



Thank you for choosing to adopt an animal. The Humane Society of Harford County is a small group of dedicated people – some paid staff and many volunteers – working very hard to find homes just like yours for about 3,500 homeless pets each year. We rely on the generosity, the care, and the compassion of our community to aide in this life-saving work.

By adopting a pet you have already joined the ranks of those saving lives and for that we thank you. We hope that your life with your new pet will be as happy and fulfilling as possible. With this packet, we have provided some information to get your new relationship off on the right foot. Whether you are a first timer or a seasoned pet owner, we encourage you to utilize the information provided in this packet and contact HSHC with any questions. Adopting a pet means adding a new member to your family. To us it means joining ours as well, and we are here to help you with your pet in any way we can.

HSHC adoption counselors can be reached by calling 410.836.1090 ext. 105 or by email at adopt@harfordshelter.org to answer any questions you might have about your new pet.

Your packet contains:

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Common Behaviors & Supplies

Perhaps you've just adopted your first rabbit, or maybe you already have a rabbit and would like more information to help you understand her better. Rabbits are intelligent, social animals who need affection, and they can become wonderful companion animals if given a chance to interact with their human families.



It's a good idea to have these items on hand:

HOUSING

- Roomy cage
- Resting board
- Litter box
- Pellet bowl or feeder
- Water bottle/crock
- Toys (chew & toss)
- Pet carrier

RUNNING SPACE

- Bunny-proofed room(s)
- Litter box
- Toys (chew & dig)
- Playpen (with floor)

GROOMING

- Flea comb
- Brush
- Flea products safe for rabbits (no Frontline!)
- Toenail clippers

CONSUMABLES

- Limited pellets daily
- Fresh water
- Hay /straw (for digestive fiber and chewing recreation)
- Fresh salad veggies/fruit (add gradually)
- Barley/oats (very small amounts)
- Wood (for chewing recreation)
- Multiple enzymes (digestive aid)
- Petroleum laxative (when needed for passing hair)

SUPPLIES

- Dust-free litter (not wood shavings)
- Pooper scooper
- Whiskbroom/dustpan
- White vinegar (for urine accidents)
- Hand vacuum
- Chlorine bleach (for disinfecting)
- Newspapers
- Books about rabbits

Below are some common behavioral traits and what your rabbit may possibly be trying to tell you!

BEHAVIOR	POSSIBLE MEANING
Sitting in a corner and panting	Stress
Panting	Overheated
Inactive	Depressed or it may be a sign of a health problem
Ears laid back (suddenly)	May soon box or nip
Pressing belly to floor	Gas pain
Pressing head into your hand	Wants head to be "groomed"
Stomping feet	Anger, fear or "danger" signal for other bunnies

Tooth grinding (gentle)	Happiness
Tooth grinding (vigorous)	Pain
Zig zagging, jumping or dancing	Happiness

One Last Thing...

We at the Humane Society of Harford County thank you for helping us find one more home for an unwanted rabbit. We hope that you and your new addition will live a happy and long life together. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please don't hesitate to speak with one of our dedicated staff members.

Proper Handling

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

Approaching a Rabbit

The safest initial approach with rabbits is to begin by stroking the top of the head. Do not offer your hand for a bunny to sniff the way you would to a dog, because most seem to find this gesture offensive and may attack (lightening-fast lunge with a snort). Most buns also do not like having the tips of their noses or chins touched. Their feet also tend to be ticklish.

Hypnosis

Often a bunny can be "hypnotized" by cradling him on his back in your arms or across your lap, tipping the head backwards until he's "out." It's helpful to do this when cleaning bunny's sensitive areas, like the face, feet, or under the tail. If the hind feet seem to be vibrating, touching them will stop it.

Lifting

Bunnies should never be lifted by the ears or scruff.



Why Spay & Neuter

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

Altered rabbits are healthier and live longer than unaltered rabbits.

The risk of reproductive cancers (ovarian, uterine, mammary) for an unsprayed female rabbit is virtually eliminated by spaying your female rabbit. Your neutered male rabbit will live longer as well, given that he won't be tempted to fight with other animals (rabbits, cats, etc.) due to his sexual aggression.

Altered rabbits make better companions.

They are calmer, more loving, and dependable once the undeniable urge to mate has been removed. In addition, rabbits are less prone to destructive (chewing, digging) and aggressive (biting, lunging, circling, growling) behavior after surgery.

Avoidance of obnoxious behavior.

Unneutered male rabbits spray, and both males and females are much easier to litter train, and much more reliably trained, after they have been altered.

Altered rabbits won't contribute to the problem of overpopulation of rabbits.

Over 7 million adorable dogs, cats, and rabbits are killed in animal shelters in this country every year. In addition, unwanted rabbits are often abandoned in fields, parks, or on city streets to fend for themselves, where they suffer from starvation, sickness, and are easy prey to other animals or traffic accidents. Those rabbits who are sold to pet stores don't necessarily fare any better, as pet stores sell pets to *anyone* with the money to buy, and don't check on what kind of home they will go to. Many of these rabbits will be sold as snake food, or as a pet for a small child who will soon "outgrow" the rabbit.

Altered rabbits can safely have a friend to play with.

Rabbits are social animals and enjoy the company of other rabbits. But unless your rabbit is altered, he or she cannot have a friend, either of the opposite sex, or the same sex, due to sexual and aggressive behaviors triggered by hormones.

Spaying and neutering for rabbits has become a safe procedure *when performed by experienced rabbit veterinarians.*

The House Rabbit Society has had over 1,000 rabbits spayed or neutered with approximately .1% mortality due to anesthesia. A knowledgeable rabbit veterinarian can spay or neuter your rabbit with very little risk to a healthy rabbit. Don't allow a veterinarian with little or no experience with rabbits to spay or neuter your rabbit.

At what age should rabbits be spayed or neutered?

Females can be spayed as soon as they sexually mature, usually around 4 months of age, but many veterinarians prefer to wait until they are 6 months old. Males can be neutered as soon as the testicles descend, usually around 3-1/2 months of age, but many veterinarians prefer to wait until they are 5 months old.

Litter Box Training

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

By nature, rabbits choose one or a few places (usually corners) to deposit their urine and most of their pills. Urine-training involves little more than putting a litter box where the rabbit chooses to go. Pill training requires only that you give them a place where they know they won't be invaded by others. Here are some suggestions to help you train your rabbit to use the litter box.

Does age make a difference?

Older rabbits are easier to train than younger rabbits, especially babies. A rabbit's attention span and knack for learning increases as they grow up. If you have a baby, stick with it! And if you are deciding whether to adopt an older rabbit, or litter train your older rabbit, go for it!

Does Spaying/Neutering make a difference?

