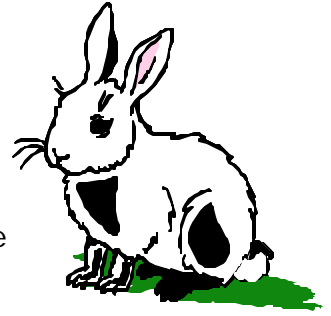


HOW TO PROPERLY CARE FOR YOUR RABBIT

Congratulations on your new rabbit! Rabbits are complicated animals and need proper care. They trust us and depend on us to survive. Rabbits are not toys. By understanding what your rabbit needs and what it can and cannot have, your relationship with your rabbit will be a strong and beneficial one for many years to come. A few topics of general care are:



- **Feeding/treats** Rabbits can be fed once a day in the evening (about dusk) during the time they are most active. Rabbits are fed alfalfa pellets that can be purchased at feed stores. When buying feed, check the ingredients and try to get the brand with the most fiber – fiber is very important in a rabbit's diet. Treats such as fresh (not canned in syrup) apples, pineapple, grapes, banana, peaches, papaya (fresh or dried), oats, cheerios, carrots, and celery are all adequate treats but must be fed **IN SMALL PORTIONS**. Never feed a rabbit cabbage or lettuce as it can cause excess body fluids.
- **Housing** The size of a rabbit's cage is crucial. If a cage is too large for the rabbit and it becomes scared and starts to run, it risks being injured. If a cage is too small, it is uncomfortable! Cage size is classified by the size of the individual rabbit (i.e. a 2 - 4½ lb. rabbit requires about an 18 x 24 inch cage) Avoid cages with paint coating on the wire because a rabbit is liable to ingest the paint substance and become sick. A cage with a lower catch pan that slides out is very important. Rabbits are clean animals and have to be separated from the bedding they defecate in so a catch pan tray is highly recommended. A good set up usually costs about \$35 to \$45. Rabbits should never be put together. Bucks as well as does fight with each other and can hurt each other.
- **Cleaning** Wood shavings are commonly used as bedding for rabbits. Shavings can be obtained from feed stores or other facilities that produce wood shavings. A caution pertaining to shavings is to **NEVER USE CEDAR**. Cedar shavings or chew toys are unhealthy for your rabbit despite the nice smell. Cedar can be fatal to rabbits if eaten. Once it enters the intestine, cedar tends to splinter inside the body and cause gastrointestinal problems or even failure. Pine, fir, or fruit woods are acceptable woods for bedding. Pine is the most common, easiest to obtain and best smelling wood for bedding. With the proper set up (using a catch pan system) when the tray needs to be cleaned (about every other day with smaller rabbits) simply remove the tray from the underside of the cage and transfer the dirty shavings or bedding to a trash can or plastic bag. Some gardeners like to use some of the used rabbit shavings and feces in their gardens because they are a good source of organic material.
- **Tools** Good tools for grooming and upkeep include animal brushes that you can purchase at feed stores or pet stores. Be sure to purchase nice brushes that have thin wire teeth. This way the grooming process will not be uncomfortable to the rabbit. If the rabbit enjoys grooming, it is easier and more enjoyable for both of you. More important tools are: toenail clippers, food cups or clip-on dishes, water bottles, and resting mats. Mats should be thin slabs of **PINE** wood (**NOT** plywood due to the harmful glue) so that the rabbit's feet do not become irritated or sore.

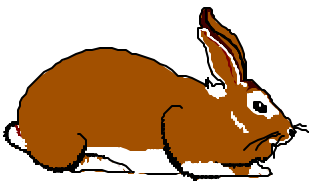
- **Toys** A few toys for rabbits include pine chew toys (avoid color treated blocks), empty soda cans, and pine cones. **NO PLASTIC TOYS!** Try to stay within the toys listed – anything else may not be suitable for your rabbit.
- **Transportation** Travel cages can be purchased online (same for housing cages) or from other sources that carry equipment for rabbits.
- **Illnesses** Rabbits are susceptible to many illnesses. Most problems occur from accidents while feeding or poor cleaning habits. A few common illnesses are:
 - Hairballs** - Signs are not eating or drinking, and stools containing hair particles. Feed the rabbit something with citric acid such as papaya or pineapple.
 - Diarrhea** – Signs are mushy stools. Give your rabbit some water and some foliage such as Timothy, oat, or alfalfa hay. Keep an eye on your rabbit to see if the symptoms worsen.
- **Hydration** If a rabbit isn't getting enough water or none at all, it could be **DEAD IN 36 HOURS**. Always make sure your rabbits have lots of water and that their water bottles are not clogged with any fur or other substance. The water has to be fresh and clean.
- **Handling** When handling your rabbit, use caution when moving the animal from one place to another. To transport your rabbit short distances, simply tuck its head under your arm and support the hindquarters with your hand. When a rabbit needs to be flipped over, with the rabbit facing you take your right hand and grab the ears and a section of scruff underneath the ears. Don't worry, this doesn't hurt the rabbit when the scruff is grabbed as long as it's held in a gentle manner. Once the ears are stable, use the left hand to scoop the hindquarters towards you. Hold the rabbit by the ears and scruff while it is upside down. When handling your rabbit, be careful with its back. The rabbit's **SPINE IS EXTREMELY FRAGILE** and can break easily with a simple accident so must be handled with care.

* **Web sites**

Rabbit information: www.arba.net

Supplies for sale: www.kwcages.com & www.klubertanz.com

*These are listed for your convenience. No endorsement or promotion of these products is intended.



**Have fun and we hope
you have many wonderful
years with your new pet!**



This handout was written and distributed by the Tuolumne County 4-H Rabbit projects. For more information about the 4-H Youth Development Program, go to www.ca4h.org or call your local University of California Cooperative Extension Office. April, 2004