

Rabbit Care News

A Practical Guide to Indoor Companion Rabbits

© 1996 Southern Tier Rabbit Care Network, Johnson City, NY
written by Jennifer Royce

This document may be printed and distributed under the following conditions:

- 1. All 12 Pages must be included,*
- 2. None of the information may be edited or deleted,*
- 3. No information about breeding, culling, or outdoor housing may be added, and*
- 4. The Southern Tier Rabbit Care Network copyright remains.*

Living with a House Rabbit: Bunny Basics

Many people are discovering the joys of sharing their homes with one or more companion rabbits. Rabbits are intelligent and playful, can be easily litter-trained, and make wonderful housepets. When you understand rabbit behavior, proper veterinary care, how to create the proper environment for your pet, and how to bunny-proof your home, your pet rabbit will provide years of love and companionship for you and your family.

However, there are many common myths about rabbits that need to be dispelled:

Myth: Rabbits are good starter pets for children

Rabbits are delicate, ground-loving creatures. Most rabbits do not like to be held or handled, and may try to escape a well-meaning child's arms by biting and scratching. In addition, a rabbit's back may be easily broken as a result of improper handling.

Myth: Rabbits are boring.

Simply placing a rabbit in an outdoor hutch with minimal interaction from you and your family does result in a boring (and bored) pet. However, with regular interaction from you and plenty of running space for a bunny to kick up his heels and play, a rabbit suddenly becomes a social, fun-loving addition to a household. All the rabbit needs is the opportunity to show his true colors to you.

Myth: Rabbits are low maintenance pets.

Rabbits have needs similar to those of other household pets. A sick bunny needs medical care from a qualified veterinarian. Rabbits have specific dietary needs. A chronically ill rabbit will require long-term care. In addition, for medical and behavioral reasons rabbits need to be spayed and neutered. Cages and litterboxes need frequent cleaning. A properly cared for rabbit can live 8 to 10 years, sometimes even longer. This is quite a long-term commitment for a rabbit owner.

A bunny owner needs patience, creativity to block or hide things a rabbit might want to chew (such as electrical cords), and a willingness to get down on the floor to interact with a bunny on her own level. For people willing to make this commitment to a house rabbit, the reward is years of companionship with a surprisingly clever, loving, and intelligent creature.

Home Sweet Home: Cage and Environment

Most rabbits have some sort of cage they can call their own. Even rabbits who have 24 hour free range of a house enjoy a place to go to nap, hide, or nibble hay. The rabbit's cage should be a pleasant place to spend time, and the bigger, the better.

The Cage

Most cages for rabbits sold in pet stores are much too small for a rabbit who must spend long periods of time in her cage. A general rule of thumb in selecting a cage is to choose one that is at least four times the stretched out size of the adult rabbit. Try to provide at least four square feet for a small breed and nine square feet for a large breed. Multiple rabbits living together need even more space.

Cages often come with wire mesh bottoms and a removable tray to catch urine and feces. While this is convenient in terms of cleaning, it can be very hard on a rabbit's feet. Constant exposure to this type of surface can lead to sore hocks, a condition in which the hair on the feet is worn away and ulcers form on the ankle. If you do purchase a cage with a wire floor, be sure to provide a board, piece of cardboard, a few sheets of newspaper, or a small grass mat for the rabbit to comfortably sit on. The tray itself should be lined with newspaper or filled with hay or a paper-based litter. **Do not use pine or cedar shavings** as the aromatics in the wood can cause serious liver and respiratory damage to your bunny. This damage can interfere with your rabbit's ability to metabolize anesthesia and cause serious complications during surgery. The New York State House Rabbit Society recommends that rabbits who have lived on pine or cedar shavings wait at least three months before undergoing surgery.

Another factor to consider in a cage is the size of the door. You should be able to fit a litterbox in the cage. If you cannot fit a box in the cage and you are the creative sort, you may be able to enlarge the door somewhat with wire cutters. If you are still unable to fit a litterbox through the door, or are planning on using the cage itself as a litterbox, urine guards attached to the sides of the cage are helpful. Rabbits often back up into a corner to urinate and may end up directing their urine through the cage bars onto your carpet. Urine guards are also useful during litter training to protect your floors while the bunny is still learning good bathroom habits.

Placement of the doors is also important. The best cage has both a top opening door, which makes it easy for you to clean the cage, and a side door which can be opened to allow the rabbit to come and go freely.

A number of companies specialize in rabbit housing, and have pre-made cages or may custom build one to your specifications. Some of these companies also sell cage materials, and if you are handy with tools, you can build one yourself to suit your needs. Many people have designed multilevel rabbit "condos" with ramps, enclosed hiding places, and multitudes of other features designed to keep a bunny occupied.

Cage Environment

A rabbit must have access to water and hay while in her cage. Water can be provided in a hanging bottle or in a heavy, tip-proof ceramic bowl. Hay may be put loose on the cage floor, on one end of the litterbox, in a separate box, or in a hayrack attached to the cage. If the bunny is to eat meals in her cage, heavy ceramic food dishes should also be provided. A variety of toys should be in the cage to keep your rabbit occupied.

Cages should always be kept clean. White vinegar is an excellent cleaner for litterboxes and cage trays. Soiled litter should be changed at least once a week.

Above all, the cage should be an inviting place for your bunny. The rabbit should view her cage as a safe home base that is all her own, and not as an unpleasant punishment. A rabbit can also be fairly territorial, and may defend her area if she feel threatened. Her space should be respected, and only entered for cleaning and feeding.

Toys for Bunnies

Rabbits love to play, and they need mental stimulation to keep active and healthy. Bunnies like to chew, dig, push, jump and throw. Giving them toys of their own also keeps your furniture from taking a beating from bunny teeth and nails. Store-bought toys are good, but many common household objects can provide just as much excitement:

- ⇒ Toilet paper and paper towel tubes
- ⇒ Hard plastic baby toys
- ⇒ Jingly wire cat ball to toss around
- ⇒ Old phone book for shredding (in a cardboard box)
- ⇒ Canning jar lids
- ⇒ A ramp to climb and a shelf to sit on
- ⇒ Empty rolled oats container
- ⇒ A non-chewable plastic ball to nudge
- ⇒ Boxes of all sizes (with staples removed)
- ⇒ Grass mats for chewing
- ⇒ Big tub of hay or straw to dig in
- ⇒ Cardboard take-out trays from fast-food restaurants
- ⇒ Untreated willow baskets to chew
- ⇒ Cardboard tunnel (usually used as a form for pouring concrete posts)
- ⇒ An old towel to push around
- ⇒ Toys from Busy Bunny (call (415) 872-2920 for a catalog)

“HE’S CHEWING *EVERYTHING!!!*”

Rabbit Proofing Your Home



Rabbits have been referred to as “life-support systems for teeth that chew.”* They have an amazing ability to chew, rip, shred, tear, and otherwise destroy anything they come across. A rabbit’s teeth grow continuously, and chewing helps to wear down teeth to a healthy level. By providing acceptable chewing alternatives and making some adjustments to the area the bunny occupies, you can minimize the destruction to your home and property.

