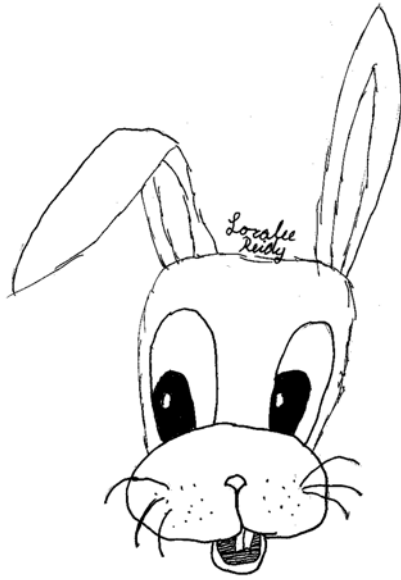


THE



BASICS

MANUAL

Cornell Cooperative Extension
of Ulster County

THE BUNNY BASICS MANUAL

A beginner's guide written by Ulster County 4-H Members in the hopes of bringing rabbits and people together in positive ways.

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What Can 4-H Teach You About Rabbits?

An Introduction by Member-Editor Melissa Carboni

4-H is a program that encompasses many different aspects of learning and activities. Although you can learn a lot about rabbits from books, the hands-on experience you get from participating in a 4-H club will be more rewarding and fun. Some examples of things that you might learn from 4-H are listed below. They are also the titles of the chapters we have written for this manual.

[How Much Can A Rabbit Cost?](#)

Before you get a rabbit, it is good to know what kind of expenses you might encounter.

[How Do I Choose the Right Breed?](#)

There are many breeds. The type of breed you should choose is dependent on how much time you want to put into the care of the rabbit and what kind of housing can be provided.

[How Do I Pick a Healthy Rabbit? How Do I Prepare for a Rabbit Emergency?](#)

Taking care of your rabbit is very important if you want to enjoy your rabbit for a long time. However, it might not be as easy as you think.

[How Do I Get Ready for An Outdoor Rabbit?](#)

When housing your rabbit in any environment there are many things to consider. In this chapter, you will learn how to keep your rabbit cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

[How Do I Bring My Rabbit Home?](#)

In reading this chapter, you will learn how to transport your rabbit home carefully and what to do the first couple of days.

[How Do I Feed My Rabbit?](#)

Food and water are the most essential needs in your rabbit's life. There are many factors to consider such as a schedule, equipment, and nutrition.

[How Do I Houstrain My Rabbit?](#)

There are many considerations when houstraining your rabbit. This

chapter will help you decide if housetraining is the right decision for you and your rabbit.

[How Do I Groom My Rabbit?](#)

Grooming your rabbit is not just to make it pretty; it also has a big part in your rabbit's health. If you are not careful of your rabbit's cleanliness, your rabbit could be affected in many ways.

[What Do I Do?](#)

Still not sure when and what you should be doing with your rabbit? Read this summary of the basics that need to be remembered when caring for your rabbit.

[What Adventures Will I Have?](#)

Read some of our experiences and find out what has happened to us while owning rabbits.

[Where Can I Learn More?](#)

This is a list of books and other references we use for our 4-H projects.

[How Do I Join 4-H?](#)

We didn't include a chapter on this because it's so easy to do. Just call your local Cornell Cooperative Extension Office and ask for the 4-H Program.

Important Note: This guide is just the first step in getting ready to share your life with a rabbit. It is not meant to be comprehensive. For health-related concerns, always check with a qualified veterinarian.

How Much Can A Rabbit Cost?

The 4-H Bunny Basics Writing Team

Guided By Roxanne Churchill

Rabbits are not expensive pets, but they do cost money. Here's our best estimate of what it can cost to own a rabbit.

Start-Up Costs (One time)

Item Estimated Cost

Cage (1 sq. ft. per lb.)	\$30-\$50
Water Crock	\$0.89-\$3.00
Water Bottle (Optional)	\$3.00-\$9.00
Feeder	\$1.00-\$6.50
Metal Garbage Can (Food Storage)	\$13.00
Food Scoop (Optional)	\$1.00-3.00
Food (50 lb. bag)	\$6.00-\$10.00
Hay(1 bale)	\$3.00
Treats (Optional)	\$1.00-\$2.00
Carrier	\$10.00-\$15.00
Nail Clippers	\$4.00-\$6.00
Pumice Stone	\$2.00
Rabbit Care Book	\$13.00
TOTAL	\$87.89-\$135.50

Maintenance (Per Year Cost for Medium-Sized Rabbit)

Food	\$12.00-\$20.00
Hay	\$18.00
Shavings	\$9.00
Equipment Replacement	\$5.00
TOTAL **	\$44.00-\$52.00

**This does not include special circumstances like veterinary care.

How Do I Choose the Right Breed?

Jessie Churchill

Kritter Keepers 4-H Club

The Importance of Breeds:

It is important to learn about the different breeds of rabbits because breed affects **size, temperament, and maintenance**. Size is an important factor because larger rabbits require more space and food, and are heavier to pick up. They also generally have good temperaments. For your first rabbit, you probably want to select a breed that is known for its good temperament and is easy to maintain.

<u>Breed Type</u>	<u>Examples</u>
MEAT	New Zealand, Californian, and Satin.
PET	Netherland Dwarf, Mini Lop, Holland Lop, and Dutch
WOOL	Angoras, American Fuzzy Lops, and Jersey Woolies

The Meat Breeds

Meat breeds are medium to large-sized, averaging 9 to 12 lbs. They are generally calm and require an average amount of care, so they make good pets for older children. Because of their larger size, they have a high food intake; so they generally cost more to maintain.

