

## Before You Adopt, Buy for Bunny:

- ❑ **Exercise pen or pet gate** to block off an area of your home for bunny to live in. 30" high minimum with a cover until you're sure bunny won't jump over.
- ❑ **Litter box** for the hay and litter. The larger, the better.
- ❑ **Grass hay:** timothy, oat blend, or orchard grass.
- ❑ **Rabbit pellets:** plain pellets with no nuts, seeds, or colored bits.
- ❑ **Litter** can be newspaper, plain wood pellets, aspen or paper-based commercial litters. Make sure the litter is safe for rabbits!
- ❑ **Fresh produce:** leafy greens, including Romaine lettuce, parsley, and cilantro. See our dietary recommendations.
- ❑ **Water/food dishes:** heavy crocks, a big one for water, a smaller one for food.
- ❑ **Carrier:** hard plastic, preferably top opening, with an artificial sheepskin liner.
- ❑ **White vinegar** to clean the litter box.
- ❑ **Toys to fling and chew:** jingle ball toys, organic willow or apple twigs.
- ❑ **Hideaway:** untreated wooden houses or cardboard houses.
- ❑ **Grooming tools:** cat claw trimmer, rubber brush, styptic powder.
- ❑ **Flooring:** tiles, linoleum or other solid surface are best until you know bunny won't chew carpets.
- ❑ **Rabbit-proofing:** cord covers and corner protectors.

**Do NOT Buy:**  
Wire cages, hutches, harnesses,  
hay racks, yogurt drops, salt licks,  
seed and nut treats.

## Before You Adopt a Bunny, Please Consider:

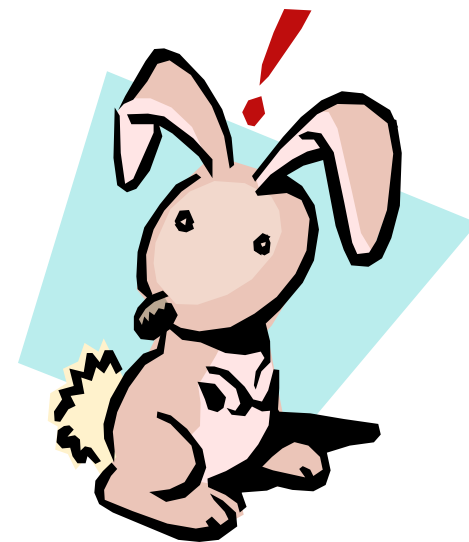
- Do you have animals that could endanger the rabbit? Rabbits can die of fright at the mere sound of predators, or from being chased.
- Rabbits are not low-maintenance pets: preparing greens, cleaning the litter box, and providing the attention your pet needs all require time.
- Which adult in your family will be the primary caregiver?
- Are you prepared for a commitment of 10+ years to the bunny?
- What will you do if you have children—or if your children lose interest?
- Does everyone in your family want a rabbit?
- Can you afford the care? Rabbits can cost \$100+/month. Veterinary care is expensive.
- If you are renting, are you allowed to have rabbits in your house or apartment?
- Do you have the room? You'll need to have space for a pen, or a room that can be sectioned off for the bunny to live in.
- Is your home "bunny-proofed" with cords, houseplants and chemicals out of reach?
- Will you be available to supervise children when they're around the rabbit? Rabbits are delicate, and can easily be injured.

Always adopt from your local animal shelter or a rabbit rescue group that adopts out NEUTERED rabbits.

Please read this pamphlet to learn more about rabbit care **before** you take a bunny home.

For more information in the Los Angeles area, call 310-713-2478 or email [losangelesrabbits@earthlink.net](mailto:losangelesrabbits@earthlink.net).

# BEFORE YOU ADOPT A BUNNY



- Things to Consider
- Shopping List
- Bunny Care Overview
- Useful Tips

## Basic Rabbit Care Overview

Rabbits make wonderful animal companions in the home. But they are **not** “low maintenance” pets. Please read this care sheet to learn the basics **before** you decide to adopt a rabbit!

