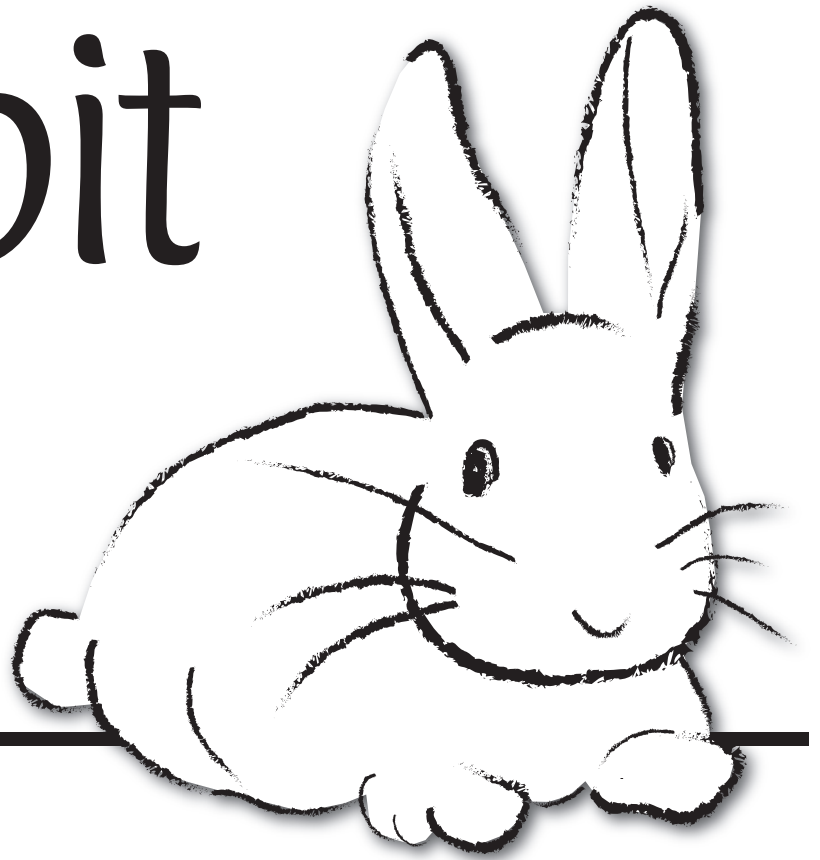


Rabbit Care



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Getting Started

Based on an article by Amy Espie

When adding a rabbit to our family, we may be ready right away to give and receive generous amounts of love and affection. Maybe that's because we're not the ones who have just arrived in a strange place, populated by foreigners who don't speak our language. Imagine how you would feel if the size difference between you were reversed: a giant hand reaches down and plucks you from your home. How long before you'd feel relaxed? Only time (plus the occasional raisin or banana slice) will tell your new companion that he's among friends.

While you are observing and learning about him, bear in mind that during these early days he may not "be himself." He may be too scared to show you how affectionate he's going to be once he recovers from the shock of relocation. His litterbox habits may falter. He may be feeling so insecure that territorial marking is almost an obsession. He may be too scared to let you hold or touch him; or he may be too scared to tell you he doesn't like to be held. Or he may be one of those rare mellow, confident individuals whose new family needs none of the following suggestions.

Home Base

Set up a small area or roomy cage* (or both). Use a laundry room, bathroom, hallway blocked off with baby gates, or part of a larger room sectioned off using furniture, boxes, or other objects he can't scale or knock over. Choose a spot that gets some regular, not-too-noisy traffic, where he can see and hear but not be trampled by your daily routines.

Start housetraining by providing at least one litterbox. A fresh layer of grass hay on top will both encourage and reward him for hopping in. If you know what brand of chow he was eating, keep him on it for a while to minimize risk of digestive upset.





Give him at least one cardboard box with two bunny-size doors cut and a towel draped across one area of his cage, as hiding places. Start him on the road to good chewing habits by moving or covering forbidden and dangerous temptations such as house plants, electric cords, and books. Provide permitted alternatives such as cardboard tubes and boxes, plastic baby-toys for tossing, apple-tree branches, and plenty of fresh hay.

Great Expectations

As with good housetraining habits, building a friendship may take time and patience. If he's not ready to be petted yet, many rabbits seem to enjoy just listening to their humans talk. Hang out with him in rabbit fashion by sitting quietly on the floor. Show him that he can hop over to you, take a few get-acquainted sniffs and gentle nibbles, and then hop away again. This hands-off approach paves the way to a hands-on friendship, especially with a shy or traumatized rabbit.

Feeding Basics

A rabbit's diet should be made up of:

-  **Good quality pellets:** we highly recommend the Oxbow brand. (Find a retailer at oxbowhay.com.)
-  **Unlimited hay:** timothy or oat hay is best for adult rabbits, preferably from feed barns or packaged by Oxbow.
-  **Unlimited fresh water:** provide in a bowl, sipper bottle, or both.
-  **Fresh vegetables:** provide a mixture comprised of dark leafy veggies and root vegetables. Purchase vegetables a couple times a week for freshness.

Help is Out There

No one's an expert overnight. If you have questions, www.rabbit.org is a great place to read up on helpful information. As always, don't hesitate to contact a rabbit-savvy vet if you have health concerns.