Yes! This is often the most important factor. When rabbits reach the age of 4-6 months, their hormones become active and they usually begin marking their territory. By spaying or neutering your rabbit, he will be more likely to use his litter box (as well as be much healthier and happier).

What types of litter should I use?

It depends on what's available in your area and what your rabbit's habits are. Keep in mind the following as you choose your litter:

- most rabbits spend lots of time in their litter boxes
- rabbits will always nibble some of the litter
- rabbit urine has a very strong odor.

House Rabbit Society recommends organic litters, made from alfalfa, oat, citrus or paper. (Some brands to look for: Care Fresh, Cat Country, Critter Country, Yesterday's News, and Papurr)



Stay away from litters made from softwoods, like pine or cedar shavings or chips, as these products are thought to cause liver damage in rabbits who use them. CatWorks litter has been linked to zinc poisoning. Swheat Scoop Litter should be avoided, because rabbits will often ingest it. Because it is comprised of wheat, it is very high in carbohydrates and can cause obesity, excessive cecal production, diarrhea, bacterial imbalance, and other health issues.

Another approach is to place a handful of hay in each box, or to simply use hay as litter. It is helpful to put several layers of newspaper under the hay, to absorb urine so that your rabbit is not standing in the urine. Most newspapers today use soy-based ink, which is safe for your rabbit, but check with your local newspaper to make sure first.

Obviously, you need to change the hay fairly frequently (daily), since your rabbit will be eating it. This method often helps to encourage good litter habits as well as to encourage hay consumption, since rabbits often eat at or near the same time as they use the litter box.

Pros and cons of the various types of litter include:

- Clay litter is dusty. If your bunny is a digger, the dust can make her vulnerable to pneumonia
- The deodorant crystals in some clay litters are toxic

- Clumping litters will clump inside the rabbit's digestive and respiratory tracts (the latter if they manage to make enough dust to breathe) causing serious problems and often leading to death
- Pine and cedar shavings emit gases that cause liver damage when breathed by the bunny
- Corn cob litter isn't absorbent and doesn't control odor, and has the risk of being eaten and causing a lethal blockage.
- Oat- and alfalfa-based litters have excellent odor controlling qualities, but if a rabbit eats too much, they expand and cause bloating
- Newspapers are absorbent, but don't control odor
- Citrus-based litters work well, offer no dangers, and can be composted, but may be hard to get and expensive in some areas of the country
- Some people have reported success with peat moss which can also be composted
- Many people have great success with litter made from paper pulp or recycled paper products. These litters are very good at absorbing and cutting down on odors. A litter called Care Fresh is available from most major pet retailers.
- Compressed sawdust pellets are inexpensive, highly absorbent litters used in many foster homes. They are made from softwood or hardwood sawdust, but they are not toxic because the phenolic compounds are removed during their manufacture. Their wood composition helps control bacterial growth and odors. Wood stove fuel pellets and Feline Pine are two examples of this product.
- Litters made from Aspen bark are safe and good at absorbing odors. One brand is called GentleTouch.

Cleaning and Disposal

Clean litter boxes often to encourage your rabbit to use them. Use white vinegar to rinse boxes out--for tough stains, let pans soak. Accidents outside of the cage can be cleaned up with white vinegar or club soda. If the urine has already dried, you can try products like "Nature's Miracle" to remove the stain and odor. To dispose of organic litters, they can be used as mulch, or can be composted. Rabbit pills can be directly applied to plants as fertilizer.

Pills vs. Urine

All rabbits will drop pills around their cages to mark it as their own. This is not failure to be litter-trained. It is very important for your rabbit to identify the cage as her property so that when she leaves the cage for the bigger world of your house, she will distinguish the family's area from her own and avoid marking it. To encourage this, make the rabbit the king of his cage. Try not to force him in or out of it – coax him. Do not do things to his cage that he doesn't like, or things to him that he doesn't like while he's in the cage.

The trick to getting the rabbit to keep his pills in the cage is to give him ownership of his cage – respect the cage as HIS:

- Don't reach into the cage to take him out; open the door and let him come out if and when HE wants to come;
- Don't catch him and put him back in the cage or it will be his prison, not his home. Herd him back gently, and let him choose to go in to get away from you (I walk behind my buns, clap my hands, and say "bedtime." They know that I'll not stop harassing them with this until they go into their cage, so they run in except when they feel they haven't gotten their fair share of time outside the cage.)
- If the rabbit has been snuggling with you, it's okay to carry him to the door of the cage and let him go in – just don't put him directly into the cage, and never chase and trap him and put him in the cage.

- Don't reach into the cage to get food dishes – anchor them near the door of the cage so they can be filled with a minimum of trespassing into the cage, or wait until the rabbit is out to fill them.
- Don't clean the cage while the rabbit is in it – wait until he comes out. He'll come over and supervise you, even help you move things around that you've set down outside the cage, but as long as he isn't in the cage, he won't see your cleaning as an invasion of his territory.

The same technique can be used if a rabbit doesn't live in a cage, but in a particular part of a room. Mark the territory with a rug, tape, whatever, and don't trespass over that.

Can the rabbit have a running space?

Even if your goal is to let your rabbit have full run of the house, you must start small. Start with a cage and a small running space, and when your rabbit is sufficiently well-trained in that space, gradually give her more space. But do so gradually! If you overwhelm her with too much freedom before she's ready, she will forget where her box is and will lose her good habits.

So what's the actual method?

Start with a box in the cage, and one or more boxes in the rabbit's running space. If she urinates in a corner of the cage not containing the box, move the box to that corner until she gets it right. Don't be concerned if your bunny curls up in his litter box – this is natural. Once she's using the box in the cage, open her door and allow her into her running space. Watch her go in and out on her own. If she heads to a corner where there's no box, or lifts up her tail in the characteristic fashion, cry "no" in a single, sharp burst of sound. Gently herd her back to her cage and her litter box, or into one of the boxes in her room. Be careful, however. You don't want to make the cage or the litter box seem like punishment. A handful of hay in the box makes it a more welcoming place. After she first uses the box, praise her and give her her favorite treat. Once she uses the box in her room a couple of times, you're well on your way, as her habits will be on their way to forming. As she gets better trained in her first room, you can increase her space. Don't hurry this process. And if the area becomes very big, or includes a second floor, be sure to include more litter boxes, so as not to confuse her. Remember, as she becomes more confident and uses fewer boxes, you can start to remove some of her early, "training" boxes. Get your rabbit into a daily routine and try not to vary it. Rabbits are very habitual and once a routine is established, they usually prefer to stick with it.

How many litter boxes?

The more, the merrier, especially if your rabbit is a bit of a slow learner, or is especially obstinate about where she wants her box(es) to go. As her habits improve, you can decrease the number of litter boxes.

Kicking litter out of the box

Some rabbits love to kick their litter out of the box. You can get a covered litter box (with a hood) to help solve this problem. You can also try experimenting with different litters.

