



Rabbit

Oryctolagus cuniculus

Life span : Up to 12 years
Courtesy : Laura Slinger (Bunnylicious)

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DESCRIPTION

The domestic rabbit comes in all sorts of varieties. Pure breed such as Dutch, rex, New Zealand and cross breeds. Males are known as “bucks” and females are known as “does”. The earliest evidence of domestication of rabbits (the European rabbit) dates back to the Middle Ages.

PURCHASING

When purchasing your rabbit, buy as responsibly as possible. Choose to rehome rabbits wherever possible, in order to help curb the breeding of pet rabbits for the purposes of making profit. If you do need to purchase, then seek out private sales - as these are generally the result of accidental breeding. If you do need to shop purchase, then use a retailer who is reliable and known to be conscientious in its sales.

Purchase a rabbit who is bright eyed and active in its enclosure. Once purchased, ensure your new pet is neutered or spayed, and vaccinated as soon as it is old enough. Not only Does this prevent death to your pet from horrible diseases such as myxamatosis, but also can help to prevent the possibility of your pet developing cancer.

HOUSING / LIGHTING / TEMPERATURE

A rabbit can be housed indoors or outdoors, but it is crucial that your animal has sufficient space to engage in its natural exploring behaviours.

As much space as possible is recommended, with at least 2 hours free roaming in a secure garden. An enclosure measuring 6x2x2 feet is recommended for a single story, with an outside run - garages, sheds and children’s play houses can all be easily converted into rabbit friendly enclosures. Please remember that your rabbit has powerful hind legs, and rabbits have been known to clear a 6 foot fence! Rabbits can also burrow, so not only does fencing need to be high, but it should always be buried. Please also be aware of other hazards, such as dogs, cats, foxes etc.

For an indoor rabbit, the same rules apply, and there are many different types of indoor enclosure that are commercially available. Rabbits are very intelligent, and are quickly and easily litter trained. They should also be allowed free roaming time for exercise.

For both indoor and outdoor rabbits (but especially indoor rabbits), it is important that they are not allowed to overheat. This is especially important if keeping your rabbits indoors, in terms of central heating in colder months and indoor temperatures in the summer months. Rabbits have no way of regulating body temperature (such as sweating or panting) and should therefore be afforded a cool area to retreat to to cool down (such as a tiled area). You can also supply them with an ice bottle - your rabbit will lie next to it, in order to cool down (this is a great idea for outdoor rabbits in the summer months)

FEEDING

Rabbits should be fed with a pellet food, rather than muesli - although this looks less exciting for your pet, it prevents selective feeding (where the rabbit will pick out the nicer bits - I.e those pieces with least nutritional value). This is also much better for your pet's health, increasing longevity and reducing the risk of your pet becoming over weight.

Your rabbit needs a constant supply of hay or herbage. Hay is not bedding, but the principle requirement of a rabbits diet. An egg cup full of pellets and a fist sized portion of vegetables is sufficient for a normal sized rabbit, provided a large portion of hay is available at all times - use a commercially available hay rack attached to your pets cage, and keep it filled. Monitor your pet's eating and feed fresh veg either every day or every other day - rabbits will not stop when they have had enough, and therefore remove uneaten food after a few hours - if it ripens then it increases the risk of bloating or loose faeces, which can cause fly strike, a life threatening condition.

Good foods : dandelions, chick weed, rosemary, parsley, kale, savoy cabbage, broccoli green beans, sprouts, apples (pips removed), leafy carrot tops and romaine lettuce.

Poisonous foods : deadly nightshade, lily of the valley, lobelia, rhododendron, foxglove, ivy, mistletoe, privet, lupin, st johns wort, chrysanthemum, carnation, geranium, laburnum, daffodil, buttercup, marigolds

OCCUPYING YOUR PET

Your rabbit is a clever animal, and therefore needs much stimulation in its environment. Cat balls (with bells in) are good, as are wire cages for their hay, or plant pots, plastic yoghurt pots and cereal boxes to throw around, etc . . . another good distraction for them is to hide food around their enclosure to give them something to forage for - they will enjoy this activity.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

DENTAL HEALTH : Rabbits teeth grow constantly throughout their lives - about 2 or 3 mm per week. Some of the foods you feed will help in keeping the growth down, but regular checks are advised. Your vet should do this, using a special tool, at least every 6 months. Rabbits with dental pain will : stop eating, drool excessively, paw at their mouth, develop staining on the inside of their fore arms from drooling as they wash. Their faeces may also be smaller than usual.

VACCINATE & NEUTER : Rabbits should be neutered at around 3 or 4 months of age. This will not only stop them exhibiting unwanted behaviours, but also stop them developing womb or testicular cancer. Your rabbit should also receive regular vaccinations

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against myxomatosis and viral haemorrhagic disease (or VHD). This should be done twice yearly by your vet. These are horrible diseases, that produce awful symptoms stressful for both you and your pet. All rabbits are at risk, as these diseases can be carried by flying insects, who pass the disease on when they bite your pet.

FLY STRIKE : This results when your rabbit is warm, wet and smelly. Flies lay eggs on your rabbit, the eggs hatch and the maggots feast on the flesh. Sounds horrid but true and can be fatal! Higher risk rabbits are those which have trouble grooming - so overweight rabbits, rabbits with dental problems etc.

To prevent fly strike : have your rabbit weighed and assessed by your vet at regular intervals, clean out the area where your rabbit toilets daily (esp during the summer months), apply fly repellent to your rabbits anal area (this can be done by a vet if you are not happy doing it yourself), use fly strips in the hutch area and citronella candles all well out of the reach of your rabbit, place a bowl of sweet smelling liquid nearby to distract the flies, check your rabbit's bum regularly (more than once a day) and regular grooming of your rabbit is a must.

Most of allENJOY YOUR RABBIT :)

Thanks to Laura Slinger of Bunnylicious Bunny Boarding for this care sheet (www.bunnylicious.co.uk) - the full unabridged version of this care sheet can be requested from Laura by contacting her through her website. Laura is a fully qualified vet nurse and bunny expert.