

4. Repeat this until the bunnies are relaxed together. You can assist this process by feeding the rabbits together, and providing lots of cardboard boxes and hidey holes so that they don't have to stare at each other.

5. When the rabbits are happy to groom each other and lie together, they can be left together unsupervised.

The whole process can take anything from a couple of hours to a couple of months. The better the rabbits get on at their first meeting, the quicker they will bond. And if you are able to put the rabbits together for very brief periods, many times a day, they'll get used to each other far more quickly than if you can only do so once per day.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Some rabbits will establish an instant bond. You can recognise this by an initial lack of interest when first introduced followed by individual grooming. This will soon progress to mutual grooming and the rabbits sitting together. Do keep a careful eye on a "love at first sight" couple for any possible aggression, but if all goes well, don't separate them.

WHAT ABOUT A GUINEA-PIG?

Contrary to popular opinion, rabbits and guinea pigs do not make ideal cage mates. Although some rabbit/guinea pig pairs get on well, many more end in disaster, often with injuries to one or both animals.

If you have a rabbit and guinea pig living together happily let them stay together but make sure the rabbit is neutered, or the guinea pig is likely to be sexually harassed. Male guinea pigs may also need to be castrated. Take care with their diet - guinea pigs need vitamin C daily, whereas rabbits don't. You must always provide a hidey-hole where the guinea pig can escape from the rabbit.

Please think twice before starting off with this combination - your rabbit will be much happier with a companion of his own species and the same goes for the guinea pig. A guinea pig is not a cheaper, easier friend for your rabbit than another rabbit.



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 £15 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.



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Write to us at PO Box 603,
Horsham, West Sussex RH13 SWL.
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Registered Charity Number 1085689

Bunny



Buddies

Why every rabbit
needs a friend



Two is company

Rabbits evolved to live in groups, never alone.

Keeping a single rabbit deprives your pet of one of his most fundamental requirements - the company of his own kind. It is possible to keep just one rabbit if your bunny lives indoors as part of the family, with plenty of human company. But once you have witnessed a bonded pair of rabbits grooming each other, lying down together, and eating together, it's unlikely you will ever want to return to keeping a solitary rabbit. This leaflet explains how you can successfully pair your rabbit with another bunny friend.



THE BASICS

Introductions have to be conducted carefully. Rabbits may be sociable, but they're also territorial. You can't just bring a strange rabbit home and expect your resident rabbit to realise the love of his/her life has arrived!

Both rabbits must be neutered, if they are old enough. If you already have a rabbit, arrange for him/her to be neutered and wait a few weeks before adopting the second rabbit. It's never too late to get a friend for your existing rabbit - there are many cases where older bunnies have spent their twilight years happily with a new companion.

WHAT COMBINATION?

The easiest pairing is neutered male/ spayed female. So if you already have one rabbit, choose a companion of the opposite sex!

Same-sex pairs can be tricky, but it is possible to keep two males or two females if they have grown up together. You'll need to find

either a pair of siblings, or two rabbits from different litters both between 8 and 10 weeks of age. It's vital that both rabbits are neutered as soon as possible, before any fighting has occurred. Same-sex pairs must never be separated, even for short periods of time. Even then, many will have occasional squabbles. Any visiting rabbits may upset the balance and trigger fighting.

With same-sex introductions, if one or both of the rabbits is already adult, introductions should only be undertaken with great caution and expert advice. Such introductions are possible, but success is not guaranteed. There's a lot more potential for serious fighting than when introducing opposite-sex pairs.

WHERE DO I GET MY RABBIT?

If you know the breed and colour you want you will need to locate a reputable breeder. Otherwise the best place to find your second bunny is at a rescue centre. Not only will you be giving a home to a bunny in need, but a rescue rabbit is likely to be neutered and vaccinated already.

Many rescue centres have some expertise in pairing up rabbits, and will often allow you to bring your own rabbit along to the centre to meet potential partners on neutral territory. Some

rescues have facilities to board rabbits and will supervise the introduction process for you. With a bit of luck, you'll find a "love at first sight" match for your rabbit. If you are about to obtain your first rabbit, please consider adopting a bonded pair from a rescue centre.

HOW DO I INTRODUCE TWO RABBITS?

Two baby rabbits (under 10-12 weeks of age); or a "love at first sight" couple, can live with each other immediately. All other combinations will need to be carefully and gradually introduced. There are many different ways to introduce two rabbits, all of which have their devotees. The scheme outlined below isn't the quickest, but it is easy to follow and it nearly always works.

1. Both rabbits need to be neutered, if they're old enough.
2. Put the rabbits in nearby cages, where they can sniff each other through wire. If your existing rabbit is free-range, put the new rabbit in a cage inside this area. The rabbits will start to get used to each other's scent. To help this you can also swap their litter trays over, or rub a cloth over one bunny and then the other.
3. Once the rabbits are used to the sight and smell of each other, start putting them together for very short periods of time in strictly neutral territory (where neither has been before- try the bath tub!) Or, put the rabbits together in a box and take them for short rides in the car.

Because this is a stressful situation, the rabbits are likely to stick together for comfort rather than trying to squabble. At the slightest sign of tension, separate the rabbits. Try again next day, gradually increasing the time the rabbits spend together. A little bit of chasing and nipping is normal, but it's better to separate the rabbits too soon than risk an all-out fight.