While some rabbits are allowed run of an entire house, others have their areas restricted to certain rooms. For example, a computer with all its cords and cables is difficult to rabbit-proof, and it is often easier to simply restrict access to that room. A strong baby gate that is too tall for a bunny to jump is a good investment.

The number one household hazard to rabbits is electrical and telephone cords. Cords seem to draw rabbits like a magnet, and sharp bunny teeth can sever a cord in seconds. Not only can the resulting electrical shock injure or kill your rabbit, the bare wire can be a risky fire hazard. Cords can be hidden behind bookcases and other furniture that the rabbit can not get behind. Another solution is to encase the wire in something that the bunny can not bite through. Plastic cable covers can be purchased at electronics or automotive stores.

You can also purchase plastic tubing or a garden hose, slit it lengthwise, and insert the wire inside.

Carpet is also irresistible temptation to many rabbits. A bunny may dig or chew at carpet fibers, which can lead to an intestinal blockage if ingested. If there are only a few spots (usually corners) where she likes to dig, grass mats can be used to hide the area and provide a great chewing and digging diversion. A large tub of hay or straw also serves as a good digging outlet. A wide variety of untreated willow baskets, wood blocks, and chewable cardboard gives a bunny plenty of opportunity to chew.

Rabbits who chew the household despite these alternatives may need to be further deterred. A water pistol is a cheap, safe way to let your rabbit know what she is doing is wrong. Also, bitter tasting substances can be bought in pet supply stores and applied to carpet, table legs, curtains, or whatever she likes to chew. When she begins to make the association that chewing the furniture results in something unpleasant, she will be less likely to destroy your property and seek out acceptable chewing and digging pastimes.

Another hazard is household plants. Many of these are toxic to rabbits and can cause serious illness or death when eaten. Plants should be out of reach.

Other cover-ups, diversions, and measures can be taken as needed to make your home rabbit-friendly. Expensive hard-cover books can be moved to a higher bookshelf, shoes and clothes should be put away, and important bills and documents should not be left on the floor, or you can be assured your bunny will find these things and work her destructive magic on them.

* Phrase used courtesy of Shredder and his pet human, D’Arcy Emery.

Important Facts on Spaying and Neutering

Just like cats and dogs, rabbits must be spayed and neutered. Due to over-breeding and the common misconception that rabbits are easy or “disposable” pets, there are more rabbits than there are good homes willing to take them. Rabbits are the third most common animal to be abandoned to animal shelters. Animal shelters that accept rabbits and House Rabbit Society foster homes are nearly always filled to capacity. Many other rabbits are “set free” in fields and parks where they die.

Aside from helping to relieve the massive overpopulation problem, spaying and neutering your rabbit has behavioral and medical benefits. When a rabbit hits puberty between 3 and 6 months of age, he most likely will become very territorial. Both male and female rabbits may aggressively defend their territory by grunting, lunging, and biting. Sexual activity in the form of mounting hands, feet, fuzzy bedroom slippers, and anything else available is also very common. While these behaviors are troublesome, one common behavior tops them all: spraying. Unneutered males and some unspayed females will spray large amounts of urine to mark territory and objects (such as an unsuspecting owner) as belonging to them. They frequently do this by leaping into the air and spinning in order to spray the urine over a large area. Unfortunately, this is when most rabbit owners give up their rabbits or move them to outdoor hutches. Neutering relieves most of these behavioral difficulties without changing your rabbit’s personality.

Most importantly, for medical reasons ***female rabbits must always be spayed***. Studies have found that 50 to 80% of unspayed female rabbits develop uterine and/or mammary tumors by five years of age. Spaying your female rabbit adds years to her life.

Spaying and neutering, as with any other medical procedure, should be done only by a veterinarian with experience and training in treatment of rabbits. Male rabbits can be neutered as soon as their testicles descend (3 to 6 months). Most vets spay females at about 6 months.

Questions to Ask Your Vet Before Spay/Neuter Surgery

- ⇒ How many spays/neuters has the vet done?
Your vet should be seeing rabbits on a regular basis and be experienced in surgery.
- ⇒ What is the success rate?
90% is too low. Some deaths are bound to occur, but they should be very rare.
- ⇒ Should the rabbit be fasted prior to surgery?
The answer to this question should always be “No.” Rabbits cannot vomit, so this is not a problem during surgery. In addition, it is not a good idea to upset the delicate balance in the rabbit’s intestinal tract.
- ⇒ What anesthesia will be used?
Isoflurane is the most common anesthesia used in rabbits, but halothane can be used also. It depends on the vet’s training and experience.
- ⇒ In a spay, will both the ovaries and the uterus be removed?
The answer should always be “Yes.”
- ⇒ Will the rabbit need to stay overnight after the surgery?
If so, provide the vet with pellets, hay and veggies to feed. Many people also give the bunny an old t-shirt or washcloth that smells like home for security.
- ⇒ Always ask for specific instructions on what to do once your bunny comes home. Call your vet immediately if the rabbit begins chewing on stitches, stops eating or drinking, or has any other difficulty.

YES!

They Can Be Litter Trained!

Many people are surprised to find that rabbits can be litter-trained. It takes patience, time, and a lot of litter-boxes (at first), but the result is a companion that can be trusted in the main living areas of your home.

Spaying or neutering your rabbit is the first step. Unaltered rabbits are highly territorial and will frequently spray large amounts of urine to mark their territory, especially during adolescence. Spaying and neutering decreases this urge to spray and improves litter habits greatly.

