

Bunny 101: How to be Your Bunny's Best Friend

Why a House Bunny?

Rabbits are highly intelligent, loving, loyal, utterly delightful companions. Nothing feels as special as earning the love and trust of a bunny. Nothing is as magical as your bunny sprawled out on the carpet while you read a book or sharing the couch while you watch TV together.

Bunnies are clean, quiet, don't smell, love the sound of human voices, enjoy living indoors, and are perfect companion pets for people who are open to new experiences.

A. Keep Bunny Indoors

1. Protection from the elements—heat, cold, wind, rain
2. Protection from trauma—dogs, cats, raccoons, escape
3. Less chance of infection by the myxoma virus now present in Sonoma County. Myxomatosis is spread by mosquitoes, fleas, ticks, mites and is 100% fatal to domestic rabbits. (Read ***Rabbit Health Alert***)
4. Hutches are not designed for you to interact with your bunny. Out of sight; out of mind.
5. Hutches are not designed for you to litter box train your bunny.
6. Hutches with their wire grids harm rabbits' delicate feet.
7. Hutches are hard to clean.

Exercise Pens in your House

1. Inexpensive, easy to set up, easy to move around, easy to clean. A safe "home base" for house bunnies. (Read ***Bringing Bunny Home***)
2. Perfect for socializing and interacting with your bunny.

Ex-Pen Set Up

1. Protect your floors—linoleum, heavy vinyl, plastic carpet runners cut to length
2. Heavy ceramic water bowl and smaller ceramic food bowl
3. Proper-sized litter box with organic litters
Litters: wheat, oat, and fiber-based litter and paper-based litters like **Carefresh, Critter Country, Eco-Straw** by Oxbow. **NO pine shavings, cedar shavings, or clumping litters.** Pine and cedar shavings lead to respiratory disease, liver disease, and skin disease. Clumping litters end up in bunny's stomach after grooming and can cause life-threatening intestinal obstructions.
4. Hay in litter box—oat hay, orchard grass or timothy hay, **NO alfalfa hay** for adult rabbits
5. Washable rugs/towels
6. Toys and Chews—straw whisk brooms; sea grass mats; cardboard boxes; untreated wicker baskets, tents and tubes, paper egg cartons

7. Location—No drafts. Clean, dry, light. No direct sunlight. Comfortable.

TIP: If your bunny is insistent about using a particular corner for urination, put a litter box in that corner. (Read *Litter Training Your Bunny*)

B. Spaying/Neutering

1. Improves behavior problems like house soiling, spraying, aggression, and destructive chewing and digging.
2. Longer life. Up to 80% of unspayed female rabbits have uterine cancer by the age of five years.
3. Makes rabbits better companions.
4. Helps avoid overpopulation at shelters.

(Read *Why You Should Spay/Neuter Your Rabbit*)

Surgery must be performed by veterinarian experienced in spay/neuter procedures and anesthesia for rabbits.

C. Diet

HAY

1. Timothy/Oat/Orchard grass hay. No alfalfa hay as it is too high in calcium. **Rabbits need large amounts of hay to maintain proper intestinal functioning. NO STRAW! STRAW IS NOT HAY!**
2. Store your hay in a dry place. Moldy hay can kill your bunny.
3. Change the hay every day. Bunnies will only eat fresh hay.

VEGETABLES

1. Escarole, endive, leafy green/red lettuce, romaine, cilantro, dill, basil, mint, kale, fennel, bok choy, carrot tops. **NO** iceberg lettuce.
(Read *Feeding Your Bunny*)
2. **Very small** piece of apple twice a week as a treat
3. Never give corn, potatoes, beans, avocado
4. Never give candy, cookies, crackers, bread, cereal, seeds, nuts or any of the treats for rabbits sold in pet stores.
5. Never give meat or cheese.
6. Never give spoiled food you would not feed your family.

PELLETED FOOD

1. Low protein, high fiber **timothy hay** pellets like **Zupreem: Nature's Promise Rabbit Food** or **Oxbow: Essentials for Adult Rabbits**
2. Measure a set amount of pellets each day. Do NOT free feed pellets.
3. **AVOID "deluxe" pellets which contain fruit bits and seeds**—this type of food often leads to obesity, diarrhea, and other medical problems.
4. **AVOID** pellets from feed store bulk bins since the source and freshness of the pellets is unknown.

