



AN INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION FOUNDED IN 1868



ADOPTION AT THE MSPCA

The Perfect Home for a Pet Rabbit

While caged animals may seem like easier pet choices (or better "starter" pets), they require just as much care as any other animal -- and often more given daily cage cleaning, scheduled exercise, and time for socialization. And of the caged animals kept as pets, rabbits are the most popular. But that's not to imply they are the easiest!

However, these special little animals are often undervalued by those who haven't spent much time with them. Many rabbit guardians find that their pets offer a tremendous level of companionship, especially when given the opportunity to bond with -- and trust -- their humans.

Scroll down to read all about rabbit behavior, diet, caging, and exercise. Or click the quick links below to jump down the page. You can also check out a great YouTube video about rabbit care, made by an experienced MSPCA volunteer, by clicking on the picture at right.

[Care and feeding](#) - [Housing](#) - [Litterbox training](#) - [Social behaviors](#) - [Exercise and training](#) - [Potential problems](#)



[click here to see a YouTube video about rabbit care!](#)

Care and feeding:

The most important element in your rabbit's diet is hay, and it should be offered in unlimited quantities every day. Hay provides the fiber needed to keep the digestive tract working properly. Timothy hay is recommended; alfalfa hay should be avoided as it is very high in calcium.

Several cups of fresh leafy greens should be offered daily, as well. Good choices include romaine lettuce, red or green leaf lettuce, escarole, chicory, dandelion greens, collard or mustard greens, bok choy, radicchio, watercress, swiss chard, dill, cilantro, parsley, carrot tops, and oregano. Other good vegetables to feed are green pepper, pea pods, and sweet potato. Kale and spinach should be fed sparingly, and carrots should be limited as they are high in sugar and calories.

Fruits should be fed in small amounts, as they can lead to gastrointestinal upset in excess. Good choices are: apples, blueberries, peaches, pineapple, plums, strawberries, bananas, papayas, pears, melon, raspberries and raisins. A few raisins or a small slice of apple or banana is plenty.

Pellets are the leading cause of obesity in rabbits and should be fed in moderation to help provide a well rounded diet. Adult rabbits should not be fed more than 1/4

cup per 5 pounds of your rabbit's weight. When choosing a pellet, buy only freshly milled plain green varieties and avoid the ones that have treat foods in them. High fiber or timothy-based varieties are strongly recommended.

Fresh water should always be available and replenished daily. Please do not feed your rabbit any human treats including nuts, beans, cereal, bread, chocolate, crackers, etc. Processed treats available in pet stores should be avoided, like yogurt drops and seed and nut sticks. The extra fat and calories can be problematic for your rabbit's health.

Housing:

The MSPCA recommends that all domestic rabbits live indoors, as this is their best protection against predators, extreme weather, and being forgotten. There are many housing options that you may choose for your rabbit. Here are a few choices that we recommend:

Cage free: If your household and lifestyle allow for it, many rabbits can live free in the house or in an extra room. Rabbits can be litter box trained just like cats and can really show off their personalities when they are allowed to be free in your home. It is important to completely bunny proof your home, and may be a good idea to confine your rabbit to a cage when you are not home to supervise.

Exercise pens: Ring pens are collapsible pens that can be set up in different areas and can offer your rabbit more space than a traditional cage. They do not have a bottom, so they are best used for rabbits that are box trained.

Dog crates: Dog crates can be a nice choice because they can provide both a good amount of floor space as well as height enough to add a second level for your rabbit to play.

Traditional rabbit cages: Traditional rabbit cages can be a good choice as well, as long as the cage is large enough for a rabbit. Your rabbit should be able to stand up on his hind legs with his ears erect, and easily stretch out on the floor. You need to make sure that the door is wide enough to fit a litter box and that there is still ample floor space. Solid bottom floors are recommended over wire-bottom floors, which can irritate a rabbit's feet over time. Towels, carpet pieces, wood or straw mats can be good additions to a wire bottom cage. Glass aquariums should never be used to house rabbits. They do not provide enough ventilation and can heat up quickly, which can be dangerous for your rabbit.