Rabbits vary in how quickly they learn to use a litterbox. Young rabbits are often hyper and too busy exploring to remember to return to a litterbox, and can be more difficult to train. A rabbit with a well established spraying habit may continue to spray, especially in the presence of another rabbit.

The Setup and Training

You will most likely have to start with several litterboxes. Fill them with newspaper, hay, or paper-based litter. Pine and cedar shavings can cause respiratory and liver damage and should not be used. Clay cat litter and corn cob litter can cause intestinal blockages if ingested and are not recommended either. Clumping cat litter is especially dangerous if ingested as it can cause a cement-like blockage and should ***never*** be used.

Litter-training begins in the cage. Rabbits tend to urinate in one spot, so place a litterbox in the corner of the cage that the rabbit has chosen to use as a bathroom. If the cage has a wire floor, place newspaper or other resting material on it or he will probably choose to sit and rest in the comfy litterbox instead of the wire. Place a few droppings and some urine soaked litter in the litterbox to encourage him to continue to use that place.

When he is reliably urinating in the litterbox, allow a little freedom in a small area such as a bathroom. As he becomes successful in a small area, you can increase his territory. If he makes a mistake and misses a litterbox, use white vinegar to clean the area. If he consistently urinates in one spot, place a litterbox there. He will eventually narrow his bathroom areas to one or two favorite litterboxes and the extra ones can be removed.

Control of droppings usually follows urine training. When entering a new territory, even neutered rabbits will mark it with droppings. As they become more familiar with their surroundings, this marking decreases and usually becomes controlled on its own. Litterboxes should be cleaned once or twice weekly or more frequently if more than one rabbit is using them. Soiled recycled newspaper litter can be composted or used to fertilize a garden, or simply thrown away. Clean the litterbox with white vinegar. This will dissolve any calcium buildup on the plastic and gets rid of any odor. Never use Lysol or pine cleaners, as the phenols in these cleaners can cause liver and respiratory damage.

Paper-Based Litters

Some common paper-based litters are: CareFresh, EcoFresh, Yesterday's News, Nature Fresh, Cat Country and Bio-Flush. If these are unavailable, you can use plain newspaper and/or hay (this will need more frequent cleaning).

Food for Thought: They Need More Than Just Carrots

The number one most important thing to feed your rabbit is grass hay. Unlimited amounts of timothy, oat, or orchard hay should be supplied 24 hours a day. Legume hays such as alfalfa and clover hay contain large amounts of calcium and protein which can cause health problems when fed in excess to rabbits over 6 months of age, and should only be used as treats. Feeding hay provides large quantities of fiber without unneeded calories, and helps to prevent intestinal problems such as trichobezoars (hairballs) and stasis (slowdown or complete stoppage of the intestinal system).

Pellets should be offered in limited amounts to rabbits over 6 months. Pellets should be of high quality with high fiber (>18%), low fat (1-2%), low calcium, and low protein. **Do not feed pellets with nuts, seeds, dried vegetables or other "treats" in them!** These pellets are low in quality and very high in fat. Plain, high quality pellets are the best thing for your rabbit.

Vegetables should also make up a large amount of your rabbit's diet. Try to introduce at least eight different types of vegetables, and of these, at least three should be fed daily. Leafy greens such as romaine, dandelion greens, endive, parsley, cilantro, basil, peppermint leaves, carrot tops, beet tops, radish tops, collard greens, and escarole are good, as well as vegetables such as carrots, celery, and broccoli. Kale and spinach can be fed in limited amounts. Generally, one heaping cup of vegetables per five pounds of body weight can be fed per day. Introduce new vegetables gradually, one at a time. If any diarrhea or intestinal upset is noticed, discontinue that vegetable. If after a week your rabbit has no problems, introduce another vegetable. Be sure to wash all vegetables thoroughly.

Treats such as apple, pear, raisins, melon, papaya, or banana can also be fed (about a tablespoon a day). Grains such as rolled oats or barley can also be fed in small amounts.

Fresh water should always be available to your rabbit. This can be provided in a tip-proof ceramic dish (lead free only) or in a hanging water bottle. Change the water at least once daily and clean crocks and bottles often with a mild dish detergent.

Other items you may want to consider feeding your rabbit include papaya enzyme (papayin) and acidophillus/lactobacillus. Papaya enzymes help promote motility of the intestinal tract. Fresh papaya or dextrose free papaya tablets can be fed. Acidophillus/lactobacillus are thought to help maintain a good balance of microorganisms in the intestinal tract.

Pellet Guidelines

Rabbits up to six months of age can have free access to pellets. After this growing stage, pellets should be limited based on the weight of the rabbit.

2-4 lbs.	1/8 cup daily
5-7 lbs.	1/4 cup daily
8-10 lbs	1/2 cup daily
11-15 lbs	3/4 cup daily

Certain breeds may have weight problems. If you rabbit is overweight, consult your physician.

Grooming and Handling: You Look Mah-valous!

Up From Ground Zero

Rabbits need to be handled very carefully. Most rabbits generally do not like to be lifted from the ground, and may struggle. They also have an exceptionally delicate skeletal structure and can be injured very easily if improperly handled or dropped.

A rabbit should never be picked up by her ears: she is not designed to support the weight of her body and picking her up like this hurts terribly and can cause damage. In addition, rabbits should not be lifted by the scruff of the neck. If the rear legs are not supported, she will struggle, kick out and most likely hurt her back. If you must pick up your rabbit by the scruff, be sure to quickly put a hand on her rump to keep her from struggling.

The best way to pick up a rabbit is to slide one hand underneath her chest, place the other hand firmly on the rump, and scoop toward your body. Hold the rabbit close to you in a firm grasp. Some rabbits may struggle even when they're secure against a body. If your bunny does this, it sometimes helps to cover her eyes with your hand. Be prepared to squat quickly should she struggle violently or start to escape from your arms.

To put your rabbit back down on the floor, do a deep knee bend to get yourself as low as possible without tipping or tilting the bunny. Gently release her to the floor.

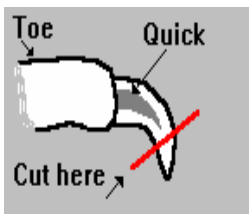
Good Bunny Hygiene

Like cats, most rabbits do a pretty good job of keeping themselves looking their best. However, there are still some things that you will need to look after to keep your bunny well-groomed and healthy.

