

Rabbit Diet:

- **Hay** - This is the most important part of a rabbit diet. Rabbits groom themselves just like cats, but are unable to cough up hairballs. Hay keeps the rabbit intestine moving, and pushes the hair through their system. A healthy rabbit should be eating roughly twice its size in hay piles each day. Choose a low calorie grass hay like timothy, oat, or orchard grass, (not alfalfa) and make sure there is fresh hay available to your rabbit at all times.

- **Pellets** - Pellets provide all the basic nutrition your rabbit needs. However, they were designed by breeders for quick growth and weight gain. Give young rabbits (under 6 months old) all the pellets they can eat, but adult rabbits should be limited to only ½ cup per day for a 5 pound rabbit. Make sure you choose a plain pellet, not one with seeds and other bits.



- **Greens** - After your rabbit is eating tons of hay, you may want to serve a variety of green leafy vegetables. Start with one small leaf and gradually increase to about 1 cup of greens twice a day. Good greens include romaine lettuce (no iceberg), kale, dandelion greens, collard greens, mustard greens, parsley, cilantro, mint, basil, dill, wheat grass, and carrot tops. Try to serve 3 different greens each day.

- **Treats** - Treats, like carrots, apples, bananas, are a great way to earn the friendship and trust of your rabbit, but should only be given in small amounts. Giving a rabbit a whole carrot is about as healthy as giving a child a large bag of cookies for dinner. Any more than one small slice of apple or one baby carrot per day can give your rabbit an upset stomach. Try to avoid pet store treats and stick to fruits and carrots.



For more information...

Books:

- *House Rabbit Handbook* by Marinell Harriman
- *Why Does My Rabbit...?* by Anne McBride
- *Hop to It: A Guide to Training Your Pet Rabbit* by Samantha Hunter, Samantha Fraser
- *Creating a Peaceable Kingdom: How to Live with More Than One Pet* by Cynthia D. Miller

Websites:

- <http://www.rabbit.org> - The official website of the House Rabbit Society, for excellent information on diet, care, health, toys, training, and veterinary recommendations.
- <http://www.muridae.com/rabbits/rabbittalk.html> - How to understand your rabbit's body language
- <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/etherbun> - An e-mail list serve for help with rabbit health and behavior.
- <http://www.rabbit.org/chapters/san-francisco/index.html> - For local information.

Contacts:

- The Humane Society of Santa Clara Valley Animal Behavior Helpline - (408) 727-3383 x753
- The San Francisco Peninsula House Rabbit Society - (650) 994-1012



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Adopting a Rabbit

The decision to adopt any pet is a very important one, and should be made with as much information as possible. Rabbits make wonderful pets. They can be playful, affectionate and valued members of a family. However, they are also some of the most misunderstood animals at this shelter. This pamphlet will provide you with some basic information to help you decide if your home and your family is the right one for a rabbit.



Rabbit Personality:

Rabbits are social mammals. In the wild, they live in large communities, or warrens, and often play, snuggle and work together. Because of this, they can become wonderful companion pets. Many rabbits love to sit by a cherished human and be gently stroked, and some will even return the favor and groom you with their tongue. However, rabbits are also very shy. This is because they are prey animals. They are easily frightened sudden movements or loud noises, and they will do anything to avoid being picked up or held. Be aware that a frightened animal may hurt a child, and carefully consider your child's personality before choosing a rabbit as a pet.

Rabbits are also very curious, playful animals. If you have never seen a rabbit at play, you are missing one of life's great treasures. They love to explore, run, make acrobatic leaps and even "dance." Because of this curiosity and boundless energy, they are rarely very happy confined to a cage all day, and will need several hours of exercise. It is relatively easy to train a rabbit to use a litter box, and with a properly rabbit proofed room or house, you may even find that you never need to lock the cage door!

Rabbit housing:

Before bringing your rabbit home, you should set up a space in your house for the rabbit to live. Choose a quiet room where you will be comfortable spending time with your rabbit, and make sure there is plenty of space for a large cage. Your rabbit's cage must have at least 4 square feet of floor space (24" by 24") to meet humane treatment standards, but this is not enough room for most rabbits to move around. We suggest looking for a cage that is at least 24" by 34". Multi-level cages are excellent, but make sure there is enough head room on each level. You will want the cage to be on the floor so you do not need to pick up your rabbit to get it out of the cage at play time.