*** Important!**

Most cages sold in pet stores are too small for a rabbit to be healthy and happy. An average sized rabbit should have an enclosure that's at least 3' wide, 2' deep and 2' tall (about the size of a large dog crate)

Necessary Supplies

The following a list of necessary items and where to buy them in/around LA.

Pellets

We recommend Oxbow Bunny Basics T (for adult rabbits) in limited quantities.

Hay

Timothy or Oat Hay is best for all but the youngest and oldest rabbits and should be provided in unlimited quantities as the top layer in the litterbox. Larger quantities of hay from feed stores tend to be less expensive. Hay is crucial to a rabbit's health.

Housing

You have many options depending on your preferences and budget. Remember, most cages sold in pet stores are too small for a rabbit to be healthy and happy. *An average sized rabbit should have an enclosure that's at least 3' wide, 2' deep and 2' tall - about the size of a large dog crate.*

Litterbox

A basic medium/large cat litterbox (without lid/roof) works best.

Water Container

Most rabbits drink from water bottles; some like bowls/crocks - you might want to start out with both and see what your rabbit prefers.

Carrier

For vet visits, etc. Carriers for cats are great; soft-sided models are a nice option.

Litter

Must be non-clumping, natural litter; we recommend Carefresh or Feline Pine. PetSmart has a version of Feline Pine called Exquisicat Pine. Typically this is the bottom layer in the litterbox; hay goes on top. Newspaper also works fine as the bottom layer.

Toys

Not all rabbits like the same toys, but nearly all will love a cardboard toilet paper core or paper grocery bag, especially if they contain hay!

Veggies

Introduce veggies slowly and in small amounts, as shelter bunnies typically aren't used to a lot of greens. A handful a day per rabbit (comprised of at 2-3 kinds of greens) is a good rule of thumb. Purchase a couple times a week so they're fresh.

White Vinegar

White vinegar is nontoxic and ideal for cleaning up a litterbox or any "accidents." You can find this at any grocery store. A spray bottle is especially convenient.

Bunnyproofing Materials

Exposed cords can be encased in vinyl tubing found at hardware stores.

Grooming Items

Nail clippers and a brush with stiff bristles are helpful

Unnecessary or Potentially Harmful Items include shampoo, packaged treats, leash/harness and salt/mineral licks.

Where To Buy

BusyBunny

Toys, food, hay, litter
www.busybunny.com

BunnyBytes

Toys, food, hay, litter
www.bunnybytes.com

BunnyBunch

Toys, food, hay, litter
www.bunnybunchboutique.com

Centinela Feed

Housing, food, hay, litter + more
Multiple local stores
www.centinelafeed.com

Generation West (Hay)

2951 Durfee Ave, El Monte
(626) 454-2375

KW Cages

Housing
kwcages.com and in stores

Leith Petwerks

Housing, food, hay, litter, toys
www.leithpetwerks.com

Lomita Feed Store

Hay, food, litter
24403 Narbonne, Lomita
(310) 326-4738

Midwest Homes for Pets

Housing
www.midwesthomes4pets.com

Oxbow Hay

Food, hay, litter
www.oxbowhay.com and in stores

PetSave

Food, hay, litter, toys
www.petsave.org

Red Barn Feed & Saddlery

Hay, food, litter
Tarzana and West Hills
www.redbarnfeed.net

This is only a partial listing.

Housing

Adapted from article by Suzanne Rubins and Suzanne Trayhan

First, the most critical piece of information: Most cages sold in pet stores are too small for a rabbit to be healthy and happy. An average sized rabbit should have an enclosure that's at least 3' wide, 2' deep and 2' tall.

The basics:

Rabbit enclosures must have a smooth floor to prevent injury or wear to furry feet, a door wide enough to allow a large litterbox, and be at least six times the size of your rabbit with sufficient height to accommodate your rabbit being able to stand up on their hind legs. The more time you plan to have the bun stay inside, the bigger the cage/enclosure should be. We recommend as much "out" time as possible and regular play and interaction with you every day for the rabbit's health and happiness. Play areas must be bun-proofed: safe from electrical cords, houseplants, and other hazards to the rabbit and with possessions you'd like to keep intact out of reach. Oh, and don't forget plenty of bun-safe toys.

Some options:

Many of the rabbit cages sold in pet stores are far too small and have wire floors. Consider instead a **dog crate** - ones for large dog breeds work well, are foldable, inexpensive, rust-proof, easy to clean and sturdy. Best for "headquarters" and overnight, these are best when combined with a play pen or extensive free time because they're not very big.

Many apartment dwellers and fosterers use **high-rise condos**. There have been several variations on this popular theme, and you can order different widths and one, two or three levels depending on your needs. The condos are expensive, but well worth the money.

Another condo option is the **Neat Idea Cube Condos**. They are made from wire panels assembled to the needs of your rabbit. Not only can you customize your rabbit's home, it is less expensive.

