



## SAFETY FIRST

Each year, many pet rabbits are snatched from gardens by predators - particularly urban foxes. You must protect your rabbits from attack by dogs, cats, foxes, and birds of prey. Chicken wire provides little protection - use strong weld mesh, with sturdy door fasteners, and check the doors regularly. Exercise runs need secure lids, to keep the rabbits in and predators out!

If your rabbits are allowed to roam free in the garden, make sure that the garden is escape-proof; that there's a "bolt hole"; and remember to remove or prevent access to poisonous plants.

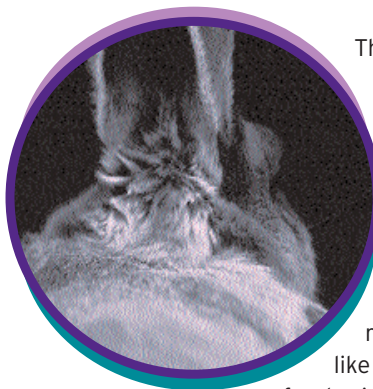
## KEEPING OUTDOOR RABBITS HEALTHY

Outdoor rabbits need regular health-checks. The RWF "Bunny MOT" leaflet explains how to do this at home. Outdoor rabbits are at particular risk from the deadly diseases VHD & myxomatosis - keep vaccinations up to date!

## FLYSTRIKE

Did you know that flies can cause a maggot infestation on your rabbits, which can cause serious damage and even death?

Rabbits suffering from obesity, dental disease, diarrhoea, arthritis and skin wounds are at highest risk. Flies are also attracted to rabbits living in poor environmental conditions e.g. dirty hutches - always keep your rabbits' living area clean. Even rabbits kept in clean conditions may develop soiled hindquarters and attract flies. Once flies lay their eggs, they quickly develop into maggots which will soon cause damage to your rabbit and can often be fatal.



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,  
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**Log onto our websites**

<http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk>

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Rabbit Welfare Fund  
Write to us at PO Box 603,  
Horsham, West Sussex RH13 5WL.  
e-mail: [hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk](mailto:hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk)  
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# Rabbits need SECS!



## The RWF Guide to keeping your rabbit outdoors



As a responsible pet owner, you'll want your bunnies to enjoy a happy, healthy life. Just think 'Rabbits need SECS' (Space, Exercise, Companionship and Stimulation) and you won't go far wrong! Rabbits can live indoors or out - this leaflet outlines how to keep rabbits in your garden. For further information about houserabbits, read the RWF leaflet "Hey Look at Me, I'm a Houserabbit".

## Rabbits need.....

### SPACE and EXERCISE

Rabbits are active animals, and can develop painful skeletal problems if kept permanently caged. Hence, daily exercise outside the hutch is vital.

- Two or more rabbits can live in a permanent enclosure with suitable shelter, exercising at will. This is the best option for the rabbits, who can display their natural behaviour patterns.
- Two rabbits can share a hutch at night with daily access to a large exercise run (or garden). The drawbacks are that the rabbits will be in the run during the day, rather than dawn and dusk when they are naturally active. Also, they may miss their daily exercise in bad weather.

You should never keep your rabbits in a hutch permanently, they need daily exercise, ideally 8 hours per day in a large run or garden. However, you should still ensure that their hutch is large enough. Hutches can never be too big. The minimum size for average sized rabbits is 6ft x 2ft x 2ft.

When it comes to exercise, rabbits often enjoy running loose around the garden, but unless you can supervise the rabbit then there are risks both to your garden plants and the rabbit! An exercise run is often a better option. Exercise runs

should also be as large as possible - ideally, at least 8 feet x 4 feet x 2 feet high.

Instead of the traditional rabbit hutch, why not make your rabbit habitat an attractive garden feature? Be imaginative... garden sheds; summerhouses; or wooden Wendy Houses with an aviary/run built on the side (accessed via a cat flap) make ideal homes. Remember to provide adequate additional ventilation - wooden buildings can overheat rapidly in summer.

### COMPANIONSHIP

Rabbits are social animals. Unless your rabbit lives indoors with human company for most of the day, plan to keep two rabbits together. A male/female pair is easiest, but don't forget that both rabbits will need to be neutered, and introductions carefully supervised!. The RWF leaflet "Bunny Buddies" explains how to pair up rabbits successfully.

### STIMULATION

Rabbits need things to keep them occupied, such as plastic tunnels; large plant pots; hay-filled litter trays and planters of earth to dig in. Wild rabbits spend several hours foraging for food daily, so use your imagination when feeding your bunny. Scatter food on the floor of the hutch/run rather than feeding in a bowl, and provide constant access to hay.

### RABBIT HUTCHES: DESIGN & LOCATION

Most people still opt for the traditional wooden rabbit hutch. It can be difficult to find suitable hutches in pet stores: most are flimsy and too small. Even the better ones usually require extra weatherproofing and

upgraded door fastenings. Consider building your own hutch, or find a livestock housing specialist.

Hutches should have a living area with a strong wire-mesh door and a partitioned sleeping area with a solid door. There are many variations of the basic hutch design. Some have ramps to allow access to a built-in run underneath. The main

drawback of this design is that bedding from the living area often falls down the hole when the ramp is lowered.

Hutches must be raised on legs to give protection from damp, and to deter vermin. The roof should be covered with roofing felt; sloped to allow water to run-off; and have an overhang. Rabbits can not tolerate damp, drafts

or excess heat so make sure that you site the hutch in a sheltered area, and out of direct sunlight or driving snow and rain. Don't forget to provide extra warmth in the form of extra dry bedding in the colder months.

### EXERCISE RUNS: DESIGN

Runs can be either portable (moved around the lawn as required, with the rabbits carried to and from their hutch) or permanent, with a hutch within the enclosure. Permanent enclosures are best sited on an easily-cleaned base such as paving slabs - grass will quickly turn to mud! Portable runs sitting on grass must have a wire-mesh floor to prevent the bunnies from digging out. If the hutch isn't permanently attached to the exercise area, provide a wooden box or covered area for the rabbits to shelter or hide in.