**Neuter** your bunny! Neutering (both males and females) dramatically decreases the chance of reproductive cancers, makes litter box training easier, and reduces chewing and territorial behavior, such as spraying.

**Litter Box Training** Most rabbits can be litter-trained and allowed supervised freedom in the house. Start with a large cat litter box; put newspaper and/or rabbit-safe litter on the bottom and cover it with lots of fresh timothy or oat hay. Since a rabbit usually urinates in one corner of his space, this is where you place the litter box. Keep bunny confined to a 4' x 4' space until he is very good with his box.

**Handling** Handle with care! Rabbits have fragile skeletons and can be seriously injured if dropped or allowed to fall. When picked up, a scared rabbit may kick out with his powerful hind legs and fall to the floor, breaking his back. A child struggling to hold a wiggly bunny could be badly scratched or bitten and the rabbit injured. For this reason and others, children should always be supervised with rabbits. Also, because rabbits are prey animals, they would rather not be picked up, but prefer that you meet them at their level and pet them on the floor. To pick up a rabbit correctly, place one hand under the rabbit behind the front legs and the other hand just above the bunny's tail, so that you are supporting him as you scoop and lift. Hug the rabbit against your body firmly but gently. See our handling page for more information.

**Never pick up a rabbit by the ears. Never chase your rabbit, use force or yell—that will only teach her to fear you. Be gentle with your bunny!**

**Diet** Your adult rabbit's diet should include lots of fresh water, plenty of fresh hay (timothy or oat for adults; alfalfa hay for babies), plain commercial rabbit pellets (no nuts, seeds, etc.) and fresh, washed vegetables and leafy greens. Romaine lettuce, carrot tops, parsley, radish leaves, and cilantro are all good. Treats include small slices of apple or pieces of carrot. Do not feed human food like crackers and cookies. Please note: Rabbit digestion is sensitive, so you must introduce new foods gradually. Young rabbits age 3 months and under should only be fed hay, rabbit pellets, and water, and NO FRUIT. See our diet page for more information.

**Location** Rabbits do not tolerate heat, dampness, or drafts. Your rabbit should be in a quiet, safe location close enough to human activity so she doesn't become lonely.

**Indoor Housing** Secure exercise pens 30-36" tall are best for indoor “starter” housing. If bunny jumps out, clip a sheet across the top of the pen for a couple of weeks until she establishes boundaries. You can put linoleum or hard plastic chair or desk mats over your flooring to protect it from chewing, digging, and damage from “accidents.”

**Indoor Bunny-Proofing** Cover phone and electrical cords. Don't let rabbits chew rugs or carpets. Keep the floor clear of anything that can harm your bunny, including but not limited to: houseplants, candles, and children's toys. Young bunnies usually want to chew, dig, and get into trouble. The good news: once your bunny is past adolescence, she will calm down!

**Outdoor Housing...** is not recommended. Rabbits are prone to heat stroke (over 85°F is life-threatening) and can be killed by raccoons, hawks, dogs, feral cats, fly strike and other predators. Rabbits can burrow under backyard fences or squeeze out of small openings, never to be seen again. Raccoons are adept at opening hutch doors and rabbits can die from a heart attack when a predator attempts to break in.

**A Bunny for Your Bunny** Rabbits like to have friends of the same species. If you're away all day at work, consider getting your rabbit a neutered bunny friend for companionship. Bunny matchmaking can be dangerous, so always consult with a rabbit group for tips on bonding.

**Dogs, Cats, and Other Animals** Do not expect a dog, cat, or other animal to behave around a rabbit. Gentle, indoor cats usually work out a good relationship with rabbits. Dogs must be quiet, obedience-trained, and well behaved for them to have a safe relationship with a rabbit. Most dogs cannot be left alone with a rabbit. Always supervise other animals around your bunny.

**Veterinary Care** Go to [www.rabbit.org](http://www.rabbit.org) for a referral to a veterinarian who specializes in rabbits and knows how to treat them. Be aware that rabbit veterinary care can be expensive.