Exercise pens —a series of metal fencing panels connected by hinges – allow the bun to have more space while still confined to a safe area while you're not around to supervise. The exercise pens are versatile, allowing you to shape a circle, divide a room in half for two rabbits to share, or set up a rabbit corner. When bun's out, the pen can be used to protect a zone you want to keep off limits. If it's a permanent or semi-permanent setup, some people place sheets of linoleum or vinyl under the area to preserve wood floor or carpet. Add toys and you've got it made.

Caution: Rabbits may jump over play fences so make sure to get a model that's high enough. Rabbits can jump at least 1.5 times their own height and ironically, smaller breeds are often lighter and can jump higher, so err on the side of taller "walls" and watch carefully to make sure they stay inside before leaving buns alone. They can also climb on boxes, so keep those away from the edges!

Finally, the free run option. Most altered rabbits become neat enough with their litterbox to be out loose all day with a designated litterbox corner. This is where bun proofing is very important. Remember that some buns climb onto chairs, sofas and tables and can snack on fruit and plants you thought were safe. Free run is very rewarding for you and your rabbit but if this is your goal, work up to it one room at a time to make sure you can accomplish this safely.



Large Dog Crate, available at pet stores



Leith Petwerks "Abode" www.leithpetwerks.com



Neat Idea Cube Condos: Info at www.rabbitnetwork.org/articles/NIC.shtml



Exercise Pen as housing, available at pet stores

Diet

Based on information from www.rabbit.org

Diet Basics

A rabbit's diet should be made up of good quality pellets (we recommend Oxbow brand), fresh hay (timothy or oat), water and fresh vegetables. Anything beyond that is a "treat" and should be given in limited quantities.






Veggies

When shopping for vegetables, look for a selection of different veggies--look for both dark leafy veggies and root vegetables, and try to get different colors. Stay away from beans and rhubarb. Select at least 2 kinds of vegetables daily. A variety is necessary in order to obtain the necessary nutrients. Add one vegetable to the diet at a time. Eliminate if it causes soft stools or diarrhea.





The importance of hay

Hay is essential to a rabbit's good health, providing roughage which reduces the danger of hairballs and other blockages. Apple tree twigs also provide good roughage.





Feeding babies and "teenagers"

-  Birth to 3 weeks – mother's milk
-  3 to 4 weeks – mother's milk, nibbles of alfalfa and pellets
-  4 to 7 weeks – mother's milk, access to alfalfa and pellets
-  7 weeks to 7 mos – unlimited pellets, unlimited hay (plus see 12 weeks below)
-  12 weeks--introduce vegetables (one at a time, quantities under 1/2 oz.)



Feeding young adults (7 mos to 1 year)

-  Introduce timothy hay, grass or oat hays, decrease alfalfa
-  Decrease pellets to 1/2 cup per 6 lbs. body weight two times per day
-  Increase daily vegetables gradually
-  Fruit daily ration no more than 1 oz. to 2 oz. per 6 lbs. body weight

Feeding mature adults (1 to 5 years)

-  Unlimited timothy, grass hay, oat hay, straw
-  1/4 to 1/2 cup pellets per 6 lbs. body weight
-  Minimum 2 cups chopped vegetables per 6 lbs. body weight
-  Fruit daily ration no more than one teaspoon per 6 lbs. body weight.

Feeding senior rabbits (Over 6 years)

-  If sufficient weight is maintained, continue adult diet.
-  Frail, older rabbits may need unrestricted pellets to keep weight up. Alfalfa can be given to underweight rabbits, only if calcium levels are normal. Annual blood workups are highly recommended for geriatric rabbits.

Veggie List

Alfalfa, radish & clover sprouts
Basil
Beet greens (tops)*
Bok choy
Broccoli (leaves/stems)*
Brussels sprouts
Carrot & carrot tops*
Celery
Cilantro
Clover
Collard greens*
Dandelion greens and flowers (no pesticides)*
Endive*
Escarole
Green peppers
Kale (!)*
Mint
Mustard greens*
Parsley*
Pea pods (flat edible kind)*
Peppermint leaves
Raddichio
Radish tops
Raspberry leaves
Romaine lettuce*
Spinach (!)*
Watercress*
Wheat grass

* Contains vitamin A:
Feed 1 veggie containing
vitamin A daily

(!) Feed sparingly. High in
oxalates or goitrogens and
may be toxic in high
quantities over time.

Behavior

Biting: Rabbits groom each other thoroughly, including what FEELS like biting to those of us without a layer of fur! Saying “Ow!” will get the point across. Rabbits may also nip when frustrated or angry and want to be left alone.

Chewing cords: There are several theories as to why rabbits are attracted to phone cords, antenna cords, cable TV cords, lamp cords, etc. Whatever the reason, it’s simply not safe to leave a rabbit alone in a non-rabbit-proofed room. Flexible plastic tubing (like that used in fish tanks, but a larger diameter) is one of the easiest ways to protect cords. If not already split lengthwise, tubing can be sliced with a utility knife and the cord pushed inside.

Chewing wood: Many rabbits aren’t the least bit interested in wood, but many love a good piece of apple tree twig. Don’t feed branches from apricot, cherry, peach, plum and redwood trees - they’re toxic. Gnawing wood isn’t necessary to keep their constantly growing teeth under control, with the exception of rabbits with malocclusion (misaligned teeth.)

