

**I'm a lonely pet rabbit.
Please open to help me out.**



Thank you.

By reading this leaflet you can help your pet rabbit have a happier, healthier future.

A hutch is not enough. Pet rabbits need...



Shelter
somewhere dry for them to rest and hide



Exercise
space to run, jump and stand up just like their wild cousins



Companionship
a neutered, compatible friend



The right diet
85% feeding hay or grass,
10% greens, 5% food pellets



Vet care
regular check-ups,
vaccinations, neutering



Enrichment
tubes, hidey holes, digging
and grazing areas



Your pet rabbits are active and social animals.

Open up their world to a happy, healthy life.

Shelter and exercise

To avoid painful skeletal problems, pet rabbits must have daily exercise. They need to run, jump, hide and dig, and choose when they rest or play.

Rabbits are 'crepuscular' and most active at dusk and dawn (times when we would have traditionally locked them up for the night). That's why their living area must be designed to allow them to safely follow their own body clock.

A permanent, secure living area of **3m X 2m X 1m high** where they can rest, forage, dig, rear up tall, run and hide is a minimum.

Alternatively, you'll need to provide as big a safe exercise area as possible, permanently attached to their hutch or shed. It's vital that your rabbits have access to this full living area 24/7, and are not relying on you to lift them in and out of their hutch.

Rabbits do enjoy running loose around the garden, but they will need supervision as there are risks to the rabbits, and of course to your plants!

If you have indoor rabbits then an area of 3m x 2m can be provided using puppy panels. Indoor cages are only suitable to hold a litter tray, they should never be the sole or main accommodation for any rabbit.

Regardless of whether yours are indoor or outdoor rabbits, exercise areas must always provide places to hide. Cardboard boxes with two holes cut out are ideal.

"You've told me how much space I need for two rabbits, how about if I just have one?"

Rabbits should always be kept in neutered, compatible pairs, but one rabbit would need just as much space as two to run and play.

Companionship

Rabbits are social animals. They love to snuggle together, groom each other and keep each other warm, so they should be kept in neutered, compatible pairs.

A neutered male/female pair is easiest, but introductions should still be carefully supervised! There is lots of information in our On The Hop booklet on how to do this, or check our website.

Toys

Rabbits need things to keep them occupied, such as plastic tunnels, large plant pots, hay-filled litter trays and planters of earth to dig in.

Wild rabbits spend several hours foraging for food daily, so use your imagination when feeding yours. Scatter food on the floor or use a treat ball, rather than feeding in a bowl.

Toys are also a great way to provide constant access to hay.

A huge variety of pet rabbit toys can be found in pet shops, but even a simple cardboard box will give them hours of shredding fun! (Don't let them eat the cardboard though).



Your rabbits should have a permanent, secure living area of **3m X 2m X 1m high** as a minimum

Rabbit housing: design & location

A shed or a Wendy house is the best option for a rabbit house. Whatever you choose, it must be a large solid construction, both predator and weather proof. As a minimum, look for something 6ft x 2ft x 2ft and make sure the door fastenings, hinges and wire are strong enough to keep foxes out.

Be imaginative! Why not make your rabbits' home an attractive garden feature? Create an ideal home by attaching an aviary or run to a garden shed, summer house, or Wendy house using something as simple as a cat flap. Just make sure it's secure!

Remember:

- **Ventilation is important – both wood and plastic housing can overheat rapidly in summer**
- **Keep them safe - all doors, panels, and wire mesh must be predator proof with secure fastenings**
- **Stay high and dry – if you're using a hutch as a bedroom, it must be raised on legs to give protection from damp, and to deter vermin**

Roofs should be covered with roofing felt, sloped to allow water to run-off, and have an overhang. Rabbits can't tolerate damp, draughts or excess heat so locate their house in a sheltered area and out of direct sunlight or driving snow and rain. In the colder months provide extra warmth in the form of extra dry bedding and insulation.



Permanent exercise area: design

Permanent enclosures are best situated on an easy to clean base such as paving slabs, where you can place digging and grazing trays. Permanent grass enclosures can quickly turn to mud and rabbits can dig out and escape, but if there is no alternative then include a wire-mesh skirt to prevent the rabbits from digging their way out. Boxes and tunnels ensure rabbits can play, hide and shelter too.

Safety first

All too often pet rabbits are snatched from gardens by predators. You must protect your rabbits from attack by dogs, cats, foxes, ferrets, other rodents and birds of prey. Chicken wire provides little protection – instead use strong welded mesh, with sturdy door fasteners.

Exercise areas need a secure roof to keep the rabbits in and predators out! All hinges and catches must be strong and secure. Lockable bolts are recommended (swivel catches and hooks aren't secure enough). Ideally, padlock all doors to prevent rabbits being stolen. Check all doors, hinges, fastenings and mesh regularly.

If your rabbits are allowed to roam free in the garden:

- **They must be supervised the whole time**
- **The garden must be escape proof**
- **There must be bolt-holes where the rabbits can hide if they are startled or nervous**
- **They must not be able to access poisonous plants**

The right diet

A good diet is essential. It keeps rabbits healthy and can also help to prevent boredom. As a general rule, rabbits need a diet based on 85% grass or feeding hay, 10% greens and 5% good quality nuggets. The key is to mimic what rabbits would eat in the wild. Don't forget water too - bowls are better than bottles as lapping from a bowl is more natural to rabbits.

Keeping rabbits healthy

It's important to sign up with a rabbit-savvy vet who will give you advice on vaccinations, neutering and diet. You'll find a list of suitable vets on our website.

In addition, you must carry out your own regular health checks and take them to the vet at the first sign of a problem. Our on the hop booklet explains how to do home health checks. Rabbits are at risk from the deadly diseases rhd & myxomatosis so remember to keep vaccinations up to date too.

Flystrike



Flies can lay eggs on rabbits, leading to a maggot infestation which can cause a horrible death. This is known as flystrike and rabbits who are unable to clean themselves or suffer from obesity, dental disease, dirty bottoms, arthritis

and skin wounds are at the highest risk. Flies are also attracted to rabbits living in dirty conditions, so always keep your rabbits' living area clean. Even rabbits kept in clean environments may develop soiled backsides and attract flies. You must thoroughly check your rabbits every day, particularly in the summer months.

If you find maggots you must go to the vet immediately. Your vet will clip the fur and remove the maggots. The fur must be dry so don't be tempted to wash it yourself. Check our on the hop booklet or website for more information.

Rabbit myth:

Only cartoon rabbits live on carrots! In fact, whilst most rabbits do enjoy eating carrots, they should be given in very limited quantities as they are high in sugar.

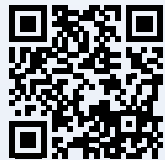


Join us!

Give your rabbits the best care while helping us to provide better tomorrows for all UK pet rabbits by becoming a member of the **Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund**.

As a member you will receive:

- Quarterly issues of 'Rabbiting On' magazine
- Home alone card
- Comprehensive rabbit care guide 'On the Hop'
- Car sticker
- Exclusive access to our specialist rabbit advice service (via your vet)



Join today at shop.rabbitwelfare.co.uk or scan the barcode.

Standard membership

only
£24
a year!



Contact details

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