Urinating over the edge of the litter box

A second problem is that rabbits often back up so far in the litter box that the urine goes over the edge. Again, a covered litter box can solve this problem. Another solution would be to get a dishpan or other type of tub with much higher sides. Still another solution would be to get a "urine guard" to place around the back of the cage, to keep the litter from spraying outside of the cage.

What to do if your rabbit insists on using another spot?

Compromise. If your rabbit continually urinates in a spot where there is no litter box, put his box where he will use it, even if it means rearranging his cage or moving a table in the living room. It is much easier to oblige him than to try to work against a determined bunny!

What are the most common litter training mistakes?

1. Letting the bunny out of the cage and not watching her with undivided attention; (You can't watch TV or read the paper or knit or talk on the phone and expect to keep your mind on what the bunny is doing every second--if she urinates without being "caught" and herded to the litter box, she'll be that much slower in learning what she's supposed to do.)
2. Getting in a hurry. Bunnies take time. Perhaps that's one of their special gifts to us in this hectic world. They require that we take time out to sit and watch and do nothing else. Besides getting a well-trained bunny for your efforts, you also get a short period of time each day to watch one of the most charming little creatures on earth explore, skip for joy, and in general entertain you with her bunny-ness.

What should I do if my rabbit starts dribbling all over her cage instead of using the litter box?

Dribbles usually indicate a bladder infection. Get your bunny to a rabbit-veterinarian who will probably put her on an antibiotic. If the dribbling stops, you know that that was the problem.

If the "dribbles" are more than dribbles, or if the antibiotic doesn't stop the problem, consider any factors that may be making your bunny feel insecure (new pet, house guests, change in location of cage, etc.), any of which can cause a bunny to mark her cage more enthusiastically (similar to someone having a dispute with a neighbor about the location of a fence setting up a flag at the property boundary marker).

Diet & Treats

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

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



What makes a good pellet?

Pellets should be fresh, and should be relatively high in fiber (18% minimum fiber). Do not purchase more than 6 weeks worth of feed at a time, as it will become spoiled. Pellets should make up less of a rabbit's diet as he or she grows older, and hay should be available 24 hours a day.

What kinds of veggies should I feed my rabbit?

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 three kinds of vegetables daily. A variety is necessary in order to obtain the necessary nutrients, with one each day that contains Vitamin A, indicated by an *. Add one vegetable to the diet at a time. Eliminate if it causes soft stools or diarrhea.

Alfalfa, radish & clover sprouts
Basil
Beet greens (tops)*
Bok choy
Broccoli (mostly 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 (the flat edible kind)*
Peppermint leaves
Raddichio
Radish tops
Raspberry leaves
Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light colored leaf)*
Spinach (!)*
Watercress*
Wheat grass

(!)=Use sparingly. High in either oxalates or goitrogens and may be toxic in accumulated quantities over a period of time

Is feeding hay important?

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.

What quantities of food should I feed 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 months--unlimited pellets, unlimited hay (plus see 12 weeks below)
- 12 weeks--introduce vegetables (one at a time, quantities under 1/2 oz.)

What quantities of food should I feed young adults? (7 months to 1 year)

- introduce timothy hay, grass hay, and oat hays, decrease alfalfa
- decrease pellets to 1/2 cup per 6 lbs. body weight
- increase daily vegetables gradually
- fruit daily ration no more than 1 oz. to 2 oz. per 6 lbs. body weight (because of calories)

What quantities of food should I feed 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 (depending on metabolism and/or proportionate to veggies)
- Minimum 2 cups chopped vegetables per 6 lbs. body weight
- fruit daily ration no more than 2 oz. (2 TBL) per 6 lbs. body weight.

What quantities of food should I feed 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.

If I feed fewer pellets, how do I compensate?

When you feed a lower quantity of pellets, you must replace the nutritional value without the calories, which is done by increasing the vegetables. Also, a variety of hay and straw must be encouraged all day long. We do this by offering fresh hay a couple of times a day.

Treats

That cute little whiskered face is so hard to ignore, especially when your bun sits up and looks so deserving of that special treat. And pet stores sell a selection of rabbit treats which are perfect for your precious rabbit. Right? WRONG!! Most so-called rabbit treats are the equivalent of taking your rabbit to McDonald's, providing non-nutritious junk that can cause potential harm to your rabbit. Confusing the issue is that many of these products use phrases that lead the buyer to believe that the product is healthful: "nutritionally fortified," "doing right for the environment," "natural feeding habits," "for nutritional variety," "the finest selected ingredients." The addition of "feeding instructions" and "guaranteed analysis" lend a cache of authority.

Pellets

Choose a pellet that is high in fiber (20-25%) and low in protein (14-15%) and calcium (<1.0%). Restrict pellet feedings to HRS guidelines and feed plenty of fresh vegetables and unlimited hay. Do not buy a pellet that contains seeds, nuts, or starch-rich cereal kibble mixed in.

Vitamin supplements

These are largely unnecessary. For nearly all rabbits, a diet containing a variety of fresh vegetables, restricted high quality pellets, and unlimited hay provides all the vitamins your rabbit requires; many of your rabbit's vitamins come from her normal ingestion of cecal pellets. While special health situations may require nutrient supplements, these are best handled after consultation with your veterinarian.

It is tempting to show your love for your rabbit by purchasing treats for her. If you are in doubt, read the ingredient label; pay particular attention to the list of ingredients (they are listed in order of abundance) and the percentage of fiber and fat. Speaking as a nutritionist, my best advice is to save your money and show your love with healthy treats like vegetables, hay and untreated wood for chewing. And give plenty of pets, which are of course free.

Housing

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

Is it OK to keep my rabbit in a cage with a wire floor?

Rabbits were not designed to live on wire floors - they're hard on their feet (which have no pads on the, like cats or dogs). If you must use a cage with a wire floor, you need to provide your rabbit with a resting board or rug for her to sit on; otherwise, she will spend all of her time in her litter box.

You can find cages with slatted plastic floors, which are more comfortable, or you can use a solid floor. As long as your rabbit has a litter box in the corner that he chooses as his bathroom, there shouldn't be much of a mess to clean up.



What size cage is best?

Bigger is better! A cage should be at least 4 times the size of your bunny – more if he is confined for a large amount of the day. You can build or buy your rabbit a two-story "condo" with the floors connected by a ramp – they love this!

Can my new bunny run loose 24 hours a day?

An untrained rabbit probably should be kept in a cage while you're not home to supervise and at night when you sleep. Rabbits are crepuscular, which means that generally they sleep during the day and during the night but are ready to play at dawn and at twilight. Be sure to let them out during the evening when you are home, and if possible, in the morning while you get ready for work.

What can I do to make the rabbit's cage time more enjoyable?