Caging and litterboxes need to be cleaned daily. White vinegar and water are excellent for cleaning as they are safe and effective. It's also great for "accidents" that may happen outside the box.

Rabbits need toys to play with and safe items to chew on. Simple cardboard boxes, paper bags, paper towel tubes, plastic slinkies, hard plastic baby keys and other plastic baby toys are all great for their entertainment. A small paper lunch bag with a few raisins inside can be a fun game and a rewarding treat for your rabbit.

Litterbox training:

Most altered rabbits will train themselves within a few days. They are creatures of habit and will always return to the same place to "go". Use a standard cat litter pan or a high back corner pan, and make sure that it's big enough for your bunny to fit completely inside. We recommend filling the litter box with newspaper, and a large top layer of fresh hay. You will need to change the box daily. Other safe products to use include recycled newspaper litters and hardwood stove pellets. Clay cat litters

are not good for rabbits as they can be fatal if ingested. Even though most pet stores sell them, cedar and pine shavings should be avoided as they cause liver disease and respiratory issues.

Rabbits produce two types of droppings: fecal pellets and cecal pellets. Fecal pellets are the round dry ones that you usually see. Cecal pellets are soft and moist and look like a tiny bunch of grapes. Rabbits normally re-ingest cecal pellets as they contain important beneficial nutrients.

Social behaviors:

Rabbits are prey animals and do startle easily. They are keenly aware of their environment and can be easily startled by sudden motion or loud noises. Have a routine, providing feeding and cleaning at the same times each day. Many house rabbits get along well with children, dogs and cats, but careful supervision by adults is essential.

Rabbits communicate through a variety of ways. Most rabbits prefer to be petted while sitting next to you, rather than on your lap. A rabbit who places his or her chin on the ground is usually asking for attention. They seem to prefer petting on the top of the head, around their eyes, on the top of their nose and down their back. Content rabbits "purr" by lightly grinding their teeth together. They seldom vocalize but may grunt if annoyed. A very frightened rabbit can scream. Happy rabbits will race around, leap in the air, flop over on their side or back, and stretch flat out. Gentle, respectful handling and an understanding of rabbit behavior will help you and your rabbit enjoy one another.

Most rabbits would rather not be picked up and carried, but it's important that you understand the safe way to do so when you need to. To start, gently hold your rabbit still on the floor. Slide one hand under her chest and one hand under her hind quarters. Bring her in close to your body and hug her with gentle steady pressure. For a really squirmy or frightened bunny, try covering her eyes to help settle her down. You can also wrap her body in a small towel to reduce scratching. Never pick up a rabbit by her ears or the scruff of her neck. If she's struggling too much for you to hold her, get as close as you can to the ground and set her down. Never drop your rabbit.

Exercise and training:

Your rabbit needs several hours of exercise time outside his cage every day. Make sure the entire area is safe for your rabbits -- electrical and telephone wires seem to always attract a rabbit's interest. You should either keep them blocked off or wrap them in a protective coating, like PVC pipe, to prevent shock and fire. House plants should be moved, as some are poisonous if eaten. Rabbits will jump onto couches, tables, and often get into places that you might consider out of reach. They will also squeeze into tiny openings including behind radiators and under stoves!

Many people are surprised to hear that rabbits can be trained using marker-based training (similar to how marine mammals are trained, as well as clicker training used for dogs). Using positive reinforcement, marker-based training can be a lot of fun for you and your rabbit.

Potential Problems:

Some rabbits can be protective of their cage or of the items in their cage. Make sure that she can come out of the cage on her own, rather than you reaching in to take her out. Spaying and neutering, adequate exercise, and stimulating toys are important in reducing and preventing cage aggression.