Chinning: Claiming possessions is done by chinning. Rabbits use their chin to mark objects with a scent that we humans are not able to detect.

Circling: This is part of a rabbit’s courting behavior and is sometimes accompanied by a soft honking or oinking. Circling can also be a way to ask for food or attention.

Dancing: The House Rabbit Handbook describes dancing as a “frolicking series of sideways kicks and mid-air leaps accompanied by a few head shakes and body gyrations.” The bunny dance, often called a binky, is something done to indicate happiness and contentment.

Grunting: Grunts are often reactions of disapproval towards human behavior or another rabbit.

Flopping: Often a rabbit who has been sitting quietly or grooming herself suddenly falls over on his/her side, exposing the belly. This is one happy, relaxed bunny!

Hunched position: The rabbit is sick and probably in pain, and must be taken to a rabbit-savvy vet immediately.

Licking: You’re an honorary bunny! Licking is a rabbit’s way of grooming a trusted friend.

Lunging: This frequently occurs when you reach into the cage. Getting the rabbit accustomed to whatever is occurring is the solution. Place your hand on top of the rabbit’s head while performing the task.

Nudging: Nudging can indicate that your bunny wants to be petted, wants you out of his/her way, or just wants to say Hi.

Playing: Rabbits like to push or toss objects around. They may also race madly around the house, jump on and off the couch and act like a kid who’s had too much sugar.

Pulling fur: Pseudo-pregnancy occurs in unsprayed females living with neutered males (or spayed females living with unneutered males). These females will occasionally think that they are pregnant and may build nests with fur from their chest or legs.

Shedding: Rabbits shed the same as do all animals with fur, and alternate heavy and light sheds, both which require brushing. Generally it may take two weeks for a rabbit to complete his shed if the owner has combed and brushed the rabbit.

Spraying: Males who are not neutered will mark female rabbits in this manner, as well as their territory. Unsprayed females may also spray.

Teeth grinding: This is a sign of contentment and happiness. It is a very light grinding sound and, when placing your hand on the side of her face, it will feel like a vibration from the molars.

Teeth chattering/crunching: This is much louder than teeth grinding and indicates pain. The rabbit often sits in a hunched up position with ears pressed against his body.

Territory droppings: Droppings that are not in a pile, but are scattered, are a sign of territoriality. This will often occur upon entrance into a new environment and is more persistent with unaltered rabbits.

Throwing: Rabbits may throw anything that they can pick up with their teeth. Often owners complain about food and water bowls being turned upside down, causing a mess. Remember, a bowl is just another toy to a rabbit. Bowls need to be the heavy ceramic type, or lighter bowls can be fastened to cages with a large clamp.

Thumping: Rabbits “thump” with their rear feet to warn fellow rabbits (and humans) that there’s danger afoot. Additionally, a thump may be express displeasure, such as when a rabbit’s returned to his cage or misses out on the last piece of banana. Also, since rabbits are creatures of habit, they are often displeased when you rearrange their cage or your furniture.

🐾 When in doubt, remember that even domesticated rabbits have some wild instincts which dictate much of their behavior.

Health

Based on article written by Sandi Ackerman of the House Rabbit Society

Red Urine

Rabbits' urine varies in color from clear to yellow to brown to bright red. This is usually not a cause for alarm unless there are additional signs such as sitting and straining to urinate, loss of appetite or temperature.

Amoxicillin Danger

Never let a veterinarian give your rabbit amoxicillin (a pink liquid antibiotic that smells like bubble gum.) Amoxicillin is very dangerous for rabbits. Any penicillin-based drug can be dangerous for your rabbit, so try to find a veterinarian who is knowledgeable about rabbit-safe antibiotics such as Chloramphenicol, Tetracycline, Septra, TMS, Baytril or Cipro.

Cedar and Pine Shavings

These are very bad for your rabbit and other pets. The hydrocarbons produced from softwood beddings can cause both respiratory and liver damage in rabbits and other small animals. Instead, use non-clumping paper-based litters OR wood pellet litters which are kiln-dried and therefore safe, such as Feline Pine.

Teeth

Rabbits' teeth can be misaligned. This condition is known as malocclusion, which means that a rabbit's constantly-growing teeth are not wearing down properly. One indication of this is a wet chin that is caused by drooling. If the misalignment is bad, the teeth must be clipped or filed by a vet periodically so that the rabbit can eat.

Hairballs

Rabbits shed their hair every three months. You need to brush and comb your rabbit to get the hair off of them when they start to shed. Rabbits groom themselves like cats and will ingest all of the loose hair, which they cannot vomit as can cats. For this reason, besides regular grooming, they must have constant access to fresh hay every day, as the fiber helps the hair pass through the digestive system. You can also give your rabbit cat hairball preparations such as Petromalt or Laxatone once a week when not shedding and daily during their molt. Daily exercise is another important factor in the prevention of hairballs.

Surgeries

Make sure your rabbit is in good health prior to elective surgeries. Food and water should not be removed from a rabbit the evening before surgery! After surgery, do everything you can to get your rabbit to eat again. If your rabbit has not eaten for 48 hours after surgery, consult your veterinarian immediately!

