

Feeding

Your pet's diet should mimic the grass based diet of his wild cousins. Any change in diet must be made slowly, so move towards unlimited hay plus small amounts of a quality branded rabbit food. Alternatively, the "hay and veggie" diet (lots of fresh, leafy greens and hay with tiny quantities of rabbit food) suits many adult rabbits.

If you feed rabbit mix, it all needs to be eaten or the diet may become unbalanced. If your rabbit is a fussy eater, consider switching to a pelleted or extruded product. Vitamin/calcium supplements should only be used under veterinary supervision.

Neutering

Houserabbits of either sex need to be neutered. Neutered rabbits are happier, healthier, much easier to litter train, and can live with another bunny without fighting or breeding.

Have your rabbit neutered at 4 - 6 months or as soon as possible thereafter. Otherwise you'll have a growling, messy teenage "bunny from hell" to contend with until the operation is performed! Castration is a simple procedure that stops male rabbits spraying urine and reduces aggression. Spaying is a bigger operation, strongly recommended by rabbit vets. Spaying reduces mood swings and aggression, and also prevents uterine cancer; all incredibly common problems in unspayed females. If your usual vet doesn't spay rabbits, ask for a referral to one who does.

Health care

Like any specialist field, vets vary in their interest and expertise in rabbit medicine. You may need to travel to find a "rabbit friendly" vet.

It's sensible to insure your rabbit - vets bills can be very expensive in case of accident or illness! Call Petplan on 0800 282009 (quoting ref no. 1300027785) for details of their Rabbitplan policy.

All pet rabbits in Britain - including houserabbits - need to be vaccinated against Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD or HVD) and myxomatosis.

Vaccination is the only practical way to protect your rabbit. Talk to your vet.



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 0870 046 5249

**Write to us at PO Box 603, Horsham,
West Sussex RH13 SWL.**

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.



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

269 Hey look at me November 2007

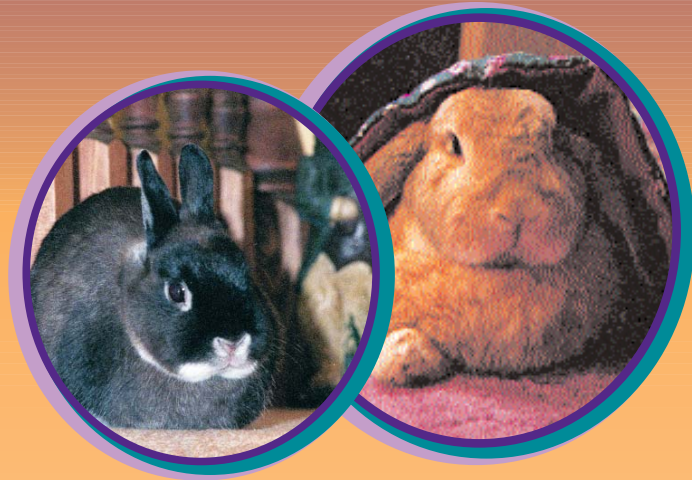
Hey!



Look at me, I'm a Houserabbit



PET RABBITS DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN THE GARDEN. HOUSERABBITS LIVE INDOORS, JUST LIKE CATS AND DOGS. IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE PREPARED BEFORE BRINGING A BUNNY INDOORS AND THIS LEAFLET OUTLINES THE PRACTICALITIES OF LIVING WITH A HOUSERABBIT.



Introducing the houserabbit

Houserabbits are here to stay. Thousands of British pet lovers share their homes with a houserabbit, and there's plenty of expertise available to help you get it right if you decide an indoor bunny is the pet for you.

Rabbits offer just as much companionship as more traditional house pets. Most people are surprised to discover how affectionate, intelligent and cute houserabbits can be. Basking in front of the fire, snuggling up for cuddles, and begging for treats are all standard houserabbit repertoire! Plus, although they are not ultra-low maintenance pets, houserabbits can fit well into the lifestyle of a working person. From an animal welfare point of view, keeping rabbits indoors actually makes it easier to meet the fundamental needs of the species. Houserabbits display more natural behaviour patterns than hutch-kept rabbits and because they get plenty of exercise, rarely suffer from the skeletal problems seen in caged rabbits.

Choosing a Houserabbit

Any rabbit can be a houserabbit. Cross-bred or pure-bred; male or female; small or large. You don't have to start off with a baby. In fact, rabbits over a year old are usually quicker to train as houserabbits, and it's easier to assess the personality of an adult rabbit. Why not adopt a rescue rabbit who desperately needs a loving home?

What to expect from your houserabbit

Training a houserabbit - like bringing up a puppy - is hard work. Rabbits can be demanding and destructive, especially as youngsters. The ultimate goal is a free-range houserabbit, but we recommend a cage until your bunny is fully trained and can be left without wrecking the house. So long as your bunny enjoys plenty of freedom (several hours per day) he won't mind being caged when unsupervised.

Toilet training

Rabbits are usually easy to litter train, although they must be neutered when they reach puberty. Although some rabbits virtually train themselves, it's better to help bunny get it right first time!

- 1. Cover floor of cage with newspaper. Put the litter tray in one corner, topped with a handful of hay.**
- 2. Shut bunny in cage for at least 48 - 72 hours. Move any stray droppings or urine-soaked newspaper into the tray.**
- 3. Once he is reliably using the litter tray, let him out for gradually increasing periods of time, supervising closely.**

Remember that baby rabbits are easily distracted and take time to learn. It's also important to respect your rabbits' territory - don't venture into the cage when bunny is in residence!

Bunny proofing

Rabbits chew. It will take time and effort on your part to train your bunny not to nibble forbidden objects. You need to teach the command "no" and distract him with a more attractive alternative every time he chews something he shouldn't. "Bunnyproofing" is vital to protect both your possessions and your rabbit. For example, move house plants out of reach and cover electrical/telephone cables with plastic piping (slit lengthways) or conduit. You'll soon remember not to leave books and clothes on the floor! If your rabbit tries

eating carpet or stripping wallpaper (most do at some stage), try this strategy:

- 1. Prevent access. Can you block the area off?**
- 2. Prevent damage. e.g. fix clear perspex about the skirting board; place seagrass doormats in room corners to allow harmless chewing and digging.**
- 3. Provide lots of irresistible chewable toys as alternatives (e.g. cardboard boxes; wicker baskets filled with straw; 'buster cubes').**

Rabbits and children

Rabbits don't make good pets for young children. Although they should be trained to accept routine handling, most rabbits hate being restrained and this is frustrating for children who naturally want to cuddle their pet.

Also bear in mind that rabbits live 7-10 years and will scratch or bite if teased or badly handled.



One or more rabbits?

Bonded pairs of houserabbits are company for each other and a delight to watch, although they may prefer the company of each other to you. If you keep two bunnies, both must be neutered and introductions made gradually on neutral territory. Male/female pairs work best, but two brothers or sisters may stay together if you have them neutered before they start fighting.

What about other pets?

Houserabbits often enjoy the company of other creatures. If carefully trained and introduced, dogs and cats will usually accept a houserabbit. Don't leave them together unattended until you are certain it is safe to do so; some dogs might never get to this stage. It helps if the rabbit is confident and doesn't run away from the cat or dog. If your cat hunts wild rabbits, choose a large breed as your houserabbit.