Long-haired rabbits such as angoras, fuzzy lops, and Jersey woolies need vigilant, daily brushing to keep mats and tangles from forming. Once these mats form, the only way to remove them is to *gently* cut them out. It can literally take hours to get mats out once they form, and regular brushing prevents this. A wire slicker brush commonly sold for cats easily removes large amounts of loose hair and wool. A wide-toothed pet comb can get out the occasional minor snarl.

Short-haired rabbits will need to be brushed as well, but not as frequently. Rabbits shed four times a year, with two of these shedding periods being major molts. Since ingesting loose hair can easily lead to dangerous hairballs, it is a wise idea to brush your rabbit frequently while she is shedding heavily.

Rabbits' toenails need periodic clipping to keep from growing too long and causing foot problems such as sore hocks. This can be done by your vet, or you can do it yourself with a little practice. Many rabbits can be "tranced" by gently placing them on their backs in your lap and stroking the top of the head. Once the bunny is quiet and still, you may be able to clip her nails. Be ready for the bunny to suddenly snap out of the trance! Always have a firm grasp to be sure she doesn't hurt herself!



If your rabbit has light-colored toenails, you will be able to see a vein inside. This is the quick. (If your rabbit has dark nails, you will need to backlight the nails with a flashlight to see this.) Using cat nail clippers or regular human toenail clippers, clip the toenail just below the quick (see illustration). If by mistake you cut through the quick it will bleed, often quite heavily. This can be stopped with styptic powder, corn starch, or regular flower. Keep an eye on that toe for a few days to be sure it does not become infected.

“Hey, What’s One More?”

Multiple Rabbit Households

Rabbits are extremely social animals. Wild European rabbits from which domestic rabbits descended live in large groups. While these rabbits breed quickly and can often overrun an area, spayed and neutered domestic rabbits can enjoy each other’s company without worrying about a population explosion.

Bonded rabbits are lifelong friends. They often share a cage, groom each other, and sleep nestled up together. Often, when one rabbit is ill the pair is left together since the separation of the two can be stressful. When one of the pair dies, the other mourns the loss and may not eat or behave normally for some time.

Introducing rabbits can be tricky business, but the final reward of watching a bonded pair snuggle closely or bound about a room is well worth the trouble. The easiest couple to introduce is a neutered male and a spayed female, especially if you bring a new female to an established male. Female rabbits are more territorial and may resent any new rabbit, male or female. Two spayed female rabbits can also be bonded, though it may be more difficult. Most difficult, but certainly not impossible, is introducing two neutered males. All important is the bunnies’ personalities: a very mellow neutered male may accept just about any new friend.

When bringing a new rabbit into a house, be sure to quarantine her in a separate room and schedule health exam with a vet right away. Once you are sure the new rabbit is healthy (and spayed or neutered), introduce the rabbits an area that is new to them both. The new situation in an unfamiliar area makes most rabbits slightly nervous, and they may band together to explore the new surroundings. You should also move their cages together so they get accustomed to each other’s smell and movements. If all goes well with the introductions for several days, you can try to expand their run time to the regular place where they will live. Keep a spray bottle handy to break up any fights that may occur. If there is any fighting, go back to the neutral space for a few more days. Eventually, they should become friends.

Some rabbits will fight, even in neutral territory. In these cases, always keep a spray bottle close at hand to break up any fights. A more stressful situation, such as a car ride is often needed to get these rabbits to accept each other. In all cases, be prepared to move slowly. It takes time to build a lasting relationship.

If it becomes apparent that the rabbits will not tolerate each other, you may have to keep them separate. This possibility should *always* be considered when bringing a new rabbit into your household, and accommodations will have to be made for separate territories in your home. Rabbits can also form friendships with other animals such as guinea pigs, cats, and some dogs. While in many situations it is the rabbit who harasses the cat, young adolescent cats may not always be trustworthy enough to be left unsupervised with a rabbit. Dogs should be very calm and well-trained.

Extensive guidelines for introducing pairs of rabbits or rabbits and other animals can be found in the *House Rabbit Handbook* (Drollery Press, 1995) or in the video *Introducing Rabbits* (Drollery Press), available from the House Rabbit Society.

Medical Concerns for Pet Rabbits

Whenever you notice that your rabbit is not eating, urinating, defecating, or behaving normally, consult a veterinarian experienced in rabbit care. Rabbits seem to get ill suddenly and their health can deteriorate very rapidly without proper veterinary care.

There are many diseases common to rabbits, all of which need to be diagnosed and treated by a veterinarian. **The purpose of this section is not to help diagnose illnesses on your own, but to illustrate signs and symptoms that indicate your bunny may be ill.**

Some rabbits, especially Netherland Dwarfs or other rabbits bred for round shaped heads, often have maloccluded teeth. This is a condition in which the rabbit's teeth do not line up properly and overgrow into "tusks." This can happen either with the front teeth or the rear molars. These teeth will need to be clipped or filed periodically, or may need to be extracted altogether in some cases.

Sore Hocks is a condition in which the fur on the bottom of the rabbit's feet is worn away. The exposed skin is subject to cracking, ulcerations, and infection. Rabbits with sore hocks need a soft, dry resting place at all times, and extra care should be taken to clean their litterboxes more frequently to help keep their feet dry.

Fleas, flies, mites and other pests may infest your bunny. If you note any small specks, dry flaky skin, or crusty material in your rabbit's ears, contact your veterinarian.

Respiratory diseases are very common in rabbits. If you notice runny nose or eyes, labored breathing, mucous on the insides of the front paws (from the rabbit wiping his nose), or excessive sneezing or coughing, take your rabbit to a veterinarian immediately.

Symptoms of Illnesses

Other physical symptoms and signs to watch for are:

- tilted head, loss of balance or coordination
- loss of consciousness or convulsions
- loss of movement in hind legs or any apparent broken bone, serious cut, or injury
- runny nose or eyes (can indicate serious respiratory problems)
- lack of interest in food or water, lethargy
- lack of urine or feces in the litterbox
- excessive gurgling digestive sounds
- diarrhea (liquid stool or normal stool surrounded with mucous) If you see soft droppings shaped like bunches of grapes, do not panic. These are normal in small amounts.
- bulging eyes coupled with loud grinding of the teeth indicate severe pain
- bloated or distended abdomen
- any sores, abscesses, lumps, or tumors
- drooling (may be caused by maloccluded molars)

Of course, keeping an eye open for symptoms and catching any problems in their early stages decreases the chance of a minor problem turning into a major catastrophe. Preventive measures such as feeding unlimited hay, regular grooming, proper diet, and exercise help your rabbit live a long and healthy life.