Bacterial Infections

The first indication of an infection may be a runny nose or eye, sometimes a high temperature, sometimes a rattling sound from the lungs or a coughing sound. It is important to see your veterinarian as soon as the first symptoms of any infection appear, as they are more easily cured when caught in the early stages.

Digestive Problems

Rabbits have various kinds of diarrhea, and should be brought to a vet's attention immediately. Other signs of digestive problems to watch for are loud tummy growling, abnormal posture/sitting, small and/or misshapen droppings or no droppings at all. See your veterinarian if any of these symptoms appear.

 ***When in doubt, see a rabbit-savvy vet as soon as possible!***

Kids & Rabbits

Based on an article by Pam Jagielo

The Big Questions

Are you willing and able to be the bunny's primary caregiver every day and house him/her indoors?

Did you know rabbits need daily exercise, housing larger than what most pet stores sell, a special diet AND health care?

Can you accept that rabbits can scratch or nip if they feel threatened or irritated by too much attention?

Have you considered what will happen when your child grows up and goes to college or moves away?

Small Child = BIG Bunny

Comparatively speaking, dwarfs are the least people-friendly breed there is. They're often hyper, skittish, and have so much energy that they need as much space as a bigger rabbit (if not more) or they'll become destructive. They're the worst match for kids due to the fact that because of their small size, kids will likely try to pick them up. What happens then? Your child could be bitten or scratched OR the rabbit could suffer a potentially fatal injury.

So, here's your mantra: small child = big bunny... as in seven pounds or more! A big bunny is more likely to flop down next to your child on the floor, or hop up onto the couch to snuggle. Sound good?

A Bunny's Place

Location, Location, Location. They don't bark or meow, but your child isn't likely to get a good night's sleep with a bunny in her room! Rabbits rattle the water bottle. Sometimes they bang their food bowl around. They jump in and out of the litterbox and shift things around. Plus, their human friend is in the room, and rabbits don't understand that nighttime isn't the time to be petted or played with.

Plus, bunnies are too social to be kept in a bedroom. It's too isolating. Just because rabbits are quiet doesn't mean they NEED quiet all the time. Chances are, if your child is in school all day, she might also have after-school activities or be elsewhere in the house in the evening. Soon, the bunny becomes an afterthought. The bottom line - rabbits should be kept where YOU usually are, if you want the rabbit to be happy and socialized. Neglected bunnies show an increase in aggressive and destructive behaviors, mostly out of boredom, fear or distrust.

Gentle, Patient Children Wanted

A common request is "We want a bunny that's good with children." Well, we need children that are good with rabbits! This means children that have been taught to respect prey animals for who they are... children who know never to chase or poke. Do you AND your child have the patience to gain your bunny's trust, even when you're frustrated or confused?

The younger your children are, the harder it is. Preschoolers don't understand that their weight can crush a rabbit's fragile skeleton. Kids think feeding crayons or cookies to their bunny is a sign of love, not realizing that either could sicken or kill their pet. *You, as a parent, will need to supervise.*

Children must be taught to let the rabbit hop away when she wants to. Let your bunny take the lead. Rabbits are naturally timid and afraid sometimes. While gaining trust takes patience, love and time, children can form wonderful, lasting bonds with pet rabbits.

Dogs & Rabbits

Based on "When Fido Met Thumper" by Amy Shapiro

Familiarity Breeds Contentment

These guidelines are designed to allow Thumper and Fido to get accustomed to each other in a safe, positive environment. Because each situation is determined by the individual personalities involved, no single "right way" exists. As a general rule, it is better to go too slowly and succeed than to rush things and risk disaster. The initial introduction can be done in several ways. If the rabbit is skittish and/or the dog is rambunctious, have the rabbit in her cage/enclosure and the dog on-leash. Most rabbits feel more confident in the safe haven of their familiar territory. A rabbit who would run from a dog if she were running free will often come right up and stiff through the cage.

Encourage and praise all gentle, investigative behavior: "good dog... what a good gentle dog you are." Fido is learning to associate the word "gentle" with quiet, friendly interest, and he is getting praised for it. You can use the word "gentle" later on, as a reminder to him if he gets rowdy. You are teaching him "yes," which is more important than "no."

If the dog becomes too excited, tell him "off" or "no" and give a quick tug-and-release on the leash. If he calms down, praise him. If you have to correct him constantly, you're going too fast. He may feel that the rabbit is nothing but a source of frustration and reprimands. This dog needs some obedience training before he's ready to meet Thumper. "Down-stay," "gentle," "good dog," and "off" should become integral parts of his vocabulary. A dog who goes bonkers and ignores you whenever distracted is not a good candidate for rabbit-friend.

A confident rabbit and a mellow dog may be able to meet nose to nose, with no cage between them. Put Fido on-leash and in a down-stay. Have Thumper brought into the room. Allow her to check out this strange new being. Again, praise Fido's calm behavior. Repeat these encounters daily. The early stages of strict control can last days or weeks or months. Your job is to pay close attention and to be absolutely sure that everyone (dog, human, and rabbit) is ready before moving on to the next level of freedom. A first step in easing your supervision of the proceedings could be to remove the leash. Or you could leave the leash on but release Fido from the down-stay. Or you could switch to a sit-stay, so Thumper can get used to Fido in a new position.