A cage should be seen as the rabbit's "nest", a special place where he can feel safe and secure. Make the nest enjoyable and she will enjoy being there, even when the cage door is open! Keep it stocked with baby toys, a synthetic sheepskin rug, a piece of wood attached to the inside (like a baseboard), and when you put him to bed at night, a nice veggie or fruit snack.

When is it OK to let a rabbit run loose in the house?

When your rabbit is better trained, and when your house (or the part that your rabbit will have access to) has been sufficiently bunny-proofed, your rabbit can be allowed free run of the home (or part of it) even when you are not home. The more room your rabbit has to run around in, the more delightful you will find her as a companion.

Even when a rabbit has a lot of room to run around, he may still get bored. A bored rabbit is often a naughty rabbit. If you don't make every attempt to provide your rabbit with lots of entertainment, in the form of boxes, baskets, brooms, sticks, magazines, phone books, grass mats, etc., then he will make his own entertainment in your carpet, behind your couch or under your recliner.

Can I let my rabbit run loose outside?

Always supervise your rabbit when she's outside. It takes just a few seconds for the neighbor's dog to jump the fence and attack or frighten your rabbit to death.



Make sure that the grass has not been sprayed with pesticides or fertilizers. Check the yard for holes in the fence and poisonous plants.

Under no circumstances should rabbits be left outside after dark. Predators are possums, raccoons, skunks, coyotes, dogs and occasionally cats. If you have an outside enclosure that you feel is very secure, a rabbit can still die of fright while a predator taunts the rabbit from outside.

Bunny-Proofing Your Home

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

Rabbit-proofing one's home involves three things: 1) Preventing destruction of your property; 2) Protecting your companion rabbit(s) from harm; and 3) Providing safe and fun chewing alternatives for your rabbit.

Preventing rabbits from chewing on electrical cords is of utmost importance, since rabbits can be badly burned or electrocuted. The consequences of biting into an electric wire are too severe to risk relying on training alone. Instead, you must take action to move the cords safely out of reach. Some ways of doing this follow.

Radio Shack sells something called "spiral cable wrap". It costs about \$3 for 10 feet and works like a charm for most, but not every bunny. (Some still manage to chew through it.) This stuff is very flexible so the cords are still manageable after wrapping. It works well with cords that you might have in the middle of the room or might move quite often, such as vacuum cleaner, phone, video game, extension, lamp and other cords.

Plastic tubing (similar to that used in fish tanks, or with "swamp coolers") from a hardware or aquarium store can be slit lengthwise with a blade and the wire can be tucked safely inside. A harder, black, pre-slit type of tubing is also available.

Decorative gold and wood-grained wire concealers that stick to the base of walls come in strips, corners, etc., so they can follow the shape of the wall. This is a more costly and time consuming method than the clear plastic tubing above, but is more permanent, and rabbit proof, as well.

How do I keep my rabbit from eating house plants? Many house plants are toxic. Putting them on high furniture may not keep a rabbit away. Hang them from the ceiling if you have an active bunny, but watch for falling leaves!

How do I protect baseboards and wooden furniture? If a rabbit insists on chewing baseboards, edges of chairs, etc., a board can be put over the places of temptation, making them inaccessible while also providing an acceptable chewing surface. This method should be combined with training your rabbit not to chew on these items.

How do I protect upholstered furniture and beds? Upholstered furniture and beds that are several inches off the ground are wonderful places for rabbits to hide underneath. However, some will burrow up into the soft underside and make a nest. A flat cardboard box or frame of 2x4s, smaller than the area of the future base, will keep the rabbit out, and won't be seen from human level.

Introducing Rabbits to Other Animals

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

Rabbit to Rabbit Introductions

Before attempting an introduction, the rabbits should be spayed or neutered, and you should wait for a full two weeks after the surgery before proceeding with the introduction. This delay both ensures proper healing and gives the hormones a chance to dissipate.



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.

What are the possible types of introductions?

- Boy and girl: one of the easiest, often fall in love at first sight, but not always
- Girl and girl: sometimes easy, often fighting
- Boy and boy: sometimes easy, sometimes difficult, usually fighting at first, but not at all impossible
- Two babies: extremely easy
- Three or more rabbits: Difficulty varies, depending on sexes, personalities, and whether or not two of the rabbits are already bonded
- Baby and adult: Sometimes difficult, but goes well if adult is very tolerant
- Bringing home a rabbit to an existing rabbit. Much easier if you bring a girl home to a boy than if you bring a rabbit home to a girl.
- Bringing two rabbits home at the same time. Quite easy, even if they're same sex. Usually the new space is enough to make them become friends quite on their own.

What are the possible scenarios after first introduction?

- 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, then they're fine, you have nothing else to do.
- 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 (or, for that matter, two existing rabbits) fight, then you must prepare for a full introduction period.

Rabbits and Children

Many people are surprised and disappointed to find that rabbits rarely conform to the cute-n-cuddly stereotype in children's stories. Baby bunnies (and many young adult rabbits) are too busy dashing madly about, squeezing behind furniture, and chewing baseboards and rugs to be held. Also, rabbits are physically delicate animals which means they can be hurt by children picking them up. Because rabbits feel frightened when people pick them up, they kick and struggle which means children can also get hurt. Rabbits are also built to react to sudden changes which means they may either run away or try to bite when approached too quickly and too loudly. Stress-related illnesses are common. For these reasons, many children, especially young children, will find it difficult to interact with a rabbit and soon lose interest.

If your child is generally easy-going, calm, gentle, and cooperative, you may enjoy having a rabbit as a member of the family. If your child is generally on the loud side, very active, tends to interact physically/aggressively, or frequently seems to need reminders about or challenges rules, s/he may find it difficult to build a relationship with a rabbit and you may find that a rabbit is an additional stress.



Contrary to Easter-time hype, rabbits are rarely a good choice for a small child (younger than 7 yrs.). The natural exuberance, rambunctiousness, and decibel-level of the average toddler is stressful for most rabbits. Children want a companion they can hold and cuddle; rabbits need someone who understands that they are ground-loving creatures.

Rabbit to Cat Introductions

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 as 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 a new cat all at once. Wait till she's confident and comfortable.

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 Daphne safely in her cage. Make sure that the wire is small enough that Felix can't stick his foot through it. Also give Daphne a hiding place within the cage, such as a cardboard box (this is a good general policy for all rabbits, especially shy ones, even in catless homes). 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. Your veterinarian can show you how to do this. A mild swat from an untrimmed claw can give your bunny an undetected scratch that may later blossom into an abscess.

When Daphne 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. It's much better to go too slowly and succeed than to push it and stress Daphne or have to scold Felix. Scolding is the least effective method of feline education. It usually teaches the cat (a) wait till the humans are away and then torment the rabbit to your heart's content or (b) rabbit equals scolding, which is not a good way to begin a friendship.