Finding a Veterinarian

The House Rabbit Society maintains a list of recommended rabbit vets. This list is also available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.rabbit.org>. The best way to deal with an emergency is to be prepared. Find an experienced rabbit vet before an emergency arises. This will save precious time in a crisis.

Adopting a Rabbit

If you are interested in adopting a rabbit, contact your local animal shelter or House Rabbit Society representative. Please do not purchase a rabbit from a pet store or breeder while there are so many rabbits waiting in crowded shelters and foster homes.

The Houston Bunny Buddies can assist you in locating a Texas rabbit that needs a second chance. As a private rescue organization, we have constant access to rabbits in need of homes.

Please contact us for house rabbit information, resources and adoption assistance in the greater Houston area. Call our Bunny HopLine at (713) 686-0073 or visit us through the World Wide Web at <http://www.bunnybuddies.org> (with links to the House Rabbit Society Homepage).

We can give rescued bunnies love, exercise and fresh food,
But we need YOU to give them a home!!

Finding a Home for a Rabbit

If you have an unwanted rabbit, there are several things you can do:

- Contact the Houston Bunny Buddies (or your local rabbit adoption organization) to be placed on the list of rabbits looking for good homes.
- Place an ad in the paper and in vets' offices.
- Litter-train the rabbit.
- Interact with her so she is used to people.
- If possible, have the rabbit spayed or neutered.
- Provide her with toys to show prospective adopters that she is a fun, interesting companion animal.
- **Never** offer your rabbit for free. Insist on a modest \$10 charge. This will prevent your rabbit from becoming snake food.
- Insist that your rabbit go to an indoor home only.
- Recommend that prospective adopters purchase the *House Rabbit Handbook* (Drollery Press, 1995), available from Barnes and Noble or from the House Rabbit Society.

Bibliography

Brown, Susan. *Feeding a House Rabbit.*

Brown, Susan. *Care of House Rabbits.*

DeMello, M. *Rabbit Toys*

Espie, Amy and DeMello, Margo. *Rabbit Helper Packet.* House Rabbit Society.

Green, H.S.N. (1940). "Uterine adenomata in the rabbit: III. Susceptibility as a function of constitutional factors." *Journal of Experimental Medicine*, pp. 273-292.

Harkness, J.E. and Wagner, J.E. (1995). *The Biology and Medicine of Rabbits and Rodents - Fourth Edition.* Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins.

Harriman, Marinell (1995). *House Rabbit Handbook: How to Live With an Urban Rabbit - Third Edition.* Alameda, CA: Drollery Press.

Hillyer, E.V. and Quesenberry, K.E. (1997!). *Ferrets, Rabbits, and Rodents: Clinical Medicine and Surgery.* Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Co.

House Rabbit Society. *House Rabbit Journal.* Subscription available for \$12 a year to The House Rabbit Society

Hunter, Samantha (1991). *Hop to It: A Guide to Training Your Pet Rabbit.* Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series. (*This book suggests that you fast a rabbit prior to surgery. This is very dangerous and is not suggested. However, the training tips are quite good.*)

Kobler, Davida R. (1995). *Your New Pet Rabbit.* New York House Rabbit Society/B. Bunster Rabbit Care Information.

New York State Chapter of the House Rabbit Society (1996). *Hazel's Herald, Vol. 1, Number 1.* Available to members of the New York Chapter of the House Rabbit Society.

Parsons, P.K. (1996). *House Rabbit Society Homepage*

Percan, S.T. (1984). *The Complete Book on Housetraining Rabbits.* Hermosa Beach, CA: Silver Sea Press.

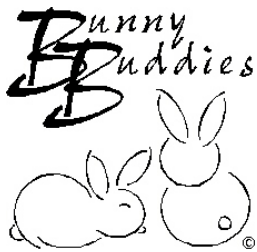
Tessmer, Laura (1995). *Hay Frequently Asked Questions*

Tessmer, Laura (1996). *PetBunny Discussion List: Selected abstracts regarding effects of pine and cedar shavings.*

Tessmer, Laura (1996). *PetBunny Homepage*

The **Southern Tier Rabbit Care Network** is dedicated to educating the public on rabbit care and providing assistance in matching unwanted rabbits with good indoor homes. It is currently a "network" of one woman with a computer.

The **House Rabbit Society** is a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to: 1-Rescuing unwanted and abandoned domestic rabbits, 2-Placing them in loving, indoor homes, and 3-Educating the public on rabbit care. Your \$12 annual contribution to the House Rabbit Society helps provide needy rabbits with food, housing, veterinary care, and precious time. Your contribution also entitles you to receive quarterly issues of the *House Rabbit Journal*. Send your name, address, phone number, and \$12 to: House Rabbit Society, P.O. Box 1201, Alameda, CA 94501.



The **Bunny Buddies** is a local not-for-profit organization dedicated to educating the public about house rabbits and their care. Our monthly meetings serve as a forum for educational presentations and to facilitate networking amongst Houston area house rabbit owners. We can provide vet referrals, but we are not able to give medical advice. Working privately and with local shelters, we help many rabbits that would otherwise be euthanized. We facilitate rabbit adoptions, matching people and rabbits together, working with families to ensure a successful and happy home for all. We are able to help a lot of potentially unadoptable rabbits find homes just by spending time with them, and most rabbits that pass through our care are able to become an important family member in their new home. We do not support rabbit breeding practices, and

all rabbits that we find homes for are spayed and neutered before they are adopted. We encourage people to house their rabbits indoors, as Houston is prone to summers of unbearable heat and humidity.

The Bunny Buddies are always in need of new volunteers to help with our efforts, and that includes people who might be interested in fostering sick rabbits, or rabbits that need to be rescued. If you have some spare time which you might want to devote towards rabbits who need you, or if you have space in your home for the foster care of rabbits, we encourage you to contact us. It's extremely rewarding to see a pet placed in a loving home when all the odds were against it. By joining the Bunny Buddies, you can help us continue and expand our educational programs in the Houston area, including the quarterly publication of our newsletter, *The Rabbit Review*.

