Housing

### Cage

**SIZE**: Minimum of approximately 12 sq feet for 1-2 rabbits. The best way to measure minimum area is to measure your rabbit. The habitat should be wide enough for your rabbit to stretch out, long enough for him to hop 3-4 times across and tall enough for him to stand on his back legs without touching the roof.

**MATERIAL**: Most rabbit cages you find in the stores are much too small on their own. It is recommended to either build your own cage (see right) or expand your cage with fencing or an exercise pen. Many rabbits do great free range or with their own room as rabbits are very easily potty trained.

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Example

One of the best cage options is a homemade cage called a C&C (cubes and coroplast) cage. It is fairly easy to make and inexpensive compared to cages sold at pet stores. It is also very easy to clean and provides appropriate space. The bigger the better!

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### Bedding

**GOOD**

- CareFresh
- shredded paper
- paper towels
- Yesterday’s News (paper pellets)
- fleece

**BAD**

- cedar
- pine
- corn cob
- saw dust
- clay cat litter

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MN Pocket Pet Rescue recommends avoiding all wood bedding to avoid respiratory illness.

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### Furnishings

Decking out your rabbits’ habitat with not only the essentials but also an assortment of fun stuff to do is incredibly important for the happiness and well-being of your bunnies. It is ideal to change out the toys and furnishings for them in addition to providing a variety and number of items to keep them from getting bored.

**Why chew toys?** Rabbits are lagamorphs, closely related to rodents, which means their teeth constantly grow. They require chew toys to gnaw on in order to keep their teeth trim.

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**ESSENTIALS**

- water bowl or bottle
- food dish
- shelter (box, igloo, etc)
- chew toy (wood, lava)

**FUN STUFF**

- tunnels
- toilet paper tubes
- fiddlesticks
- fleece blankets
- cat jingle balls
- pet beds
- cardboard
- wooden toys
- treat balls
- hay huts
**Diet**

**Hay**: Timothy hay, orchard grass or meadow hay should be available to your bunnies 24/7. Only rabbits under 8 months should have alfalfa hay. A rabbit’s digestive system needs hay in order to function properly.

**Greens**: Offer about 1 cup of greens per day per 2 lbs of body weight.

**Pellets**: Feed 1/4 cup per 5 lbs of body weight of timothy pellets per day per rabbit. Pellets are not a substitute for hay!

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**Treats**

**Good**
- alfalfa, radish & clover sprouts
- basil
- bok choy
- broccoli
- carrots
- cilantro
- clover
- collard greens
- dandelion greens and flowers (no pesticides)
- green peppers
- kale
- romaine lettuce
- red or green lettuce
- mint
- mustard greens
- parsley
- peppermint leaves
- radish tops
- spinach
- wheat grass
- apples (no core/seeds)
- bananas
- blackberries
- blueberries
- cranberries
- grapes
- mango
- melons
- raspberries
- strawberries

**Bad**
- iceberg lettuce
- chocolate
- crackers
- cereal
- pasta
- bread
- chilies
- hot peppers
- garlic
- onions
- peanut butter
- baked goods
- nuts
- meat
- seeds
- potatoes
- cabbage

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Check out this comprehensive guide to safe rabbit foods for more information:

http://rabbit.org/suggested-vegetables-and-fruits-for-a-rabbit-diet/

*These food items should be given sparingly.
RABBIT CARE GUIDE

Exercise & Social Needs

EXERCISE

FLOOR TIME: Floor time and exercise is very important for a rabbit. Time outside the cage for a rabbit should be spent running around, exploring and playing. It is strongly recommended that there be at least four hours of free range play time in a bunny safe environment every day.

WHEEL: Never use a wheel or exercise ball with your rabbit. These items can cause injury to your bunny’s back, feet or toes.

BUNNY PROOFING: When having outside playtime be sure to secure the area so your rabbits can’t escape the designated area. Always hide or cover all cords and outlets, put away anything that you do not want chewed on including house plants. Make sure your pets cannot get into small spaces that you cannot reach into such as under the fridge or in couch cushions. If you have other pets, secure them in another room or a crate.