**Medical Emergencies** Lack of appetite; diarrhea; few or no fecal pellets; listlessness; crusty ears; overgrown teeth, mucus around the eyes or nose; urine-soaked fur, straining to urinate; lump or swellings; head tilt; or *any sudden behavior change*. Rabbits don't show illness like cats and dogs; any perceived problem should be treated as an emergency. One skipped meal could mean your rabbit is in grave danger.

**Grooming** Trim rabbit nails every 8-12 weeks. Brush, comb, or pet your bunny gently and frequently to prevent hair blockages. For fleas, see a vet or use *Advantage* (but not necessarily other, similar products). NEVER use *Frontline* or a flea dip or a flea collar—these are toxic to rabbits. Rabbits are clean animals and should generally **not** be bathed. Rough fur, “dandruff,” or loss of fur can mean fur mites or ringworm—see your vet, as these conditions can easily be treated with medication.

**Additional Reading:** [www.larabbits.org](http://www.larabbits.org), [www.rabbit.org](http://www.rabbit.org)

## Dietary Recommendations

**IMPORTANT: All dietary changes must be made gradually.**

- Hay should be available 24 hours a day. It provides roughage, which reduces the danger of hairballs and other blockages.
- With the exception of tiny babies, all rabbits need clean water 24 hours a day, preferably in a large, heavy crock to prevent spilling.
- Pellets should be fresh and relatively high in fiber (18% minimum fiber). Do not purchase more than six weeks' worth of food at a time, as it will become spoiled.
- No nuts, seeds, salt licks, or human foods!

### Babies

- Birth to 3 weeks: mother's milk
- 3-4 weeks: mother's milk, nibbles of alfalfa hay, and alfalfa pellets
- 4-7 weeks: mother's milk, access to alfalfa hay, and alfalfa pellets

### Teenagers

- 7 weeks to 7 months: unlimited grass hay and alfalfa pellets (plus 12 weeks see below)
- Decrease alfalfa hay
- 12 weeks: introduce vegetables (one at a time, quantities under ½ oz.)

An **adult** rabbit's diet should consist mainly of unlimited water and hay, measured, high-quality pellets, and fresh vegetables (for example: Romaine leaves, Italian parsley, cilantro, and basil or mint to add flavor).

### Young Adults: 7 months to 1 year

- Eliminate alfalfa, increase grass hays
- Decrease pellets to ½ c. per 6-lbs. body weight
- Increase daily vegetables gradually
- Fruit rations no more than 1-2 oz. per 6-lbs. body weight (these are treats!)

### Mature Adults: 1 to 5 years

- Unlimited grass hays (no alfalfa)
- ¼ – ½ cup plain pellets per 6-lb. body weight, preferably timothy-based pellets
- Minimum 2 cups chopped vegetables per 6-lb. body weight
- Fruit only as treats!

### Senior Rabbits

- If sufficient weight is maintained, continue adult diet
- Frail or older rabbits may need unrestricted pellets to keep weight up. Consult your veterinarian.

### Suggested Vegetables

Select at least 3 kinds of fresh, clean, leafy green vegetables daily, but stay consistent. Pick one each day that contains vitamin A (indicated by an \*). Add one vegetable to the diet at a time. Eliminate if it causes soft fecal pellets or diarrhea.

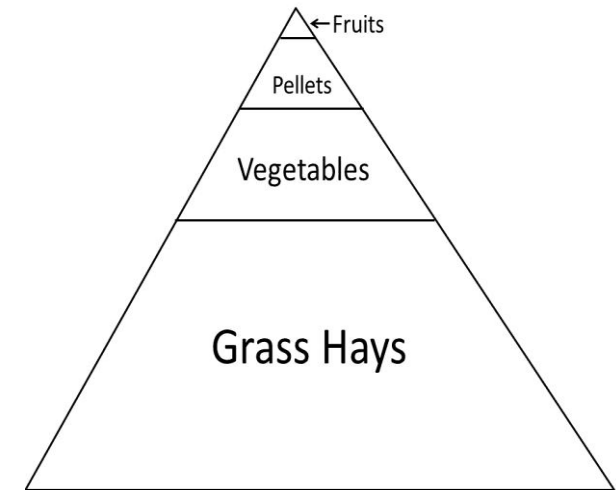
- Basil
- Beet Greens (tops)\*
- Bok Choy
- Broccoli (mostly leaves/stems)
- Brussels Sprouts
- Carrot tops
- Cilantro
- Dandelion greens and flowers
- Endive\*
- Escarole
- Green Peppers
- Mint
- Mustard greens\*
- Parsley (Italian)\*
- Peppermint leaves
- Radish tops
- Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light-colored leaf)
- Watercress
- Wheat grass