Cage set-up:

Inside your rabbit's new home, you will need several things. You will need food and water dishes. Since many rabbits see these as toys, consider buying the kind that can be attached to the side of the cage. You will also need a litter box filled with a layer of paper based litter like Carefresh or Yesterday's News, not cedar or pine which contain chemicals called phenols which can be harmful to your pet. Put a pile of hay on top of the litter to make your rabbit more eager to hop in and use it. Finally, find a small cardboard box, and cut a door or two in it. This gives your shy rabbit a place to go and hide while he getting to know you. There should still be some space left in the cage for your rabbit to just hang out and hop.



Rabbit proofing your home:

You will need to choose at least one large room that you can set up as a safe place for your rabbit to play in. The biggest danger to a rabbit in a human household is electrical cords. ALL cords must be hidden behind heavy furniture that your rabbit can't crawl under, or wrapped in plastic cord covers. You will also want to make sure chewable things like books, magazines and houseplants are put away out of the rabbit's reach. You may want to treat wooden furniture with a chewing repellent like "bitter apple." Some rabbits like to dig in corners, so put down grass mats to protect your carpet.

Rabbit care:

Rabbits can be high maintenance pets and need lots of care on a daily basis. They need to be fed greens and pellets every morning and evening. They need their water bottle or bowl cleaned and refilled daily. The



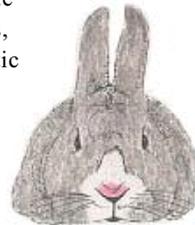
litter boxes should be emptied daily, and need to be cleaned with white vinegar to prevent odor at least weekly. Hay is a messy food, so the area around the rabbit's cage may also need frequent cleaning. In addition, the rabbit will need at least two hours of supervised exercise time out of his cage every day. While they are out and about they need to be brushed and petted, and once a month you should clip their nails (it is good to have your vet show you how to do this the first time). Because of the sheer amount of care your rabbit needs an adult must take the responsibility to see that all this gets done.

Veterinary needs:

Rabbits have few veterinary needs. Rabbits do not need vaccinations at the moment, although this may change in the near future. However, we recommend that you take your rabbit to a vet for yearly checkups. Keeping your rabbit healthy requires watching carefully for any signs at home. Call your vet and ask about any changes you see, and make sure your rabbit is eating plenty of hay. If your rabbit does not eat or poop for 1 day, it is an emergency and you must take your rabbit to the veterinarian immediately.

Toys:

Your rabbit will also need several toys, both for chewing to wear down their teeth, and for fun. Good chew toys include cardboard boxes, unpainted wood baskets, grapevine wreaths, natural whisk brooms, grass mats, and, of course, hay. Most rabbits ignore pet store chews. Other toys just for fun include plastic baby keys and cat balls to toss, old phone books to shred, small plastic slinkies to stretch, and towels to bunch. Each rabbit has different taste in toys, so try different things until you find something your rabbit likes, other than tossing food dishes!



Litter training:

Litter training starts in the cage, and until your rabbit learns to use a litter box there, you should not allow him play time out of the cage. Cover the entire floor of the cage with newspaper, place a litter box in one corner, and put a few of the rabbit's droppings in the box so it will smell right. When your rabbit makes a mistake, do not rub his nose in it or shout, as this will frighten him and make him less likely to use his box. Simply place the soiled newspaper into the box. Reward your rabbit whenever you see him in the box. If your rabbit continually uses the same spot out of the litter box for peeing, consider moving the litter box to that area of the cage. Most rabbits will litter train rather quickly, although many will drop the occasional stray poop around their cage to mark it.



Once your rabbit is successfully trained in his cage, you may invite him out to play in one rabbit proofed room. Place 2 or 3 litter boxes in convenient places around the room, and settle down to watch your rabbit. If you see him lift his tail, he is probably about to pee. Gently pick him up and set him in a litter box, and give him a treat. Again, do not shout at him or rub his nose in a mistake. Rabbit wet mistakes can easily be cleaned up with white vinegar or a commercial enzyme cleaner, and rabbit dry mistakes can be picked up and placed in the nearest litter box.

Other training techniques:

Rabbits occasionally get into trouble, especially if they are bored. To discourage misbehavior such as digging on or chewing your furniture, make a loud noise by clapping, slapping the wall or shouting "No!", then offer the rabbit a playful alternative. Some owners also use a spray bottle. Occasionally a rabbit will nip to get their owner's attention. Shout "ouch" loudly as if you are in pain to stop this.