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SOCIAL NEEDS

BONDED BUDDIES: Rabbits are very social and will be happiest when living with other rabbits. It is strongly recommended to keep a minimum of two bunnies at a time. Never keep unaltered same sex pairs together. MNPPR only adopts out rabbits who have been spayed or neutered.

KEY COMPONENTS OF TRAINING
- trust
- positive reinforcement
- consistency
- repetition
- patience

LEARN HOW TO TRAIN YOUR RABBIT
http://wabbitwiki.com/wiki/Training_a_rabbit

TEACHING YOUR RABBIT TO TRUST YOU

Every time you approach your rabbit’s habitat, bring a small treat for your pet. They will learn to associate you with pleasant things and look forward to your visits. Never feed treats through cage bars or your bunny may start to nip fingers.

A great way to bond with your rabbits is letting them out of their cage to run around. Be sure to watch your bunnies for cues. If they come to you, pet them, but leave them alone if they don’t want to be touched. Rabbits in the wild are prey animals which means they are hunted and eaten by other animals, so when you go to pet them, get down at their level and DO NOT chase them. The more you let them out to play, the sooner they will be comfortable with you.

Speak softly to your rabbit so it get used to your voice.

Coax your rabbit in and out of the cage rather than picking him up or pulling him out of the cage forcefully.
RABBIT CARE GUIDE

Health

GENERAL INFO

ANNUAL EXAM: It is important to take your rabbit to the vet for an annual exam, to ensure your bunny is in good health. Rabbits do not require vaccines.

LIFESPAN: 8 - 10 years

REPRODUCTION: Rabbits become sexually mature and are able to reproduce between 3 and 6 months of age. It is recommended to spay female rabbits between 4 - 6 months of age and neuter males between 3 - 4 months of age.

GENERAL SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- any behavioral change
- lethargy
- defensive aggression
- disinterested in treats
- changes in eating or drinking
- disinterested in interacting with you
- poor coat quality
- head tilt
- teeth grinding

COMMON ISSUES

DENTAL PROBLEMS

Due to the structure of rabbits’ teeth, they can be prone to dental problems such as malocclusion. If your rabbit is drooling/has saliva build up on the face, has bad breath, decreased appetite, weight loss or lumps on the face, get him to the vet immediately. Rabbits can starve to death if their teeth are not working properly or are painful. Dental problems often require x-rays and tooth filing or abscess removal under anesthesia. Rabbits keep their back teeth trim by eating hay so be sure your rabbit is grazing throughout the day.

GASTROINTESTINAL STASIS

One of the biggest killers of pet rabbits is GI stasis; this is when your rabbit’s GI system is blocked up. Signs to watch for are lack of eating, drinking or pooping and smaller, stringy or misshapen droppings. If you see these symptoms, take your rabbit to the vet immediately. To prevent this condition be sure your rabbit is eating lots of fiber (grass hay), brush him several times a week so he doesn’t ingest as much hair while grooming and ensuring your rabbit has at least 4 hours of exercise per day - exercise keeps the gut moving.

RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS

Rabbits can be sensitive creatures and can easily develop respiratory infections which can quickly turn into pneumonia. If you notice that your rabbit is sneezing, has eye or nose discharge, has a lack of appetite or is lethargic, get him to a vet as soon as possible. Rabbits, like most pocket pets, are prey animals and thus tend to hide any weakness or illness for as long as possible. This means that by the time you notice symptoms, your pet is usually very sick. To help avoid respiratory illness, keep your rabbit’s cage away from drafts, clean the cage often, use fleece for bedding, keep stress to a minimum and provide your pet with as large of habitat as possible.