### Suggested Fruits

Fruits should be fed in small quantities, such as 3 to 4 blueberries or a small slice of apple. Introduce slowly, as you would vegetables. Rabbits can “bloat” (become dangerously ill) if they have access to a quantity of fruit they are not used to. As with vegetables, feed only fruit that is fresh and in good condition.

- Apple (remove stem and seeds)
- Banana (a thin slice, 1/2” or less)
- Blueberries
- Carrots (yes, these are vegetables, but they are high in sugar, less than 1” piece.)
- Melon
- Papaya
- Pear
- Pineapple
- Raspberries
- Strawberries

### Rabbit Food Pyramid (for Adult Rabbits)



## Housing

### The Exercise Pen Option

Exercise pens are dog playpens that can be purchased at local pet supply stores. You can find “small animal” exercise pens, too, on-line and at some stores. A 30-36” tall pen is suggested. Until you can be sure bunny won’t escape over the top, just clip a sheet to the top of the pen creating a roof (this can be removed after a few weeks) or purchase a taller pen.

Pens can be adjusted to fit various spaces/size. A pen with a walk-through gate makes cleaning the pen and interacting with your rabbit easier.



Here’s an exercise pen setup with sea grass mats over a thick sheet of linoleum.

### Sample Setup

Use hard waterproof flooring (hard plastic desk mat, linoleum) to protect your house floor, wrap an old sheet tightly around flooring, and set up the pen on top of the sheet/flooring. Or use a tarp covered with a low-nap area rug—just make sure bunny doesn’t ingest the rug.

Add a litter box layered with litter and fresh hay (oat or timothy), toys, water dish, dish for pellets, etc.

### Housing (continued)

Why an exercise pen environment? If your rabbit is not able to live in a larger indoor bunny-proofed room or area, then an exercise pen is the next best thing.

- Room for bunny to move and hop a bit.
- Easier for human companions to interact with the rabbit; bunny does not “defend” against you like in a cage.
- Room for large toys, cardboard boxes, tunnels, hideaways.
- Much easier to clean than a cage especially when the rabbit is spayed/neutered and litter box trained.

Don’t forget – Bunny still needs exercise time outside of the pen!

### Alternatives to the Exercise Pen

Put a chew-proof baby gate or Dutch door across the doorway to one room, and bunny-proof that room; section off a corner for your bunny; or build your own rabbit habitat using 1” x 2” welded wire or hardware cloth and untreated lumber.

If you cannot keep your rabbit with you in your home, then create a “house” for your rabbit with enough space and shelter to protect her from the elements and predators. We do not recommend keeping your rabbit outside.

### Why Rabbits Should Not Live Outdoors

Domestic rabbits are not related to the local wild rabbits and do not have survival skills to live outside. They are prey animals with minimal ability to defend themselves or avoid predators ranging from raccoons, coyotes, and dogs to fly larvae. Since domestic rabbits are related to the Western European wild rabbit, they overheat quickly in the summer heat in CA and even if they survive, suffer when it’s hot outside.

You are less likely to notice when your rabbit is ill or needs your help if she is not living in your home with you.

## Before You Adopt, Rabbit-Proof Your Home

Rabbit-proofing involves protecting your rabbit from electrocution, carpet fibers, poisonous plants, strings, candles, lead paint, and so on. As an added benefit, rabbit-proofing also protects your valuable material possessions.

