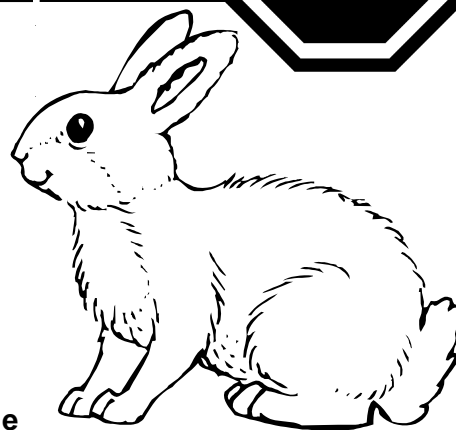


Basic Information on Rabbit Care



Rabbits, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, come in a wide variety of sizes, colors, and types. They are not rodents. They, along with their cousins the hares, belong to a family of animals called "Lagomorphs."

The largest rabbits, the Flemish giants and New Zealand Whites, can grow to a weight of 30 pounds. The smallest is the Netherlands Dwarf which grows to only 2 or 3 pounds. The most popular is the 5 to 7 pound Dutch bunny. Keep in mind that even dwarf rabbits can grow large if they overeat. Do not over feed!

The male rabbit is known as a "buck", the female a "doe". Do not keep more than one buck per group as bucks will usually fight. Females can be kept in groups peacefully. Generally rabbits are very quiet. When rabbits are scared they will make a baby-like scream.

When choosing a rabbit look for clean, clear eyes. Check the nostrils. Make sure they are free from discharge. Check the underside of the bunny. Make sure the fur is clean and there is no evidence of diarrhea.

Rabbits began to mate when they are four months old. The pregnancy lasts for 28 - 32 days and they can have 5 - 7 litters per year. She can breed again as soon as she delivers a litter. Babies (kittens) are born hairless and blind. Their eyes open in about 10 days and they start to eat solid food at 16 days. They are fully weaned and can live on their own at 30 days.

In a clean, healthy environment, with proper nutrition, rabbits can live up to 10 years.

Food

Rabbits eat rabbit pellets. This is their staple food. Young rabbits should also have **Timothy Hay** to help keep their stool firm. When your rabbit is 3 months old you may change to alfalfa hay. Whether in cubes or loose, alfalfa provides roughage for proper digestion. Do not give very young rabbits fruits and vegetables until they are at least 3 months old. Even in small quantities, fruits and vegetables can cause diarrhea in young rabbits.

Even though rabbit pellets are formulated to be a complete diet, we recommend an additional vitamin supplement. Vitamins will help the rabbit through stressful physical changes such as nesting, giving birth, and everyday shedding.

Cage

The minimum cage requirements for a rabbit is 16" x 24". A wire bottom cage is more sanitary and makes cleanup easy. Once your pet is acclimated to it's environment, you may allow it time outside of it's cage. (see our handout "Basic Information on Housetraining Rabbits")

Litter

We recommend corn cob bedding, shredded pine, aspen litter or Carefresh Bedding®. All are absorbent and non-allergenic. Do not use cedar bedding as it tends to irritate the rabbit's nasal membrane.

Grooming

Use a slicker brush twice a week to keep the rabbit's shedding under control. Brushing also provides quality time with your rabbit.

Clip or file your rabbits nails regularly. (Pay special attention to the rear legs.)

Going Home

Allow your rabbit some time to become accustomed to a new cage and surroundings before handling it. Pay attention to it's droppings. Stress related diarrhea can occur during the move. After a day or so, gently scoop your pet up with both hands. Make sure you support it's rear legs firmly. This gives your pet a sense of security. After it has become accustomed to you, allow it to explore it's environment. Supervise any encounter with other pets. If a rabbit becomes alarmed, it will scurry away to hide. This type of movement brings out the predator in dogs and cats. Be careful when mixing pets.

Please note: This handout is meant to provide basic information only. There are several good books available on the care and maintenance of rabbits.

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