

How to Care for Your Pet Rabbit

- Your pet rabbit should have a water bottle available with clean water at all times. The bottle should be washed and refilled daily, even if it is not empty.
- Your rabbit's feed should be changed gradually. Obtain some of your rabbit's current food from its breeder. Begin adding more and more of his or her new food to this feed over the period of a week, until he or she is entirely converted to the new feed.
- Adult Holland Lop rabbits eat about 2 to 3 oz. by weight (generally 1/3 to 1/2 cup) of rabbit pellets per day plus vegetables and hay (avoid overfeeding, which may lead to obesity and health problems). Young rabbits may be fed freely.
- Rabbits enjoy hay, which is good for their digestion. Young rabbits may have alfalfa (until 6 months), but adults should have a low-protein hay, such as Timothy hay—remember to change the hay type gradually.
- Young rabbits may have a small amount of fresh vegetables or fruit as a treat beginning at 16 weeks of age (some breeders suggest waiting until the rabbit is 6 months old). Adult rabbits may have up to 50% of their diet from fresh vegetables and fruit (remember to increase gradually and reduce if diarrhea results). Acceptable foods include broccoli leaves and stems, kale, sweet potatoes, greens, apple, carrot, parsley, and even an occasional raisin or strawberry. **DO NOT FEED HEAD LETTUCE, SPINACH, CAULIFLOWER OR CABBAGE.**
- Rabbits have two types of solid excrement. They consume the softer, smellier type (this is cecal matter, not fecal matter, and it vaguely resembles small clusters of grapes). This is normal and necessary. (Thankfully, they usually do this around dawn.)
- Your rabbit needs a hutch of his or her very own (same-sex young rabbits from the same litter may share until they begin to scrap, usually between three and four months of age—a chance of pregnancy exists if the rabbits are different sexes).
- If the bottom of your hutch is wire (which is recommended), it should be made especially for rabbits—mesh that is too large may allow legs to be broken-- 1/2" x 1/2" or 1" x 1/2".
- A piece of plywood, Plexiglas or similar item may be placed in a wire cage to allow the rabbit to rest his or her feet. Otherwise, hutch sores may result. You may use the solid surface only as needed.
- Outdoor rabbits must be protected from precipitation, the sun and the wind (especially in winter). Jugs of frozen water are appreciated on the hottest days (85 degrees and over). Rabbits who get too hot can easily die. Misting may help cool overheated rabbits.
- Your rabbit will learn to recognize you by your shape, smell, and voice. Talk to your rabbit each time you approach him or her, petting on the head or back.

Do not offer your hand to the nose (like you might to a dog). Your rabbit may respond by nibbling or biting you (that's their blind spot).

- Rabbit nails may need clipping from time to time. (Your vet can do this or you can cut them beyond the blood vein in the nail.)
- DO NOT USE DOG PRODUCTS ON RABBITS, including shampoo and flea powder.
- To hold your rabbit, scoop your rabbit up with one hand under the rump and one under the chest, bringing it close to your body, with the rabbit's nose in the crook of your arm. Rabbits do not like to feel as if they will fall. NEVER PICK UP A PET RABBIT BY THE EARS.
- Allow your rabbit time out of the cage daily. In the house, rabbits can be litter trained. Always supervise your rabbit—rabbits will bite through electrical cords and try to burrow through carpets. Rabbits can drown by hopping into toilets. Protect your rabbit from dogs and other family pets until you are sure they are pals.
- Rabbits are easily stressed and can die from fright or anxiety alone. Thumping is one sign of distress. Providing hay helps relieve stress. Make sure your rabbit cannot see other animals unless they are pals.
- Rabbits enjoy having something to chew on and need to chew to wear down their teeth, which grow. A piece of apple tree limb is safe (several other trees are poisonous). Chewing sticks are available where pet supplies are sold.
- Your rabbit may be capable of breeding at 4 months of age or even younger. Please consider spaying or neutering if you have more than one rabbit. Spaying or neutering can extend the life of your pet and help avoid undesirable behaviors, such as aggressiveness in does or spraying in bucks (not all rabbits develop undesirable behaviors). It also eliminates the possibility of death by certain types of cancers.
- Train your rabbit to trust you by frequently holding it like a baby on its back. Rabbits will often go into something of a trance held like this. If the feet quiver, simply touching them may stop the movement.
- Get to know your new rabbit gradually if she or he is shy. Open the cage door and talk to the rabbit about 15 minutes at a time, making no attempt to touch the rabbit. When the rabbit begins coming to you, stroke its head between the ears and rub his or her ears. Soon, you will be able to hold your rabbit or let your rabbit interact with you outside its cage.

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