When you feel ready to move on, the next step is to give Daphne and Felix supervised access to each other. That means, hang out with them in a room where you can intervene if necessary, but don't intervene unless absolutely necessary. Give them a chance to work things out in their own way. 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. Go back to the cage phase. Eventually, most rabbits and cats get used to each other. It's just a matter of time.

Rabbit to Dog Introductions

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 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 uncaged will often come right up and sniff through the cage.

Encourage and praise all gentle, investigative behavior: "good dog, that's gentle, 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 starts to get rowdy. You are teaching him "yes," which is a much more important learning tool 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. Set him up to succeed.

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. The animals involved will set the pace. 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.

Grooming

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

Rabbits can act as if they're hardy creatures, but they are, in fact, extremely delicate—from their skin to their spines to their external systems. Care must be taken to maintain their good health. The following basics are necessary to know in order to groom rabbits safely and to help keep them healthy.

Shedding

Rabbits shed every three months. Every alternate time they'll have a light shedding that may not be very noticeable. Next they'll have a heavy shedding that you will not be able to escape.

Rabbits are fastidious groomers. They insist on being clean and tidy and will lick themselves like cats, and like cats, they can get hairballs if they ingest too much hair. Unlike cats however, rabbits cannot vomit. If hairballs are allowed to form they can become gigantic masses of tangled hair & food and will block the stomach exit, causing the rabbit to starve to death while his stomach appears to be very fat.

Rabbits need to be brushed at least weekly. In addition to removing any loose hair, this weekly brushing session helps prepare them for the multiple daily brushings that they must undergo when their heavy shedding begins. Rabbits will shed in different ways. Some rabbits will take a couple of weeks or more to lose their old coat of fur. Other rabbits will be ready to get rid of their old coats all in one day and these rabbits are the ones that cannot be neglected once they start shedding. You can often remove a very large percentage of hair by just pulling it out with your hand. But, however you remove it, remove it as soon as possible or your rabbit will do it during grooming.

Bald spots on rabbits are quite common when they are shedding. If these bald spots occur from shedding, they will begin to grow back within a week or two.

Long Haired Rabbits

These types of rabbits are truly wonderful to look at, but require a lot more attention than their short haired cousins. We recommend that you use your scissors and keep their hair trimmed to one inch or less, otherwise you may be fighting hairballs most of the time.

EXPERT HELP: If you are not comfortable with the above you can have someone, maybe your veterinarian, show you how to do all of the above tasks.

Fleas and Mites

Safe treatments to prevent and kill fleas on rabbits include Advantage (imidocloprid), Program (lufenuron) and Revolution (selamectin). The latter is preferred, as it is also effective against various types of mites that cause symptoms of mange, ear canker, and "dandruff" (which is often caused by fur mites in the genus *Cheyletiella*). These products are available from your rabbit-savvy veterinarian, who can explain dosage and treatment regimens to you at the time of prescription.

A flea comb is a non-toxic device that takes more patience, but is both physically and psychologically rewarding. Most rabbits learn to love the attention of being flea combed, and it can be used as a supplement to your main flea-control program.

The following products should NOT be used on rabbits:

- Frontline (fipronil) has been linked to neurological damage and death in rabbits, although this product is apparently safe for dogs and cats. The manufacturer (Merial) has placed a warning on the Frontline label stating that **Frontline should never be used on rabbits.**
- Flea powders, even those considered safe for cats and kittens or advertised as "rabbit safe", are not recommended for use on rabbits.
- Flea shampoos, even those considered safe for cats and kittens or advertised as "rabbit safe", are not recommended for use on rabbits. Bathing of rabbits, in general, is strongly discouraged because the stress of the bath itself can cause serious health problems, and has in some cases been linked to the death of the rabbit. Flea baths or dips are NOT recommended for this reason.
- For environmental flea control, sprays and "bombs" are not recommended, as they may leave harmful residue that the rabbit can ingest. Safer alternatives include borax and diatomaceous earth, worked into the carpet where fleas leave their eggs.

Baths

The vast majority of rabbits, like their ancestors, do not relish getting wet. Even an occasional bath is quite stressful to the average rabbit, and is not recommended.

NEVER – unless your veterinarian advises it to bring down a fever – should you give a sick rabbit a bath. Because seemingly healthy rabbits can have undiagnosed problems, it's best not to subject them to the stress of a bath. If your rabbit is very badly infested with fleas, there's a good chance that he is already compromised and may go into shock when bathed. There are many safe alternatives to flea control (see these under "Fleas," above). Also, a thoroughly wet rabbit takes a very long time to dry, so spot cleaning the dirty area with an application of baby cornstarch (available at any supermarket in the baby section) (do not use talcum, as it is carcinogenic) and then gently combing out the dirt with a fine flea comb is better than a wet bath.

A wet rabbit can quickly become hypothermic. If your rabbit is wet to the skin for any reason, be sure to thoroughly blow dry the bunny until even the undercoat is dry and fluffy. Normal rabbit body temperature ranges from 101°F - 103°F. Because rabbit skin is very delicate, and rabbits are sensitive to heat, never use a blow dryer on a setting higher than "warm," and constantly monitor the temperature of the air on the bunny's skin by placing your hand in its path.

Mats

Rabbit skin is delicate and highly susceptible to cuts, so mats should not be cut off with scissors. Instead, use a mat splitter or mat rake to take the mass apart. Bunny fur usually requires a finer blade than most cats and dogs.

Skin

Scratchy, flaky skin with bald patches is usually a symptom of mites or, more rarely, an allergic reaction to fleas. Products described under "Fleas" will usually clear up such problems. A veterinarian should be consulted for such conditions as open sores or chronic skin inflammation.

Feet & Nails

House rabbits who spend all of their time in homes with carpeting and linoleum periodically need to have their toenails trimmed, in the same way as dogs and cats. Rabbit's nails can grow to be very long and sharp and will be uncomfortable for the rabbit. If the rabbit has light colored

nails they are very easy to trim. You can see the blood inside the nail and you clip just before that point. The dark colored nails are harder to see where they should be clipped but it is still visible.

People are often afraid to clip nails for fear that they will cause the rabbit to bleed. You can purchase a product called Kwik Stop to keep on hand for this problem, but just holding pressure with a cotton ball works fine too. Your veterinarian will also clip nails for you. They should be checked every 6-8 weeks.

Because of risk of infection, declawing is definitely NOT recommended for rabbits.

If excessive digging or scratching is a problem, then a large box of hay or straw, where bunny can pursue these activities, may help.

If the padding (fur) on the feet is worn down, exposing inflamed or callused skin, then soft dry resting pads (rugs) should be provided. Exposed skin that becomes urine burned or broken is very likely to infect. Take extra care that rugs and litterboxes are kept clean and dry.