D. Bunny Proofing (Read *Rabbit Proofing Your Home*)

Electrical Cords

1. Plastic tubing (1/2" inside diameter; 3/4" outside) slit lengthwise with a blade or heavy shears and tuck the wire inside.
2. Decorative gold and wood-grained wire concealers that stick to baseboards or walls
3. Wires blocked off or run under, behind, or above furniture

Baseboards, Carpets and Furniture

1. Towel or fabric on chairs to protect upholstery
2. Carpet samples over carpet; Heavy tiles or bricks in corners
3. Board velcroed over baseboards making them inaccessible
4. Repellents like perfume, deodorant, oil of cloves
5. Distract and divert by placing toys to chew around the house
6. Digging box—put shredded paper or hay in a covered cat litter box or cardboard box with holes cut high in two sides.
7. Cardboard concrete tube forms behind sofa or bed

Household items

1. Place items you don't want chewed out of reach.
2. Explain this to guests in your house. Especially thin leather sandals and expensive handbag straps.

Other Hazards

1. Poisonous Plants—Remove them.
2. Rubber Bands—Throw them away immediately.
3. Open doors or cat doors—Keep them closed.
4. Visiting Dogs—Put bunny in a safe place.
5. Visiting Children—Put bunny in a safe place.

TIP: Bunnies cannot be trained like a dog can. With love and patience, you can teach your bunny what is acceptable and what is not. The only effective way to train a bunny away from undesirable behaviors is with positive reinforcement and a firm "NO" when the bunny is being naughty.

E. Health and Happiness

1. Don't neglect your bunny. Neglect creates behavioral problems.
2. Talk to reassure them and gain their trust. Bunnies find the sound of people talking very calming.
3. Sudden movements can startle a bunny, especially at night

Picking up, Holding and Petting

1. Bunnies don't like to be picked up. Rabbits have many predators and are always fearful. They do not like being held above the ground where they can't escape if they feel they are going to be eaten.
2. Sit on the floor and let the bunny come to you. Remain quiet and patient. Bunnies are curious and eventually will come over to sniff you.

3. Most bunnies enjoy being held and petted once they have learned to trust you and are feeling at home.

Minimize noise; Minimize stress

Bunnies are music critics. No Drums. No subwoofers. No loud music. No heavy metal. Find soft, soothing music. (Of course every rabbit has different taste in music)

TIP: A bunny is often happier living with a human, a cat, or guinea pig than with an unfamiliar rabbit.

Daily health check

1. Dry, round marbles in the litter box—GOOD
 - a. **Excessive soft clusters** left unconsumed, may mean the diet is too protein-rich.
 - b. **Small hard scanty droppings** mean less is coming through the intestinal tract.
 - c. **Strung marbles** together in ropes of hair indicate excessive hair is being swallowed.
 - d. **Watery diarrhea** means digestion has shut down.
 - e. **No marbles** at all means your bunny is starving to death.
2. Empty food dish—GOOD
3. **WARNING!!! If your bunny has not eaten, drunk water, or pooped for six hours, he is already very ill. Take him to your rabbit doctor immediately.**

Annual bunny health check up

Vet will check toenails, teeth, ears, weight, respiratory and digestive systems.

TIP: Use Advantage (the one made for small cats) on bunny if other household animals go outdoors. Ask your vet for proper type and dosage. No bathing. No flea powder.

F. Bunnies and Respectful Children (Read *Teaching Children to Be Rabbit People*)

1. Bunnies are wonderful family pets where the parents want the rabbit as part of the family as much as the child and an adult will be the bunny's primary companion and caregiver. **Parents have the ultimate responsibility for the bunny's well-being.**
2. Bunnies are naturally fearful and need a lot of quiet, patient, loving attention. **Do not use a rabbit or any animal to teach children responsibility.**
3. Children are easily bored. Rabbits can live 10-12 years. **Children cannot be depended upon to care for the bunny.**

4. Bunnies have delicate backs that can be easily broken if bunnies are picked up improperly or dropped. **Do not let children pick up and/or carry bunny around.**
5. Plan a safe place for bunny to retreat to when he tires of the children.

G. Bunnies and Cats

Can be compatible. It is important that the rabbit is of equal size to the cat and the cat is not a hunter.

H. Bunnies and Dogs

Not recommended. Dogs are natural predators. House rabbits need to be kept indoors, safely separated from dogs.