The Family Factor

In many dogs, the hunting instinct is buried deep below generations of domestication. Others have a stronger urge to chase, which may even have been encouraged (or, at least, not effectively discouraged) by their human. The purpose of the introductory exercises is not only to control Fido and to teach him your definition of good manners but also to show him that Thumper is a member of your (and his) household. Just as a dog might chase neighborhood cats but not cats with whom he lives, Fido can learn that Thumper is family, not dinner.

Can you ever leave Fido and Thumper together without supervision? The cautious approach says no. For some situations, this is also the realistic answer. I have heard many horror stories about dogs and rabbits who were "just fine together until one day... I don't know how it could have happened..." In all of these cases the definition of "just fine together" was very different from the one proposed here. It does not mean "Fido doesn't lunge at the cage every time he walks by it, but they've never actually been together with Thumper out of his cage." Nor does it mean "But Fido's such a sweet dog. He's great with the kids" or "I yell at him every time he goes for the rabbit. He knows he's not supposed to."

In describing how her two dogs and rabbit get along, one person explains that she doesn't leave them unsupervised - after all, "you don't leave your (human) kids unsupervised!"

Words of Caution

After being harassed by a playful pup, a rabbit can go into a terminal state of shock. If you find that your rabbit has been badgered by another animal, get veterinary treatment immediately. Symptoms may not show up for several hours, and by then it may be too late. Also, coyote-dog mixes and wolf-dog mixes should NEVER be allowed to live with a rabbit, supervised or not.

Cats & Rabbits

Based on “Cats and Rabbits “ by Amy Shapiro

What seems an unlikely combination, given the predator-prey context that first comes to mind, is in fact a common and often rewarding match.

Basic Instinct with Variation

Many people report a total reversal of the expected roles between house-rabbit and house-cat. Thumper takes charge, bossing Felix, chasing him and generally throwing her weight around. Rabbits tend to be much more confrontational in social situations than are cats. A very basic level, rabbits are group animals and cats are solitary. Thumper’s instincts tell her, “Here’s someone in my territory. We need to figure out who’s who in the social hierarchy.” Felix, on the other hand, is thinking, “Hmm. A large furry creature who isn’t running away from me. Why look for trouble?”

One Step at a Time

Probably the most difficult cat/rabbit introduction is between a shy and/or small rabbit and an adolescent cat whose claws haven’t been trimmed recently. In this or any situation where the cat chases, the initial acquaintance should take place with Thumper safely in her cage*. Make sure that the wire is small enough that Felix can’t stick his foot through it. Also give Thumper a hiding place within the cage*, such as a cardboard box. Actually, any cat who interacts with a rabbit, regardless of how friendly they are, should have his claws kept trimmed. Clip off the curved, sharp tip about once a month. A mild swat from an untrimmed claw can give your bunny an undetected scratch that may later blossom into an abscess.

When Thumper is in her cage*, the two have a chance to get used to each other’s smell, sounds, movements, etc. A cage* that’s large enough for the rabbit to do some dashing is ideal, as Felix will be able to observe rabbit aerobics and become accustomed to it. This phase may take days, weeks, or even months, depending on the animals’ personalities. Don’t rush things, and don’t scold – scolding teaches the cat to wait till the humans are away before tormenting the rabbit.

When you feel ready to move on, the next step is to give Thumper and Felix supervised access to each other. Hang out with them in a room where you can intervene if necessary, but don’t intervene unless necessary. If Felix is mostly respectful and curious, let him sniff and investigate. If he’s rambunctious, squirt him with water a few times. Try not to let him know that it’s you doing the squirting, or he will associate it with you instead of with the behavior. The water should come as an unpleasant surprise. If you find you’re resorting to the water-pistol frequently, that means you’ve moved ahead too soon. Eventually, most rabbits and cats get used to each other. It’s just a matter of time and, in some cases, supervision.

Big, Bossy Bunny

This is by far the most common scenario. Cat and rabbit meet, indoors. Rabbit charges up to cat. Cat, non-plussed, backs off. The cat may even run from the rabbit. Most rabbits will chase only till they feel they’ve made their point. These two guys require no human intervention. Once Thumper feels she’s asserted herself to her satisfaction, she and Felix can become roommates, friends, or soulmates.

If you’re introducing a new rabbit to a resident cat, you may need to give the rabbit time to establish a sense of territory in your home before she takes on Felix. It’s generally a good idea to confine a new animal, whether cat or rabbit, to a small area at first, either a cage* or a single room. Change is stressful for rabbits as it is for humans. Arrival in a new home is more than enough stress for a rabbit. Don’t put her in the position of having to get used to new territory, new humans, and new cat all at once. Wait till she’s confident and comfortable.

Use Your Sixth Sense

By far the most important element you can contribute to this process is your intuition. Get to know your own cat and rabbit. Listen to what they tell you about their level of stress, when they’re ready for changes, whether they’re lonely, and so on. Let them set the timetable. This is the information that will allow you to shape the general guidelines given here to suit your situation.

