy at Martin's Pet and Garden in Elkhart)

GROOMING

- Flea comb
- Brush
- Flea products safe for rabbits (*no Frontline!*)
- Toenail clippers

SUPPLIES

- Dust-free organic such as recycled paper products or wood stove pellets (no cat litter or pine or cedar shavings)
- Pooper scooper
- White vinegar (for cleaning)