

# Rabbits

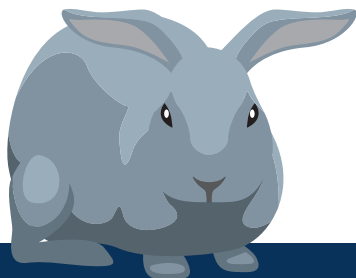
Rabbits are inquisitive, loving pets, and make great family pets in households with older children. There are many breeds of rabbits, and they come in all sizes, colors, and personalities. Most rabbit's average life span is eight to 12 years. Before purchasing a rabbit, we recommend considering adoption. There are many shelters and rescues in the area. Discuss with your veterinarian for more information on these facilities.

## Housing/Enclosure

Most commercially available rabbit cages are too small for 24-hour housing, so prepare a secure play yard for your rabbit to enjoy for a few hours each day. Your cage and play yard should include the following:

- Timothy hay should always be available
- Water bottles or heavy water bowls that cannot be tipped over.
- Flooring should be solid, non-slip, and lined with towels, carpet remnants, carefresh® bedding, and/or newspaper. Avoid pine and cedar shavings as these can cause respiratory issues. We recommend solid floored and not wire bottom cages because they predispose rabbits to get sores on their hocks, commonly called "sore hocks."
- Provide hide spots. Rabbits are a prey species and will need a safe space to escape potential stressors. Cardboard boxes or commercially available huts are great options.
- Provide a litter box. Rabbits can be litter boxed trained. Start by lining with hay and slowly switch to the newspaper, carefresh®, or a recycled pelleted litter that is changed every day.

Make sure to supervise your bunny at all times if it is outside of the rabbit proofed area as they can easily hide and rapidly chew furniture, cords, and other hazards.



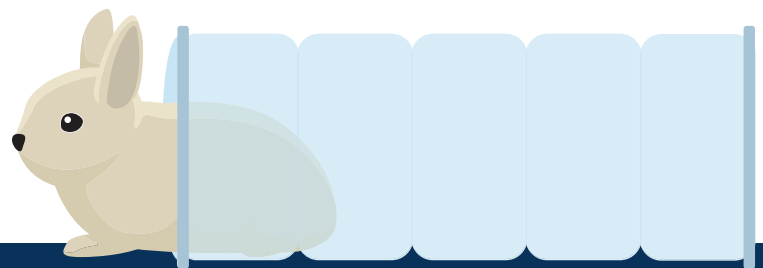
## Veterinary Care

- Common diseases in pet rabbits include dental disease (molar elongation and tooth root abscesses), bladder stones, gastrointestinal stasis and bloat, external parasites, and cancer in older patients.
- We recommend spaying and neutering pet rabbits. Female rabbits have a very high incidence of uterine disease/cancer and spaying will prevent these problems. Intact male rabbits can exhibit unwelcome reproductive behaviors, such as mounting and urine spraying.
- We recommend yearly physical exams for all rabbits. Although rabbits do not require any vaccinations, we recommend routine veterinary care since physical exams may reveal disease in the early stages.
- If your bunny ever stops eating suddenly, stops producing feces suddenly, or is having trouble breathing, these can be signs of life-threatening diseases and the rabbit should be seen by a veterinarian immediately.



To provide enrichment and to satisfy a rabbit's inherent chewing behavior:

- Offer willow and apple branches and/or chew toys. **Do not offer cherry, peach, apricot, plum, and redwood, which are all poisonous.**
- Paper bags, cardboard boxes, and tunnels provide hide spots and a space to crawl, scratch, and chew.
- Hide treats, greens, or hay in newspaper or paper towel tubes.
- You can also offer a dig box filled with shredded newspaper or dirt to satisfy their instinct to burrow.



## Behavior and Handling

A relaxed bunny may lay on their stomach or side, with their hind legs stretched out behind them. Your rabbit may run around quickly and jump straight up in the air, shaking their whole body. If you have never seen this behavior before, some owners may become concerned. Don't worry, this is called a binky, and normal behavior for a happy bunny!

It is important to pick up and set down a rabbit correctly. Rabbits can break their back easily if they are inappropriately handled due to the strength of their back legs. When picking up a rabbit, it is important to support their whole body, and if the rabbit is nervous, you can let them hide their eyes in your elbow. Always place a rabbit back into the cage or onto the floor, rear-end first. This decreases the likelihood of them jumping from your arms and hurting themselves.



## Diet

Rabbits are herbivores and their diet should be unlimited hay, fresh greens, and good quality timothy-based pellets. We recommend the following diet brands: Oxbow Animal Health, Sherwood Pet Health, and Small Pet Select. These brands have both hay and pelleted options available.

**Hay:** Adults rabbits should be fed unlimited timothy hay or other grass/oat hays. Rabbits should eat a pile of hay at least the size of their body every day. Due to its high calcium content, alfalfa hay should be fed to young rabbits up to six to eight months old, pregnant, and/or nursing rabbits, only. Feeding alfalfa hay to an adult rabbit can lead to health problems. Hay is essential for a rabbit's rabbit's gastrointestinal health, as well as, to help prevent dental disease.

**Greens:** You may offer vegetables, such as romaine, mustard greens, dandelion greens, carrot tops, red leaf lettuce, parsley, cilantro, bok choy, radish tops, watercress, and/or escarole. Add one vegetable to the diet at a time to eliminate any item that causes soft stools or diarrhea. Feed one handful of greens per five pounds of rabbit.

**Timothy-based Pellets:** Feed no more than 1/4 cup of pellets per five pounds of rabbit. Avoid the "deluxe" pellet mixes with seeds and dried fruits. These types of foods can lead to gastrointestinal and dental abnormalities.

**Treats (sparingly):** Herbs such as basil, dill, and/or mint. Fruit and vegetables such as strawberries, carrots, banana, and/or squash. Dandelion and clover flowers and leaves).



Hay



Greens



Pellets



Treats