*** Important!**

Most cages sold in pet stores are too small for a rabbit to be healthy and happy. An average sized rabbit should have an enclosure that’s at least 3’ wide, 2’ deep and 2’ tall (about the size of a large dog crate)

Bonding

Based on an article by Margo DeMello

First - why bond? As Bancy LaRoche of the House Rabbit Society writes, "Pairs are much easier to care for, get into far less trouble, are happier, and tend to relate better to people. Boredom leads to bunnies in trouble, and pairs don't get nearly as bored because they are so busy relating to each other. Many adopters have told me, 'If anyone doubts that pairs get into less trouble and relate better to people, tell them to call me! If I had known how much easier two rabbits would be, I'd never have gotten just one.'"

The easiest introductions involve a male plus a female, though same-sex pairs are also possible. Success is increased by bringing two rabbits home at the same time, since they bond over the shared relocation. Before attempting an introduction, the rabbits should be spayed or neutered, and you should wait for a full two weeks after the surgery, to allow proper healing and the settling of hormones.

Many well-meaning rabbit caregivers bring a new rabbit home, put him with their existing rabbit, and think all will be fine. Sadly, these introductions often result in injury. In addition, rabbits are not quick to forget, so a bad fight could hinder future bonding success. Taking the time, reading up, and waiting for two spayed or neutered rabbits to be introduced will ensure you the best possible chance at a loving, bonded relationship.

Possible Scenarios:

- 🐰 Love at first sight: If this occurs, you can try them in the space they're going to live in. If it's still good, you're done!
- 🐰 Tentative friendship: If this occurs, just watch them when they're together, keep them separate when you're not around, and if no fighting occurs, they'll eventually become friends.
- 🐰 Amorous behavior: If the (neutered) male mounts the female, and the female does not mind, then this is usually a sign that the relationship will go well. If she does mind, and runs, it is still not usually a problem. If she minds, and becomes aggressive towards him, then you must prepare for a lengthier introduction period.
- 🐰 One chasing, one running: If this occurs, just make sure the one running doesn't fight back and doesn't get hurt. If neither of these things occurs, then just watch and wait. If one gets hurt, then separate them and go slower and if one fights back, then you must prepare for a lengthier introduction period.
- 🐰 Fighting: When two new rabbits fight, don't despair or give up - just prepare for a full introduction period.

Working with Space

In wild rabbits, territorial behavior includes depositing marking pellets at the boundaries of the territory, chinning, urinating, and aggressive behavior such as digging, circling, and fighting. In our neutered domestic companions, hormonal causes may be absent, but territorial behavior still exists.

By creating artificial situations where your bunnies are snuggling, rubbing noses, smelling each others' fur, etc., you are creating positive memories, even if they are also stressful. Always introduce rabbits, regardless of sex or age, in neutral space first. Examples include a room that your rabbit has never been in, a friend's home or apartment, the seat of a car, on top of the kitchen table or the garage.

Tips for Success

- 🐰 Work with the rabbits for at least 20 minutes per day. When you're not working with them, they should be apart if they fight when they're together.
- 🐰 Every day, try using a different situation, one relatively stressful (like a car ride) followed by one relatively normal (the floor of a new room, the top of the bed).
- 🐰 Use a water bottle (with the nozzle set on "stream") to break up any fights if they occur. It's best to spray the instigator before a fight occurs (watch for aggressive body language) rather than breaking up an existing fight.
- 🐰 Have thick gloves in case you need to physically break up a fight.
- 🐰 **Remember - while bonding can be stressful, the rewards are worth it!**

Go Pro!

We highly recommend the following for professional bonding assistance:

Dianne Russon

dianerusson@hotmail.com

BunnyLuv (Van Nuys)

www.bunnyluv.org

Bunny Bunch (Chino)

www.bunnybunch.com

Area Vets

This is a listing of area veterinarians who are experienced in rabbit medicine, based on recommendations received by the House Rabbit Society and from experienced rabbit rescuers and caregivers. Insist on seeing the vet listed – not all veterinarians at a particular animal hospital are experienced with rabbits. Once you find a vet, ask for a referral to an after-hours emergency clinic so that you are ready before an emergency occurs. Please note: by providing this list, no claims are made on behalf of LAAS or RabbitMatch.org.

Los Angeles County

Drs. Schwartz & Shane
Overland Vet Clinic
3465 Overland Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90034
310-559-2424

Dr. Frank Lavac; VCA Wilshire
2421 Wilshire Blvd.
Santa Monica, CA 90403
(310) 828-4587

Drs. Palazzolo & Ridgeway
Long Beach Animal Hospital
3816 E. Anaheim St
Long Beach, CA 90804-4005
562-434-9966

Dr. Roskopf
Avian & Exotic Animal Hospital
4871 W. Rosecrans Ave
Hawthorne, CA 90250-6613
310-679-0693

Dr. Ann Murata
County Hills Animal Hospital
2919 Rolling Hills Road
Torrance, CA 90505
310-539-3851

Dr. Cassie Jones; Point Vicente Hosp.
31234 Palos Verdes Drive West
Rancho Palos Verdes, CA 90275-5361
310-265-9511

Dr. Maria Castiglione; Pacific Vet Center
23629 Hawthorne Blvd.
Torrance, CA 90505-5603
310-265-9511

Dr. Oliver; Blue Cross Pet Hospital
15239 La Cruz Drive
Pacific Palisades, CA 90272
310-454-2633

