



Rabbit Husbandry Sheet

Rabbits are friendly, social pets that can live up to 10 years when cared for properly. Female Rabbits are prone to uterine cancer and if not spayed can have a much shorter life span. Neutering males can help reduce urine odor, spraying and aggression. Rabbits are found living in groups naturally and do best in pairs. However, some males, if not neutered, may fight if they are housed together. If a rabbit is to be kept singly, they rely on humans for social interaction. Rabbits are very curious creatures and will need exercise and things to keep their minds busy. They are very fragile creatures and can easily fracture their spine, pelvis, or hind legs if not handled properly. Rabbits are prone to GI Stasis and should be monitored for any change in appetite or stool on a regular basis.

Housing

Most commercially available rabbit cages are designed for 1 rabbit. It is recommended to house rabbits inside throughout the year. Rabbits can be sensitive to temperature extremes, parasites (like maggots), and predators when housed outdoors. If a rabbit is going to spend some time outside, it needs to have access to shade and water and should only be outside a few hours each day. Outdoor pens should be predator proof including wiring on top to prevent birds and other animals from entering the pen and prevent predators from digging underneath. A rabbit requires a cage that is at least 10 times the size of the rabbit with plenty of room to stretch and run. There should be room for the rabbit to comfortably move around. It is important not only psychologically for rabbits to explore and exercise, but movement is important to stimulate motility of their gastrointestinal tract. They need a flat bottom cage to avoid injuring their feet. If the cage has a wire bottom, it should have covered areas with cardboard, or fleece to prevent hock sores from forming. Carefresh bedding (recycled newspaper bedding) is recommended and can be purchased at most pet stores. Cedar, aspen, pine and other aromatic wood shavings, and corn cob should never be used. Fleece can also be used to cover ramps and flooring to provide cushioning. Fleece should be removed and washed as it becomes soiled. Rabbits can be comfortably housed using puppy pens, bunny condos, or large rabbit cages. They do not do well in aquariums because the ammonia from their urine can be damaging to their respiratory tract. Rabbits are very intelligent and can be taught to use a litterbox. Yesterday's news, a newspaper pelleted product, is recommended in the litter pans.

Rabbits naturally desire to hide when startled and enjoy hide boxes. Commercial plastic hides, cardboard boxes or paper bags provide nice hiding opportunities. Some commercially available

hay-based igloos or houses can provide an edible house but should be used sparingly due to possible GI upset.

Diet

Rabbits are predisposed to obesity and are strict herbivores (plant eaters). Hay should make up most of a rabbit's diet. They should never be fed seeds, high protein items, or sugary treats. Rabbits that are 4 months old and younger should be fed a diet mostly of alfalfa hay. Alfalfa based pellets should be offered at 1/8 of a cup per day. A vegetable (1/2 – 1 cup depending on the size of the rabbit) and a small piece of fruit (size of a quarter) can be offered daily. Hay should be available 24 hours a day and often stays fresher if kept in a hay rack.

Rabbits over 4 months of age should be fed a diet of mostly Timothy hay. Other hays such as Brome, Orchard grass, and Botanicals can be offered as well. Pellets should be transitioned to Timothy based pellets such as Oxbow. Feed 1/8 cup of pellets per 5-pound rabbit once daily in a heavy weighted ceramic bowl. Greens can be fed once daily and any remaining should be removed to prevent spoilage.

Rabbits love their greens. Romaine, parsley, endive, Broccoli, dandelion greens, green/red/yellow peppers, kiwi, carrot tops, tomatoes, peas, spinach, oranges, papaya, strawberries, and guava are all appropriate choices. Remember not to over-feed fruits as it can cause diarrhea and rabbits do not handle sugars well. Avoid grass or weeds with insecticides, onions, garlic, and keep high calcium greens (such as Kale, Bok choy, spinach, collards) in moderation. Water is best provided in a water bottle as water dishes often are easily contaminated with waste.

Cleaning

The cleaner your cage is, the healthier your rabbit will be. Spot cleaning of litter pans and fecal pellets around the cage and removal of any uneaten veggies should occur daily. Cages should be cleaned once weekly. The cage should be dumped or scooped of all bedding and rinsed with warm diluted bleach water. Bleach can be diluted to ½ cup bleach to 1 gallon of water. Scrub the floors of the cage, rinse, and allow it to dry. Also scrub down toys/hide boxes or replace disposable cage items (cardboard boxes, paper bags) with fresh items. Ceramic food bowls and water bottles should also be disinfected either with dilute bleach solution and rinsed or put through the dishwasher.

Enrichment

Even though we do our best as pet owners to provide the best care possible, sometimes that is just not enough. Some pets need additional stimuli/enrichment in addition to the right food, water and housing. Below are some options to increase the value of your pet's day-to-day lives. There is an infinite amount of ways to enrich your rabbit's life. Use your imagination, but here are a few to start:

- **Chewing:** Rabbits will chew on anything and everything! Make sure to provide a variety of wooden or hay-based things for your pet to chew on.
 - Careful using plastic toys long-term as these are not “chew-proof” and may be accidentally eaten
 - This can also be as simple as rolled up paper, cardboard tubes, or boxes.
 - It is important to have several toys that you rotate. Do not put them all in your rabbit's hutch/pen at once and just leave them there. They will become boring very quickly.
- **Foraging:** Hiding high value treats (such as fruit) in something to make your pet work a little for their food is beneficial.
 - Try digging in substrate or just hiding food items for your pet to search out.
 - There are also different things such as: a treat ball filled with little pieces of carrot or other treats to keep them busy.
- **Socializing:** Spending time with your rabbit outside of the cage and interacting with them is very important.
 - Brushing your rabbit is a good way of bonding with them. It also helps reduce the amount of hair they ingest while cleaning themselves.
 - Teaching and playing games like bunny bowling or fetch.
 - Training your pet with a clicker trainer and positive reward system.
- **Toys:** Rabbits are very intelligent and typically enjoy new things. This can be as simple as chew blocks or even bird toys to destroy or carry around.
 - Large bird toys can be the perfect toy and are typically more durable than other similar toys. Make sure to watch for small pieces or things your pet may be able to ingest
- Make sure to have a “bunny proof” area outside of the cage for your rabbit to run around, stretch and jump in.