Incontinence

A rabbit with a urinary infection or a disabled older rabbit may not be able to project urine away from the body. The result may be saturated fur around the hindquarters. For milder cases, shave the areas that get wet so the skin can dry (remember, rabbit fur takes a long time to dry), rinse the affected areas daily, and follow up with a dusting of baby powder or corn starch. For more infirm cases, disposable baby diapers – turned backwards so the tabs are up – do wonders for keeping the moisture away from the skin. (Huggies Step 2 work well for an 8 pound rabbit.)

Ears

Ear wax can be lifted out with a cotton swab, being careful not to push on wax in the canal, or you can try a mild ear cleaner containing Chlorhexadine, such as Nolvasan Otic. For ear mite infestation, apply a topical medication such as Mitox. The veterinarian may also prescribe Ivermectin.

Teeth

Rabbit's teeth grow continuously and must be checked to ensure that they are wearing down properly. While you're brushing your rabbit or clipping his nails also look at his teeth to make sure there is not a problem.

Bunnies with straight teeth will keep them worn down with everyday gnawing and chewing. Buns with malocclusions, or crooked teeth, will need to have their teeth kept trimmed with guillotine-type clippers. If this occurs and is left untreated, the rabbit will not be able to eat and could starve to death. Your veterinarian can show you how to clip a rabbit's teeth or they can clip them for you.

Eyes

Watery eyes or eye discharge needs to be diagnosed by a vet. In addition to any medications or eye drops, the cheek needs to be kept dry and clean so the area will not become chafed nor the fur peel off. Clean tissues will absorb mild wetness. Ophthalmic saline solution (what people use with their contacts) carefully poured onto the cheek will crystallize the tears so that they can be removed with a clean flea comb. A touch of prescription anesthetic powder on a finger can be applied to the area if there are painful lesions.

Toys

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

Why is it important to provide toys?

Toys are important because they provide:

- Mental stimulation. Without challenging activities to occupy your rabbit when you're not home, your rabbit, especially a solitary rabbit, will get bored. This could lead to depression and/or excessive destruction. The creative use of toys can extend your rabbit's life by keeping him interested in his surroundings, by giving him the freedom to interact with those surroundings, and by allowing him to constantly learn and grow.
- Physical exercise. Your rabbit needs safe activities to keep her body in shape as well as her mind. She needs things to climb on, crawl under, hop on and around, dig into, and chew on. Without outlets for these physical needs, your rabbit may become fat or depressed, or may create jumping, chewing, or crawling diversions with your furniture.
- Bunny proofing for your home. As is clear from the above descriptions, toys are not just for your rabbit, they also keep your house safe. By providing your rabbit with a selection of toys chosen to meet her age, sex, reproductive status and temperament, you have fulfilled most of the requirements of bunnyproofing your home.

What are good bunny toys?

If you find your rabbit ingesting plastic or cardboard toys, switch to a different type of toy that the rabbit is not interested in eating.

Some good toys to start with:

- Paper Bags and Cardboard boxes for crawling inside, scratching, and chewing. Bunnies like them much more when there are at least two entry points into the boxes.
- Cardboard concrete forms for burrowing
- Cardboard roll from paper towels or toilet paper
- Untreated wicker baskets or boxes full of: shredded paper, junk mail, magazines, straw, or other organic materials for digging
- Yellow Pages for shredding
- Cat toys: Batta balls, and other cat toys that roll or can be tossed
- Parrot toys that can be tossed, or hung from the top of the cage and chewed or hit
- Baby toys: hard plastic (not teething) toys like rattles and keys, things that can be tossed
- Children's or birds' mobiles for hitting
- "Lazy cat lodge" (cardboard box with ramps and windows) to climb in and chew on. Also, kitty condos, tubes, tunnels, and trees
- Nudge and roll toys like large rubber balls, empty Quaker Oat boxes and small tins
- "Busy Bunny" toys
- Plastic Rainbow slinkies
- Toys with ramps and lookouts for climbing and viewing the world
- Dried out pine cones
- Jungle gym type toys from Toys R Us
- A (straw) whisk broom
- A hand towel for bunching and scooting
- Untreated wood, twigs and logs that have been aged for at least 3 months. Apple tree branches can be eaten fresh off the tree. Stay away from: cherry, peach, apricot, plum and redwood, which are all poisonous.
- Untreated sea grass or maize mats from Pier One or Cost Plus

- Things to jump up on (they like to be in high places)
- Colorful, hard plastic caps from laundry detergent and softener bottles. They have great edges for picking up with their teeth, make a nice "ponk" sound when they collide, and the grip ridges molded into the plastic make a neat "rachety" sound when rabbits dig at the cap. The caps are nice for human-stacks-on-floor and bun-knocks-down kind of games. Note: *Be sure not to choose caps from caustic material bottles (e.g. drain uncloggers, bathroom cleaner bottles) since a residue of the cleaner might remain no matter how much washing off you do.*

Chewing

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

Why does your rabbit chew things other than her meals? Chewing is a normal, natural, necessary (and highly enjoyable) activity for rabbits. Here is an outline of some considerations to help you understand the why of chewing, as well as the how of preventing destruction of your favorite wicker furniture.

What are the psychological factors of chewing?

Sex. Females often have a stronger urge to burrow than males, although this is not the only reason rabbits chew. The hormone/age factors below also apply to males. Both males and females can and should be spayed or neutered as soon as they are sexually mature (3 1/2 to 6 mos. old). Remember, a spayed rabbit will chew less and less as she matures. It may be just a matter of riding out a high energy stage of your bunny's life.

Personality. Chewers are often intelligent, outgoing, affectionate individuals who like to be in charge and get lots of attention. Does she chew to get attention? Would a companion alleviate boredom? Anything that would entertain her/make her happier might lessen her chewing.

What are the environmental factors of chewing?

Diversions: keep trying to find something harmless she enjoys doing. What kind of "burrow" (such as a cardboard box stuffed with hay), can you provide for her?

Protecting the environment: A box or wire basket can go over a group of wires. Browse a large hardware store for products to use for bunnyproofing.

Confinement (to a cage or room). This simply buys you time, while you bunny-proof, get her spayed, or wait for her to mature.

Should I give the rabbit items to chew?

Yes. You can give rabbits pieces of the thing they want to chew: their own small towel, for example, providing they aren't ingesting it. This is especially useful when the attraction is the particular consistency.

Here are some items that are OK for rabbits to chew on:

- apple, willow, aspen branches;
- pine firewood;
- cotton towels
- untreated fresh pine lumber attached to cage so it doesn't move – piece of molding, 1"x2"s, or 2"x4"s;
- basket with hay in it – let the bun chew the basket as well as the hay;
- compressed alfalfa cubes

Aren't some woods toxic?

