

RABBIT HOUSING

You will get the most enjoyment from your rabbit – and vice versa – if he/she lives in your home with you. People sometimes confine rabbits to a life in an outdoor hitch because they do not realize what wonderful house pets they can be. With a little training, your rabbit can be a delightful INDOOR companion.

CAGES

Rabbits were not designed to live on wire floors. Living on wire floor can cause a condition known as sore hock to develop on their feet. Cages with wire floors were designed for the convenience of breeders who were looking for an easy way to clean up after the most rabbits in the least amount of time. Cages with wire floors must have a piece of plywood, cardboard, Plexiglas or carpet that the rabbit can sit and lay on. If you try carpet and the rabbit chews it, immediately replace it with something else.

The size of the cage should be influenced by the amount of time spent inside it. A general rule for long-term use is that the length and width of the cage should be 3-4 times the (stretched out) body length. If you have a baby bunny, then think of the adult size or plan to replace your starter cage with a larger one. The cage height should allow the bunny to sit up and stretch on its hind feet. Many bunnies will easily learn to climb ramps, making bi-level cages a possibility for young, active rabbits. The cage should have large doors – side opening for bunny's convenience and top opening for your convenience. You can always add or enlarge doors, if you desire.

Using large amounts of bedding material to cover the bottom of the cage is generally not necessary if you litter box train your rabbit (see Litter Box Training handout). If some type of bedding material is still desired, we recommend paper-based products only. **NEVER use cedar, pine, or other aromatic wood shavings**, as these can cause liver disease and respiratory inflammation in rabbits and other small mammals.

TRAINING

An untrained rabbit should be kept in a cage or confined to a room while you are not home to supervise, but they must be let out for at least several hours a day, both to exercise, and to have social interaction with you and/or your other pets. Also, the more they are let out, the faster they will learn proper behavior through discipline. Younger rabbits tend to get into more mischief and must be watched and disciplined more closely. As time goes on and their behavior improves, more freedom may be given. If you don't want to confine your rabbit to a cage, a clean, rabbit-proofed room may be used. Rooms that are generally easy to rabbit-proof are bathroom, laundry room, kitchen, and bedroom.

Eventually, when you feel you can trust your rabbit, free run of the house can be given. But first, you must inspect every room extremely carefully for any exposed wires and other dangerous objects (like plants) that could be harmful to your rabbit. You may have to deny access to one or more rooms if bunny proofing is difficult or impossible (such as a computer room). But the more space your rabbit has, the more delightful you will find him/her as a pet companion. See the Rabbit-Proofing handout for information on how to rabbit-proof your house.

RABBITS OUTSIDE

It is a joy to watch rabbits play outside, but certain precautions must be taken:

- Do not let your rabbit onto grass that has been sprayed with fertilizers or pesticides. Always supervise our rabbit while outside. It only takes a few seconds for a dog to jump a fence and attack or frighten the rabbit (literally) to death.
- Under no circumstances should a rabbit be left outside after dark, even in the middle of cities. Predators such as opossums, raccoons, coyotes, dogs and occasionally even a cat will attack a small rabbit. Even if you have an enclosure that is very secure, a rabbit can die of fright while a predator attempts to break in – even if the attempt is unsuccessful.