Orange County

Drs. Roberts & Pursley; Northwood Hosp.
13925 Yale Suite 115
Irvine, CA 92620-2669
949-559-1992

Dr. Todd Kopit; Stanton Pet Hosp.
8591 Katella Ave
Stanton, CA 90680 -2725
714-828-5891

Drs. Greenberg & Petersen
Westminster Veterinary Group
6621 Westminster Blvd.
Westminster, CA 92683-3704
714-899-1100

Dr. Wayne Kopit; Brook-Ellis Pet Hosp.
18542 Brookhurst
Fountain Valley, CA 92708-6708
714-963-0440

Dr. Tom Greek; Yorba Linda Vet Hosp.
4872 Olinda St .
Yorba Linda, CA 92886
714-777-2314

Drs. Casale & Glasser; VCA Rossmoor
10832 Los Alamitos Blvd.
Los Alamitos, CA 90720-2333
562-598-8621

Dr. Daryl Mabley; Arbor Animal Hosp.
14775 Jeffrey Road , Suite F
Irvine, CA 92620-2669
949-551-2727

Dr. Joel Pascoe; All Creatures Care Cottage
1912 Harbor Blvd
Costa Mesa, CA 92627
949-642-7151

Dr. Scott Weldy
Serrano Animal & Bird Hospital
21771 Lake Forest Drive #111
Lake Forest, CA 92630
949-855-9744

Outside LA/Orange Counties

Dr. Martin; East/West Vet Clinic
1625 E Thousand Oaks Blvd. Suite A
Thousand Oaks, CA 91362
805-496-2930

Dr. Tiffany Margolin; Animal & Bird Wellness
2806 Townsgate Unit C
Westlake Village, CA 91361
888-374-7387

Dr. Garlinghouse; All Creatures Hosp.
5405 Arrow Hwy # 108
Montclair, CA 91763
909-946-3211

Dr. Ann McDowell; Chaparral Pet Hospital
195 W. Foothill Blvd. Suite A
Claremont, CA 91711
909-625-1561

Dr. Sari Kanfer; The Animal House
135 W Foothill Blvd
Monrovia, CA 91016
626-303-7881

Drs. Pickell & Tesauero; TLC Pet
1412 Huntington Dr.
South Pasadena, CA 91030
626-441-8555

Dr. Dawson; Vanderhoof Hosp.
2234 Lake Ave Suite 101
Altadena, CA 91001
(626) 798-5901

Dr. Charles Misetich; VCA Arden
407 W Arden Blvd
Glendale, CA 91203
(818) 246-2478

Dr. Reimer; Adler Veterinary Group
16911 Roscoe Blvd
Sepulveda, CA 91343
(818) 893-6366

Why Indoors?

Adapted from "Consider Making Your Outdoor Bunny an Indoor Companion" at <http://www.rabbit.org>

- 🐰 Fatal illnesses result from exposure to 80° temperatures (or above) for a prolonged period of time.
 - 🐰 Domesticated rabbits are different from wild rabbits. Domesticated rabbits feel safest in familiar surroundings and do not need (or benefit from) time outdoors.
 - 🐰 Rabbits kept outdoors have an average lifespan of only a few years; while house rabbits can live 8+ years.
 - 🐰 Outdoor rabbits are often inadvertently neglected and don't get necessary exercise, interaction or medical attention.
 - 🐰 Even rabbits in supervised, urban backyards can be (and are) victims of predators! They can suffer fatal heart attacks from the APPROACH of a predator.
 - 🐰 Rabbits can run 35 miles per hour and can jump over or dig under fences. Picture yourself trying to catch your escaped pet!
 - 🐰 Rabbits should not be put on harnesses or leashes. The outdoors can be scary to rabbits, and they can easily injure themselves trying to get away.
 - 🐰 Outdoor rabbits are exposed to potentially fatal insect bites/stings, pesticides, poisonous plants, herbicides, and fertilizers.
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More Resources

Not all rabbit resources are created equal. Here are excellent places to start:

- 🐰 **General Reference:** <http://www.rabbit.org> (this is the online bunny "bible.")
- 🐰 **Litter Training:** <http://www.rabbit.org/faq/sections/litter.html>
- 🐰 **Unwanted Behavior:** <http://www.rabbit.org/journal/2-12/tools-of-the-trade.html>
- 🐰 **Rabbit Myths:** <http://www.ontariorabbits.org/beginners/myths.html>
- 🐰 **Health Reference:** <http://homepage.mac.com/mattocks/morfz/rabrefs.html>
- 🐰 **Etherbun Email List:** <http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/etherbun/>
- 🐰 **Rehoming a Rabbit:** <http://www.rabbit.org/adoption/finding-a-new-home.html>
- 🐰 **Rabbits with Other Pets:** <http://www.geocities.com/Petsburgh/1451/bunpets2.html>
- 🐰 **House Rabbit Handbook** (book) by Marinell Harriman; fourth edition

Remember, we at RabbitMatch are dedicated to helping you every step of the way. Please contact us with any questions. We can refer you to bunny-savvy pet sitters, places to buy great hay, and more!

Most importantly, thank you for choosing to adopt and saving a life.