Thorough rabbit-proofing is critical to your rabbit’s safety. Rabbits cannot cough up (regurgitate), and operations on their digestive systems are rarely successful, so if they ingest hard objects, candles, fabric, or household chemicals, it can be fatal. Electrical cords are irresistible to most rabbits and very dangerous.

Don’t count on “training” your rabbit not to chew cords; rabbits quickly learn that when you are not in the room, they can get away with anything. The only certain way to prevent harm to your rabbit is to create physical barriers between your rabbit and hazards in your home.

Consider installing a baby gate across the doorway of one room and bunny-proof that room, or construct a safe “rabbit living room” with exercise pens.

To rabbit-proof a room:

- Lift all electrical cords out of reach or cover them completely with cable wrap that your rabbit cannot chew through.
- Remove all dangerous or destructible objects from reach.
- Cover moldings with inexpensive acrylic corner protectors to prevent chewing.
- Block off the entertainment center altogether, instead of attempting to cover all those wires.

The good news: most rabbits can’t jump or reach higher than three feet. So once you have rabbit-proofed below that level, you’re home free. Just don’t leave any chairs pulled out!

## Before You Adopt, Learn About Litter Box Training



During the two weeks following neuter surgery, or when you first bring your adopted bunny home, confine him to a puppy pen with linoleum or a hard plastic desk mat underneath.

Use a BIG cat box or cement mixing box made from hard plastic. Line the litter box with a thin layer of rabbit-safe litter, then top off with lots of grass hay (oat blend or timothy). To save money, you can first line the box with newspaper.

Whenever you see your rabbit hop into the box, praise him. Rabbits respond well to positive reinforcement. Don't scold your bunny for not using the box. Instead, clean up urine with white vinegar, which completely removes the smell, and sweep up fecal pellets, placing them into the box where they belong.

**Some Rabbit-Safe Litters:** 100% wood pellet litters for pets; wood stove pellets; Oxbow Hay Company EcoStraw; CareFresh original.

### Troubleshooting

*Bunny goes everywhere besides the box, and tends to nap in the box.* Your rabbit is sending you a clear message that you should provide a second box, one for him to sleep in, and another for him to use as a litter box.

*Bunny's hopping all over and leaving pellets all over, too.* The biggest mistake new bunny parents make is to give the rabbit too much space, too soon. Start out with an exercise pen and wait until your bunny's box habits are as good as they are going to be, before letting him or her run free in the home.

*Bunny uses the box initially. Later, she goes outside the box. Sometimes she lifts her tail but nothing comes out.* These are classic symptoms of a painful UTI (urinary tract infection). An older rabbit going near, but not in, the box may be suffering from arthritis. A visit to the veterinarian will help with diagnosis and treatment of any underlying medical cause for loss of litter box habits.

### Tips to help speed up and improve box training

- Use a paper towel to soak up "accidents" and place it in the box.
- Keep the floor outside the box scrupulously clean.
- Provide a bigger litter box and/or a second litter box.
- Put fresh hay in the box several times daily to encourage bunny to hop in.

Within a few weeks of training, most neutered rabbits will use the litter box. The occasional stray fecal pellet can usually be expected, although some rabbits have perfect box habits.

After thorough box-training, rabbits can be given more space in a bunny-proofed area of the home and are on their way to becoming well-behaved house bunnies.

### Heat Warning!

**Temperatures over 80° Fahrenheit can be dangerous for a rabbit.** Before you adopt a rabbit, consider how you will keep her cool.