Fruit tree branches, such as apricot and peach are toxic while attached to the tree but not after they're cut and dried (a month or more). Lisa McSherry and Rusty Fayter, who package The Busy Bunny baskets, share this research. Another tip they offer for your bunny's safety is to keep your purchases of imported baskets limited to willow, the only basket material not sprayed with pesticide.

Does chewing carpet hurt the rabbit?

Yes, if they ingest the fiber. Since swallowing indigestible materials such as carpet presents a health hazard to your bunny, follow up excessive chewing incidents with a petroleum laxative such as Petromalt or Laxatone (sold at pet-supply stores).

Should I give the rabbit items to dig?

Yes. For digging, build a "tunnel" (top isn't needed, just bottom, high sides, and end). Cover the bottom with a bit of carpet or something similar. Bunnies LOVE to dig at the end of tunnels. (Same thing can be accomplished by putting a board with carpet tacked on between two pieces of heavy furniture against the wall...just be sure the board can't move or the bun will be digging the carpet beneath where the board was meant to be).

Can I discipline my rabbit not to chew?

Discipline (clapping hands, saying "no") has a small role in stopping chewing behavior. Most people report that it's easy to make their bunnies understand them, but difficult to make them stop the behavior through the use of discipline only, especially if the bunnies are left alone for periods of time.

Behavioral Problems

Information provided courtesy of The House Rabbit Society

People are often shocked the first time they see a rabbit display anger. Bunnies, after all, are supposed to be timid and sweet, not outspoken and nasty, and the sudden appearance of sharp teeth and raking claws can be disarming. But whether your rabbit is nipping the hand that feeds him, chasing you across the room, or latching his teeth into your calf, it's not unusual and it's not hopeless. In fact, working with an aggressive rabbit can be extremely rewarding. Aggressive rabbits are often very intelligent animals who are just trying to express themselves. Once they're given some respect and some ground rules, that expression can turn to boundless energy, enthusiasm, and affection.

The Basics of Rabbit Aggression: Ballistic Bunnies 101

Aggressive rabbits can be scary. Rabbits bite hard, kick hard, and move fast, so it's not unusual for owners to get intimidated, or start dreaming of dumping Boopsie at the pound. So before you even approach Boopsie, convince yourself of the following principles:

1. Rabbits aren't born mean. Ninety-nine percent of aggressive rabbits have a behavioral problem, not a genetic one. Behavior can be changed, so give your bunny a chance.
2. Your rabbit doesn't hate you. There may be a slight chance that Boopsie has taken a personal dislike to one person. More likely, she's afraid you're going to hurt her.
3. You're the only one who can solve the problem. Boopsie won't wake up one day and say, "Gee, maybe I should be nicer to Jane." It's the humans who have to figure out what's wrong and initiate new ways of interacting.
4. You can't hit a rabbit. Some people try to "teach" their bunnies not to bite by swatting their noses or even hitting them with newspapers. This will only aggravate the problem. You need to reassure your rabbit that her environment is safe.

The first step in helping an aggressive rabbit is figuring out what's making him tick. The following scenarios, all taken from real life, illustrate the basic causes of aggression and some easy ways to solve it. (Names have been changed to protect the reformed).

"Every time I walk in the room, Netty circles my feet and bites my ankles. Does she want something from me?"

She does – and you can't give it to her. Circling, mounting, and biting are classic signs of a sexually frustrated bunny. It may be cute at first, but it can develop into a pretty nasty habit. Neutering males and spaying females can dramatically reduce aggressive behavior. In the meantime, try the suggestions listed below to protect you and your loved ones.

"When I put my hand down for my new rabbit, Jaws, to sniff she lunges at it. Doesn't she like the way I smell?"

It isn't the smell, it's the motion and the position. Although rabbits have great long- distance eyesight, their near-distance vision isn't so great. A human hand in front of a rabbit's face can be very startling, and a rabbit may lunge defensively at the perceived threat. One should also consider natural rabbit communication, and how a hand in front of your bunny's face might be perceived as a message of hostility. In rabbit social situations, a dominant rabbit will often approach a subordinate from the front and place her face and body close to the subordinate's nose. This "getting in her face" is one way rabbits maintain dominance, and the usual result is that the subordinate will give way and hop off to avoid a confrontation. But if the subordinate

rabbit takes offense at this gesture, fur could fly! Thus, your rabbit may interpret your hand approaching her face as a sign of aggression on your part. She is doing no more than meeting your (perceived) aggression with a defensive lunge.

To break Jaws of her lunging habit, keep your hands above her head and away from her nose. When she looks aggravated, stroke her gently from above, avoiding her face except for her forehead, and speak in a soothing voice. Meeting aggression with more aggression will only escalate things. Positive reinforcement and understanding will go a long way towards getting your bunny to understand that you mean her no harm.

"Attila is adorable. But when we reach into his cage to pull him out he bites our hands. What's wrong?"

Rabbits can be very territorial. The first step to helping this rabbit is to stop dragging him out of his cage; he needs a place to call his own. Open the door and let him come and go on his own time. Wait until he's out of his cage to clean it, change his water, or do other housekeeping chores.

After a few weeks, you can begin to try to touch him in his cage, but don't grab him or mess with his stuff. Wear gloves so you don't jerk your hand around, which may provoke him. Keep your hand above his head and then calmly and quickly bring it down to the top of his head. If he lets you touch his head, very softly stroke it. Tell him what a great big, brave, beautiful rabbit he is. Then let him alone until the next day, when you try the exercise again. Eventually he should associate your hand in the cage with a nice nose rub, not being grabbed.

"Sometimes when I try to stop Baby from eating the carpet she nips my hands. Am I hurting her?"

No, you're bugging her. Nipping is often a rabbit's way of saying "back-off " or "get out of my way" or "quit putting the wet stuff in my ears." It's understandable, but it's not the greatest behavior for a house pet. You can try pressing her head down. You can also try squealing "EEEEK!" when she nips, so she realizes she's actually hurting you. Many rabbits will learn to nudge your hand instead, or simply hop away. You might also decide that little nips as communication are ok in your household.

"Piggy has started biting my hands when I put the food down. What's her problem?"

Piggy is probably an enthusiastic eater. But she may not be sure you're going to put the food down. If you're putting the bowl down, make sure you put it right down – don't make her beg or dance for it. Feed her on a regular schedule so she can count on chow at a certain time of day. And don't overdo the snacks – it makes some rabbits expect a treat every time you walk in the room.

If she bites when you hand feed her, it's probably because she can't see what smells so good. Try feeding her larger treats (like parsley sprigs or carrots) until she gets her aim down (some rabbits have to practice). You can also try feeding small treats, like raisins or banana, with wooden spoons or tongs. That way you can hold the treat steady for her without losing a thumb.