Bunny HopLine:

Mailing Address:

Send us E-mail:

World Wide Web:

713-686-0073

PO Box 7446, Houston, TX 77248-7446

rabbit@bunnybuddies.org

<http://www.bunnybuddies.org>

Rabbit Supplies

Mail-Order

Oxbow Hay Products, for hay & pellets
American Pet Diner, for hay
Busy Bunny, for bunny chew toys
Bunny Bytes, for rabbit supplies
BunnyLuv, for rabbit supplies
Bunny Heaven, for bunny-theme gifts
SDV vitamins, for papaya tablets
KV Vet Supply, for pet supplies

800-249-0366, www.oxbowhay.com
800-656-2691, www.americanpetdiner.com
415-872-2920, www.busybunny.com
www.bunnybytes.com
818-986-4412, www.bunnyluv.com
609-324-9270, rabbit.simplenet.com
800-738-8482
800-423-8211

In Houston

To share at-cost hay, pellets, and other supplies
Great Cubes™/Neat Ideas Cubes™, for bunny condos
Shepler's, for cardboard tunnels

713-639-2885 or 713-686-0073
Sam's Club, Office Depot, Office Max
713-799-1150, 9103 East Almeda

Understanding Rabbits

Sounds

- ◆ **GROWLING:** Indicates an aggressive mood usually provoked by an assumed attack and may be followed by biting. Rabbits growl when they are grabbed and handled roughly and when they are under stress, such as being in strange, loud places. Such behavior does not necessarily mean that a personality problem exists, as the behavior has been known to subside when the rabbit is given a calm environment and persistent gentle handling.
- ◆ **TOOTH-CLICKING or TOOTH-PURRING:** Indicates great pleasure and usually occurs while they are being petted and/or completely relaxed.
- ◆ **TOOTH-GRINDING:** Indicates severe pain or stress and is usually accompanied by sitting hunched up in a corner.
- ◆ **PURRING or HONKING:** Soft, almost inaudible, honking sounds which indicate a desire to mate or attention from humans. It is usually accompanied by circling the other rabbit or human.
- ◆ **THUMPING:** Rabbits thump their hind legs when they are frightened.
- ◆ **SCREAMING:** Indicates mortal terror or excruciating pain.

Body Language

- ◆ **TENSE BODY, UPRIGHT TAIL, LAID-BACK EARS:** Indicates the rabbit may be about to attack.
- ◆ **THIRD INNER-EYELID SHOWING IN CORNER OF EYE:** Indicates fright or stress.
- ◆ **RUBBING WITH UNDERSIDE OF THE CHIN:** Marking territory.
- ◆ **NUDGING WITH MUZZLE; DIGGING ON FABRIC:** Rabbit wants attention.
- ◆ **LICKING PEOPLE:** Indicates affection and appreciation of petting.
- ◆ **STRETCHING OUT ON BELLY WITH EYES HALF-SHUT, FEET STRETCHED OUT; STRETCHING OUT ON SIDE (Bunny Flop, Dead Bunny):** Indicates relaxation and sleepiness. Rabbit feels extremely safe and comfortable in your home.
- ◆ **WAGGING TAIL BACK AND FORTH:** Indicates defiance. (i.e. when feeling pursued, refusing to go into cage)
- ◆ **JUMPING IN AIR; DOING TWISTS (Binky, Bunny Dance); RACING AROUND:** Pleasure!
- ◆ **BITES, NIPS – OFTEN WITHOUT BREAKING SKIN:** Indicates irritation or displeasure with human.

Rabbit Dietary Needs

Unlimited Hay, Every Day!

Timothy is the best –	high quality grass hay, source of fiber & nutrition – does not grow in Texas
Orchard –	similar to Timothy in quality & nutrition
Oat –	a great nutritious fun-to-eat hay
Brome –	another nutritious hay with a different flavor
Coastal is Texas hay –	most bunnies will not eat enough of it – can be used as litterbox filler
Alfalfa –	great for young bunnies, but too rich for regular use in adults (use as a treat)

High Quality Rabbit Pellets

There are many varieties available at feed stores and pet supply stores – look for high fiber and low protein.

Healthy Examples:	Purina “Green Bag” – Protein 16%, Fiber 15-20%
	Purina “High Fiber” – Protein 14%, Fiber 18.75-25%
	Oxbow Bunny Basics – Protein 15%, Fiber 23%
	Oxbow Timothy Pellets – Protein 14%, Fiber 28%

Do not buy the kind with the added seeds & colored bits – it is junk food for bunnies!

Follow the rationing guidelines on page 7 of the Rabbit Care News, for rabbits over 1 year old

Safe Veggies

Maintain a variety in the diet, at least 3 types a day to ensure adequate vitamins in the diet.

Introduce new veggies slowly, watching for signs of diarrhea, gas, or upset stomach.

Feed at least one heaping cup of raw veggies per 5 pounds of bunny – some bunnies eat a lot more.

The veggies on this list are all safe, but each bunny has different tastes! Limit the ones highest in calcium.

Most herbs are considered quite tasty by many bunnies!

Raw Vegetable	Calcium Content - mg/1 cup serving	Raw Vegetable	Calcium Content - mg/1 cup serving
Alfalfa Sprouts	10	Lettuce, Romaine	20
Asparagus	28	Lettuce, Loose-Leaf	38
Beet Greens	46	Mustard Greens	58
Broccoli	42	Mustard Spinach	315
Chinese Cabbage	74	Okra	82
Carrots & Carrot Tops	30	Parsley	78
Cauliflower	28	Peas, Edible Pod	62
Celery	44	Peppers, Sweet	6
Chard, Swiss	18	Pumpkin	24
Chicory Greens	180	Pumpkin Leaves	15
Collard Greens	218	Purslane	28
Coriander (Cilantro)	16	Radishes & Leaves	28
Cress, Garden	40	Spinach	56
Dandelion Greens	103	Squash, Summer	26
Eggplant	30	Squash, Zucchini	20
Jerusalem Artichoke	21	Turnips	39
Kale	94	Turnip Greens	105
Kohlrabi	34	Watercress	40

United States Dept. of Agriculture, Human Nutrition Information Service, Agriculture Handbook Number 8-11, “Composition of Foods: Vegetables and Vegetable Products.” Revised August 1984. Compiled by Susan Smith, Ph.D. 1996.