- \* **NEVER leave a rabbit unattended in your vehicle.** Even with the windows down, cars heat up fast. Avoid traveling with your rabbit in the middle of the day.
- \* **When the temperature reaches 80° F or higher, place a jug of frozen water next to your bunny.** Wash a plastic jug or liter bottle, fill it 4/5ths full of water and put it in the freezer overnight. Have an extra bottle or two ready to swap out. Cover with a thin towel if bunny doesn't eat towels; or place 2 jugs spaced apart with a towel over them to create a cool tunnel.
- \* Housing a rabbit in an outdoor hutch is not recommended. If you must keep bunny outside, make sure the hutch or outdoor run has adequate ventilation and is shaded throughout the entire day. Use frozen bottles of water and/or misters around the rabbits. But be aware that this might not be enough to keep bunny cool on a very hot day.
- \* Provide water in heavy crocks if possible, rather than in water bottles with a sipper—rabbits drink more water from an open dish. The water crock must be heavy to prevent your rabbit from tipping it over.
- \* Place a chilled ceramic tile or marble slab in the corner of your rabbit's living area for your rabbit to lie on.
- \* If you go on vacation, choose an experienced pet-sitter who knows how sensitive bunnies are to the heat.
- \* Symptoms of overheating include: listlessness, wet nose or mouth, hot ears, and stumbling. If you think your rabbit is overheated, wipe her ears with cool water (but do not immerse in cold water or she could go into shock) and rush her to a rabbit-savvy veterinarian immediately.

## Before You Adopt, Learn How to Handle a Rabbit

Basic rules of rabbit handling:

- Do not pick up rabbits unless necessary.
- **Always support the back of the bunny.**
- Do not hold bunny upside down!

Whenever possible, it's best to interact with rabbits at their level, either on the floor or on the couch, rather than pick them up. As prey animals, rabbits do not enjoy being scooped up and suspended mid-air. They prefer to stay grounded.

When your rabbit has a veterinary appointment, you can usually get him to hop into an open carrying case. Place a thick towel or artificial sheepskin liner in the carrier first, to prevent him slipping around and panicking when being carried. Put food or a small treat in the back of the carrier, and quickly close the door when he goes in.

Of course there are times when you have to pick up a rabbit. Here's how to do it right.

Pet your bunny gently on the top of the head. Then slide one hand under his front legs and



place one hand on his back above the tail, so that as you pick him up, you are supporting him at both ends. Lift gently but firmly until you have bunny securely in your arms.

Never pick a rabbit up around the middle or grab at a rabbit trying to hop away from you. Do not hold a rabbit up near your shoulder; one leap and your rabbit could go over your shoulder and fall to the floor.

When you want to catch a rabbit who has escaped his room, press the bunny's head gently toward the floor with the palm of your hand to get control over him. Then pet bunny before lifting carefully, making sure to support his back.

PLEASE REMEMBER:

# A RABBIT IS NOT A CHILD'S TOY.

# HE'S A REAL, LIVE, 10-YEAR COMMITMENT!

Rabbits are not ideal pets for small children. They cannot retract their claws and may scratch to defend themselves if picked up. They don't react well to high-pitched voices or sudden sounds or movements. Young children may hurt a bunny without meaning to.

If your kids are begging you for a rabbit, please consider having them volunteer for a rabbit group first. You and your children can learn more about rabbit care prior to adoption, and you'll get a better feel for whether or not rabbits are the right companion animal for your family. In some cases, a dog, cat or other species is a better match.

The purpose of this pamphlet is not to dissuade you from adopting a rabbit, but rather to make sure you've carefully considered the rabbit's well-being and suitability for you and your family prior to adoption. We want you to be happy with your choice of companion animal.

If you decide to adopt, please read this pamphlet carefully, visit with the rabbit(s) you plan to adopt, and prepare the rabbit's living area in advance.

If you decide not to adopt, there are other options for you to help rabbits and to enjoy being around them. You can volunteer, foster, or donate.



## Volunteer

Please consider volunteering with a rabbit organization or animal shelter. Non-profit groups are able to certify community service hours when needed for school.

## Foster

Not sure a bunny is for you? Want a rabbit but know you can't make the 10-year commitment at this time? Consider fostering a bunny. You'll only want to foster for a reputable rabbit welfare group that will take responsibility for the rabbit long-term.

## Donate

Animal shelters and rabbit groups always need donations. Please ask what donations are needed before spending money on things the organization may not be able to use.

Thank YOU for caring about abandoned domestic rabbits! For more information, please go to [www.1arabbits.org](http://www.1arabbits.org).