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

If you notice that your rabbit has darkened or beige colored urine, bloody urine, or frequent urination in small amounts he may have a urinary tract infection. If left untreated can cause a blockage in your pet’s urinary tract which is life threatening. If your pet has these symptoms, he will need antibiotics from a vet. Avoiding alfalfa in rabbits over 8 months of age and ensuring lots of water intake can help prevent UTIs.
RABBIT CARE GUIDE

Handling & Grooming

SAFE HANDLING

PICKING UP YOUR RABBIT: Most rabbits tolerate but do not enjoy being picked up as they feel more safe and secure on the ground, so try to only pick up your bunny when necessary. Always use two hands when picking up your rabbit. One hand should support the rump while the other supports the chest. Hold him close to your body. It sometimes helps to talk to him softly to comfort your bunny. Never pick your rabbit up by the ears, legs or tail - this is very painful and harmful to your pet!

TRUST: It is ideal to let your rabbits come to you before reaching in to pick them up as this develops trust. Talk to your bunny and let it sniff your hand before you pick it up to announce that you are coming.

GROOMING

DENTAL CARE: You do not need to brush your rabbit's teeth but you must provide plenty of hay and chew toys so your bunny can wear down its teeth naturally. Check your rabbit's teeth regularly to be sure they are not overgrown or misaligned. If they are, take him to the vet as they will need to be trimmed by a professional.

BATHING: Bathing is strongly discouraged as rabbits can go into shock from stress and hypothermia. If your rabbit is ill and has a messy bottom, your vet may instruct you to give him a “butt bath” which involves only getting the rabbit's rear end wet.

BRUSHING: Unlike cats, rabbits cannot vomit so hairballs can be a very serious concern. Help your rabbit out by brushing him at least once a week. Every three months, rabbits go through a molting period where they shed large chunks of fur, during this time you must brush your rabbit daily.

SCENT GLANDS: Occasionally you may notice a strong musky smell on your pet which can indicate that there is buildup in the scent glands on either side of the anus. Simply dip a cotton swab in warm water and wipe away the buildup.

Rabbits need their nails trimmed regularly, usually every 4-5 weeks. You can do this at home or have your vet do it for you. Rabbits have five toes on their front feet and four toes on their back feet.

When trimming your rabbit's nails, be sure to only clip the clear part of the nail, avoiding the pink vein (quick.) Use small animal or cat nail clippers and try to cover up the toe with your fingers so that only the nail is exposed. If you accidentally cut the quick, dip your pet's foot in cornflour or styptic powder. It is often easier to trim nails if you have second person to hold the rabbit. Nail trims can be scary for a rabbit so be sure to give breaks and lots of treats! Sometimes it is easier on you and your bunny if you only do one or two feet per session.
RABBITS have a very complex communication and hierarchy system. This is a guide to the most common sounds and behaviors. Rabbits communicate mostly through body language. Check out The Language of Lagamorphs (http://language.rabbit-speak.com) to learn more!

### Vocalization

**Grunting**: When angry, displeased, or trying to defend his territory, rabbits will make a kazoo sounding noise called a grunt.

**Teeth Chattering/Grinding**: If your rabbit is grinding his teeth softly this indicates pleasure and contentment. If he is grinding hard and loudly, this can indicate pain.

**Clucking**: This also sounds a little like hiccups and it means your bunny is content and relaxed.

**Shrieking**: A piercing, high pitched squeal means extreme fear or pain.

### Body Language

**Binkying**: Rabbits hop, bounce, leap and run around when they are happy and having fun. This is also called popcorning.

**Flopping**: When your rabbit flops down on its side, it means it is happy and relaxed. If they flop around you it means he is comfortable with you being around him.

**Thumping**: When a rabbit is annoyed, displeased or defending his territory, he will stomp his hind leg on the ground making a loud thump.

**Scent Marking**: Like cats, rabbits rub their faces on items to mark them with their scent.

**Mounting**: This is either a sexual behavior or a dominant behavior.

**Nudging**: “A rabbit will present itself for grooming by coming right up next to you, maybe nudging you a bit with its nose or poking its nose under your hand or foot, then lowering its chin and chest to the ground, and stretching its head forward while keeping its rear up a bit.” - The Language of Lagamorphs. This means your rabbit wants you to pet him!

**Signs of Aggression**: When rabbits are particularly annoyed or are defending their territory, they will sometimes get up on their hind legs and box or even charge and box or bite. If your rabbit is displaying these actions, remove whatever is stressing your rabbit and leave him alone.