Fruits & Treats

A small amount of fruit can be fed daily: banana, apple, pear, orange, mango, plum, peach, berries, grapes, etc.

BEWARE: apple & pear seeds, fruit pits, banana peel, & orange rind can be deadly or dangerous! Don't risk it!

Don't encourage your bunny to be a junk food junkie with human cereals, chocolate, or seed treats.

Frozen fruits are especially yummy in the summer-time: try freezing fresh papaya chunks or grapes.

Papaya Enzyme

There is some speculation that the papaya enzyme can aid in preventing gastric stasis (hair-balls). **Unlimited hay is the best prevention**, but papaya tablets can be given daily as a treat. (3-4 tablets per day, maximum)

Rabbit Nutrition: Facts and Fallacies about Treat Foods

House Rabbit Society Literature (P.O. Box 1201, Alameda, CA 94501)

By Susan M. Smith, Ph.D.

Nutritional Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison

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.

Commercial rabbit treats fall into several categories: pellets, processed cereal kibble, mueslix (dried seed/fruit/veggie mixes), cereal/veggie blends, and candies/sugars. None confer an advantage over the fresh vegetable, high fiber pellets, and unlimited hay diet.

Pellets were discussed in the House Rabbit Journal vol. III #4. I won't say more here except to repeat those guidelines: chose 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 (see below).

Processed Cereal Kibble. These range from "Crunchy Puffs" to shaped products designed to substitute for pellets. Some contain expensive extras that serve no benefit to your rabbit, such as plant or herbal extracts and freeze dried bacteria. One contains less than the National Research Council (NRC) requirements for calcium. Another contains cheese flavoring! Supplementation with digestive enzymes (proteases, amylases) normally is unnecessary because these foods are highly digestible and because there is no evidence that healthy rabbits produce insufficient levels of these enzymes; in fact, some of the most important digestion is by the cecal bacteria. These kibbles tend to be lower in fiber and higher in fat. They are also extremely expensive and come with feeding recommendations destined to give a spayed or neutered house rabbit obesity. The variety of colors and shapes are more of an aesthetic to the human buyer than to your rabbit. Again, fresh vegetables, restricted high fiber pellets, and unlimited hay are healthier and easier on your budget.

Mueslix. These are mixes which are made of seeds and grains. They are marketed as "vitamin and mineral enriched," a "delicious energy provider," or "fortified." They are made of carbohydrate and fat-rich seeds and grains such as oats, milo, corn, peas, sunflower seeds, potatoes, peanuts, puffed corn, corn flakes, popcorn, and dried fruits. They are often held together into "sticks" with honey and other sugars, and are marketed with the explanation that they supply needed energy and reflect the rabbit's normal diet.

In reality, a diet of vegetables, hay and restricted pellets provides all the nutrients and energy your house rabbit needs. Seeds are high in fat and are important for wintering animals. Your house rabbit has no such need; in fact, the National Research Council recommends that domestic rabbits receive no more than 1.5% of their calories as fat. Labels on the back of these mueslix products list a minimum fat content of 4-5%; the real value is probably greater. Rabbit metabolism is geared for a low fat diet (in comparison, the average human diet contains 35-40% fat!), and the excess is not burned but is stored as body fat. Rabbits appear to be more sensitive to fat than are humans, and in addition to obesity, the excess fat can accumulate in your rabbit's liver and arteries (atherosclerosis). Veterinarians have reported that rabbits fed seed-rich diets have a much higher incidence of fatty liver disease (hepatic steatosis), which is often fatal. These seeds and grains are also rich in starches. While some of this starch is digested in the small intestine, much of it is not accessible until it reaches the cecum. There it becomes a potent energy form for the cecal bacteria; unlike cellulose fiber, which slows fermentation, starch in the cecum is fermented rapidly and can lead to bacterial overgrowth, bloat, and gi stasis. Manufacturers claim that seeds and grains satisfy "the chewing urge." While this is true, it is far safer and cheaper to satisfy that urge with baskets, untreated wood, and cardboard boxes.

Cereal/veggie blends. These are grain products which may be supplemented with dehydrated vegetables, and shaped into a form which mimics a vegetable product. There is no advantage to feeding these over the real vegetable. One product label lists three different cereals before the dehydrated vegetable! The high carbohydrate content of these snacks means they are robbing your rabbit of important fiber and overloading him with sugars. These products also tout the vitamins that are added back (due to processing); real vegetables will supply as much if not more. With 2.1 ounces costing \$3.09 (\$24 per pound), a pound of carrots and some cardboard provides a healthier and cheaper alternative.

Candies/Sugars. These can include everything from yogurt drops to sweetened papaya tablets. The high sugar is the culprit here. Many rabbits have a sweet tooth, but sweetness means a high content of sugars. As we discussed above, excessive sugar is converted to fat, or will pass into the cecum where the bacteria will use it for energy and then rapidly overgrow, possibly leading to bacterial imbalance and gi stasis. The same can occur after feeding too much fruit. Avoid feeding your rabbit simple sugars and instead stick with nutritious treats such as vegetables and herbs; save the sweets for an occasional raisin or banana snack.

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.

Safe Grooming and Handling Techniques

*House Rabbit Society Literature (P.O. Box 1201, Alameda, CA 94501)
Compiled with the assistance of Dr.Carolynn Harvey, DVM*

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. For information specifically geared towards the caring for long-haired rabbits, see the reprint of the *House Rabbit Journal* article, "The Well-Groomed Rabbit."

Shedding. Rabbits shed every 3 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 & 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 loose 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. I have one Angora rabbit for instance, that gets totally naked except for her face and feet. But, short haired rabbits can do the same thing. 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. Cat flea products are generally safe for rabbits with fleas. It's better to stick with powders and sprays. Carbaryl is the ingredient preferred by the House Rabbit Society's veterinary advisors. One must be hesitant to treat rabbits' fleas aggressively, because the cure can be more stressful than the infestation, so flea baths and dips are not recommended. A flea comb is a non-toxic device, which 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 or as your main flea-control program. If you want to control fleas in the environment with sprays or a flea bomb, do only one room at a time and keep your rabbits out of that room for at least 24 hours.