Extremely Aggressive Rabbits: Bunnies Who Run With the Wolves

Some rabbits are so "mean" they seem more like predators than prey. These are the rabbits who chase you across the room and up into chairs, who sink their teeth into your tender limbs and refuse to let go, or who growl at you when you approach. Unfortunately, they're often the ones who have suffered the most in life because somewhere along the line they learned that humans, or life itself, is not safe.

If your rabbit is neutered or spayed, there can be any number of reasons he's aggressive. If you just got him, he may be stressed out by the move. His last owner may have frightened him somehow. He may have never had much contact with a human before. Or, if he used to be a hutch rabbit, the noises, smells, and sights of a house may be overwhelming him. One of the best things you can do for your relationship with this kind of rabbit is to protect yourself. Wear gloves, long sleeves, long pants, and real shoes when you're around him to protect your flesh. It will also help you keep calm. If your skin is protected, you're not as likely to jump, squeal or flail your arms, all of which might provoke or frighten him more.

Now start playing detective. Watch him closely to see what provokes him. It may be your touching anything in his view. It may be the movement of your legs when you walk. It may be a certain sound – like a rattling newspaper or the vacuum cleaner. It may be your reaching out to touch him or feed him. Whatever it is, don't do it. He needs to learn that you're not out to get him.

Then turn on the charm. Try acting like he's the greatest thing that ever happened in your life, despite the bandages on your hand and the boots on your feet. Give him a big hello when you see him. Greet his every act of aggression with good humor too. When he charges your arm, say "why hello, you little pumpkin!" while calmly removing your arm from his reach. If he growls and thumps, say, "yes, you're a BIG rabbit – I love that about you!" If he streaks across the room with murder in his eyes, simply say, "hey buddy, are you coming to see me?"

You can ruffle his fur, sing a little song, say a little prayer, whatever it takes to greet his bad temper with joy, affection, and calmness. It takes courage, but if you have gloves and shoes on, you're safe. If he looks like he's going to bite, put your hand on his head, but continue to be cheerful. You can try saying EEK too – but be careful with this. Some nervous rabbits are provoked by a high-pitched squeal.

Rabbits think in patterns; your job is to change the pattern, so he realizes that his approach provokes affection from you, not harm. Eventually he'll associate you with kind words, nice pats, and enthusiasm for his particular personality. Your bunny probably won't change overnight. It can take weeks for a rabbit to learn to trust. But that's what's so rewarding, and so moving, about helping aggressive rabbits. You're not just changing his behavior; you're changing his perception of the world. As you do so, you'll alleviate a lot of his suffering.

Medical Concerns

Information provided courtesy 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. When you see red urine, don't panic. Just keep your eyes open for other signs that might indicate a problem. If in doubt, you can have your veterinarian test to see whether there is blood in the urine.

Amoxicillin Danger

Never let a veterinarian give your rabbit amoxicillin. It is a pink liquid antibiotic that smells like bubble gum. **Amoxicillin is very dangerous for rabbits**, and has killed many more than it has helped. Any penicillin-based drug can be dangerous for your rabbit, so try to find a veterinarian who is knowledgeable about rabbit-safe antibiotics, and who is familiar with safer drugs.

Cedar and Pine Shavings

These are very bad for your rabbit and other pets. The aromatic hydrocarbons produced from softwood beddings can cause both respiratory and liver damage in rabbits and other small animals. Use organic litter in the litter box and put newspaper in the cage tray.

Spay/Neuter

The risk of reproductive cancer (which is fatal) for an unsprayed female rabbit stands at about 85%, which makes spaying a necessity. For male rabbits, the benefits are primarily behavioral (eliminating spraying and hormone-related aggression), but are just as important. A knowledgeable rabbit veterinarian can spay or neuter your rabbit with very little risk.

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. If the misalignment is bad, the teeth will need to be clipped periodically so that the rabbit can eat. Your veterinarian can do this for you, or can show you how to do it at home. Usually malocclusion just strikes the front teeth, but occasionally, the back teeth can also be misaligned. One indication of this is a wet chin that is caused by drooling. If this is the case, your rabbit will need his molars trimmed by a veterinarian on a regular basis.

Hairballs

Rabbits shed their hair every three months. Every second shedding is light, followed three months later by a heavy shedding. This is an important factor in rabbit deaths. 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. Finally, 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! Any change in diet can upset a rabbit's

sensitive digestive tract and cause problems in post-operative recovery. One of the reasons some veterinarians recommend removing animals' food before surgery is the possibility that they may vomit. Rabbits cannot throw up, thus this is not a concern. Additionally, some veterinarians are concerned about spaying rabbits with a full cecum. Unfortunately, the cecum would take 3-4 days of fasting to empty out, and by that time, the rabbit would be dead. So please, do not fast your rabbit before surgery!

After surgery, make sure the rabbit's cage is clean, and check her incision site daily for swelling or discharge. Do everything you can to get your rabbit to eat again as soon as possible after returning home. To coax him to eat again, you may have to offer a variety of treats, including his regular pellets and hay. If your rabbit has not eaten for 48 hours after surgery, consult your veterinarian.

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 (rarely) 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. The bacteria you may hear the most about is called *Pasteurella*. This used to be a major problem, but with the newer antibiotics, this bacteria can often be eliminated. And, if not totally eliminated, it can be controlled with the use of long term antibiotics. Most of the symptoms described are quite common for many types of bacteria, so it is important to have your veterinarian do a culture to determine exactly what is being treated.

Digestive Problems

The following symptoms require that you see your veterinarian immediately. As in human children, diarrhea in rabbits can be fatal. Rabbits have various kinds of diarrhea. If it's runny, messy and smelly it's easy to identify. A more subtle form of diarrhea (which does not require the urgency of runny diarrhea) is when the droppings appear to be normal, but "squash" when you touch or sweep them up. You may also see "clumpy" diarrhea. This will be the consistency of silly putty, with normal round droppings mixed in. Diarrhea usually requires antibiotics from your veterinarian. Other signs to watch for are loud tummy growling, small and/or misshapen droppings or no droppings at all. See your veterinarian if any of these symptoms appear. (Veterinarians often misdiagnose this problem as being a hairball.)

It's up to you

Find an experienced rabbit doctor before a problem develops. If your rabbit has been harassed by a predator, take him to a veterinarian even if no injuries are apparent. When it is over, keep your rabbit cool with nearby wet towels or ice. Regularly check eyes, nose, ears, teeth, weight, appetite, and droppings.

Danger Signs

Don't waste valuable time. Call your veterinarian immediately if you see:

- Diarrhea with listlessness
- Sudden loss of appetite with bloat and abdominal gurgling
- Loss of appetite with labored breathing
- Loss of appetite with runny nose
- Head tilt
- Incontinence (urine-soaked rear legs)
- Abscesses, lumps or swellings anywhere
- Any sudden behavior change