Baths. Although some bunnies grow up swimming in the family pool and going on camping trips where they paddle around in the lake, most rabbits are not used to this routine and would find even an occasional bath quite stressful. 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. Also, a thoroughly wet rabbit takes a very long time to dry, so spot cleaning the dirty area is better than an over-all bath. Normal rabbit body temperature is 102oF. Since they are subject to heat stress, use a warm dryer, not hot.

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 skin mites or an allergic reaction to fleas. Cat flea powder clears up either condition. A veterinarian should be consulted for other skin irritations.

Feet. 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. 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. Rabbits 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.

Nails. Rabbits 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 I've found that just holding pressure with a cotton ball works better for me. Your veterinarian will also clip nails for you. They should be checked every 6-8 weeks.

Eyes. Watery eyes or and 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.

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 not be lifted by the ears or scruff.** See the House Rabbit Society handout, "Getting off the Ground," for safe ways to lift and carry rabbits.

Do-It-Yourself Cages

Pictures: <www.bunnybuddies.org> – Bunny Buddies website – see the “Lifestyles” Page

Where to buy the panels: One resource is Store Supply Warehouse (www.storesupply.com). They sell the panels individually or as a set with the virtually useless corner connectors. Contact them for a catalog or search their website for “minigrid”. They even sell the cable ties – search for “security tie” – so you can buy everything you need in one place! Fixtures International (in Houston) also sells the panels individually.

Other Resources for Panel-Sets: (not guaranteed)

Target, www.fellowes.com, www.officemax.com, www.staples.com, www.sevilleclassics.com

Additional Supplies:

Nylon cable ties (aka zip ties) – hardware stores usually sell these with electronic stuff – you’ll need 200-400

1 ¼” dowels or 1x2 untreated pine to support shelves

Cardboard, plexiglass or carpet to cover the shelves

Clips to hold door closed – could be “dog leash” style clips or binder clips

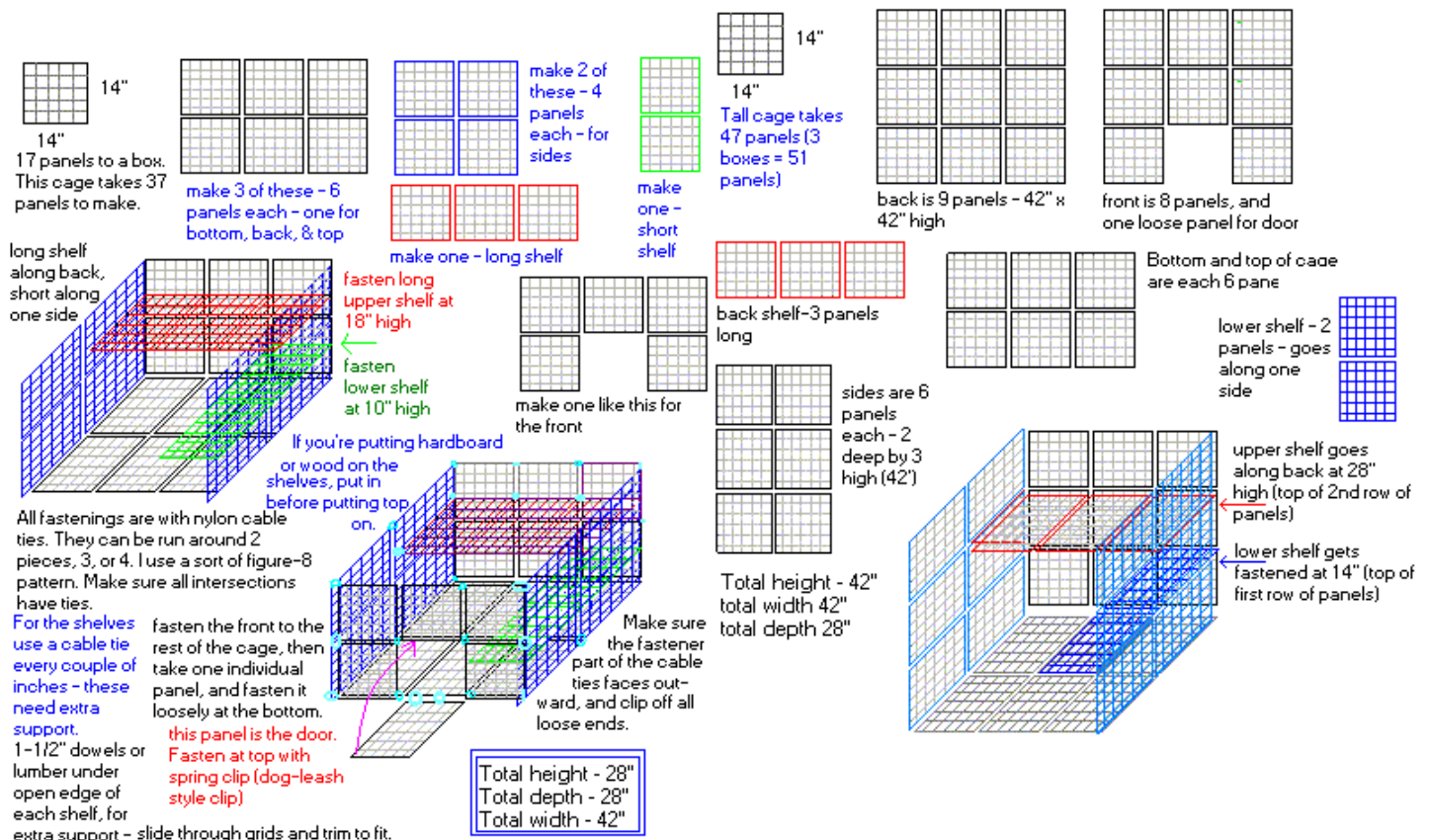
Hard base (plywood, masonite, etc.) – cover it with waterproof material & attach wheels if you want a mobile cage

Other Instructions:

Blackie inspired the original “NIC Cages” (©1997 by Lynne M. Skerlec), which can be seen on the web.

<members.xoom.com/myblackie/NeatIdeaCubescondos.htm>

These graphics have been reproduced with permission from Kelly Wagner. Further instructions and pictures are available on the web. <members.aol.com/bunrabtoo/neatcubs.html>



Do-It-Yourself Cages

This cage belongs to Benji & Sheba and can be seen on the Bunny Buddies website on the "Lifestyles" Page. It is made from Great Cubes™ and uses outdoor carpet runners on the shelves and bottom floor.