The Pet Breeds

These small to medium-sized breeds are most often kept as pets. They are fairly calm and have a medium food intake. Most require an average amount of care. The smaller breeds may be less calm than the medium-sized, so we recommend medium-sized (5 to 6 lbs.) for young beginners.

The Wool Breeds

These medium-sized breeds are high maintenance. Their wool requires daily grooming. They are moderately calm and have a fairly low food intake.

Before you bring a bunny home, read all about the breed in *The American Rabbit Breeders' Association's Standard of Perfection*.

How Do I Pick A Healthy Rabbit?

Melissa Carboni
Ulster County Muttmasters 4-H Club

When purchasing a rabbit, a health check is an easy way to see if the rabbit is in good health. In addition, a health check should be done at least once or twice a year on the rabbits that you own.

The Health Check:

Ears The ears should be clean inside. A brown, crusty appearance would suggest ear mites. You can get rid of ear mites by placing a few drops of mineral oil in the rabbit's ears and then cleaning the ears with a cotton swab. Do this daily for three days and then wait ten days. Repeat if necessary.

Eyes Check to make sure that there is no discharge, which would mean the rabbit has weepy eye and that there is no cloudiness, which could mean the rabbit is blind.

Nose The nose should be clean and dry. A discharge from the nose and crusty fur on the front legs would indicate that the rabbit has a cold. It can also indicate a serious disease called snuffles.

Teeth The front teeth should line up with a slight overlap present. If one set of teeth is longer than normal, it indicates that the rabbit has malocclusion or buckteeth. Rabbits with this condition will have to have their teeth trimmed regularly by a veterinarian.

Front/Hind Feet

A rabbit's legs should stretch out straight and have five toenails on the front feet and four toenails on the hind feet. Also check the bottom of the front and hind feet for redness, which would indicate sore hocks. Sore hocks are treatable with udder balm, but can be an indicator of poor cage sanitation. When treating a rabbit with sore hocks, place a board in the rabbit's cage to keep sore skin up off of the wire.

Stomach By running your hand over the rabbit's belly, feel for any abscesses that may be present. An abscess must be drained to prevent further infection. Check genitals for discharge or malformations.

Tail The tail should also stretch out straight. The presence of a crooked tail would indicate wry tail. The tail should also be clean from any urine or droppings.

Body Condition Overall the body should be clean, smooth and firm.



How Do I Prepare for a Rabbit Emergency?

Dorothy Shanahan-Roberge
County Carrot Crunchers 4-H Club

It is important to take the time to examine your rabbit every day. If you notice anything different or possibly harmful, you can do your rabbit a favor by finding out what you can do to treat its condition. Below are the materials for a First Aid Kit that you might want to make and keep handy in case of a rabbit emergency.

What you need

How You Use It

Cotton Balls

These are used to clean wounds and apply medicine.

Cotton Swabs

Cotton swabs are used to remove ear wax and ear mite crust. They also can be used to swab the inside of a rabbit's ear with mineral oil to prevent and kill mites.

Gauze (rolled)

Rolled gauze is useful for wrapping up an infected wound.

Waterproof
Adhesive Tape

Used to keep gauze on the wound.

Nail Clippers

Clippers are used to shorten the rabbit's toenails about once a month. Human nail clippers may be used if special safety clippers made for rabbits are not available.

Styptic Powder

This item can be found at feed stores or pet shops. It is useful when the quick in a rabbit's toenail begins to bleed if cut too short. When the nail is covered in styptic powder, the bleeding will decrease, then stop. Cornstarch is sometimes suggested, but it doesn't work very well.

Scissors

This item comes in handy for cutting bandages off and trimming hair from around wounds.

Eye Dropper

It may be necessary to give a rabbit medicine through an eye dropper in the mouth.

Papaya	Either dried papaya or papaya tablets can be given as a supplement to rabbits to prevent wool block.
Mineral Oil	This type of oil should be put in a rabbit ear every three days at ten-day intervals to treat ear mites.
Antibiotic Cream	This cream is soothing and suitable for treating sore hocks and other infections or cuts.
Hydrogen Peroxide & Rubbing Alcohol	Both of these easy to find solutions are good for sterilizing cuts and cleaning your own hands after cleaning the rabbit's cut.
Disinfectant	Ask your veterinarian to recommend a disinfectant for cages and equipment. This is especially important in cleaning up after a sick rabbit to avoid spreading the illness.
Gloves	It is important to protect yourself and your rabbit by wearing plastic gloves. By using gloves, an infection is less likely to occur.

To Make the Kit:

After you have collected all the materials above, transfer the liquid cleaners into small plastic bottles and then label them. Other materials should be placed in plastic bags to assure they are as clean as possible.

How Do I Get Ready for an Outdoor Rabbit?

Melissa Carboni

Ulster County Muttmasters 4-H Club

Basic Ideas to Consider:

- Don't place the hutch in direct sunlight. Rabbits are sensitive to heat and heatstroke can result.
- Make sure the hutch is high enough off the ground so that it is well ventilated and your rabbit is safe from other animals.
- Make sure the hutch is built from safe materials. Be sure that the rabbit cannot come in contact with paint and sharp wires or nails.

The Specifics:

When building or choosing a hutch, make sure that it is large enough so that the rabbit can move around freely. The cage should approximately measure one square foot for every pound of rabbit. The floor of the cage should be built from wire with a one inch by one-half inch grid, so that the rabbit's feet cannot go through and get caught in the wire. A note on wire floors: A wire floor allows for the rabbit droppings to fall through so your rabbit doesn't have to sit on dirty shavings. It also makes the cage easier to clean. You should also provide a wooden surface for the rabbit to sit on. A small, untreated board works well.

It is important that rabbits have an enclosed area within their hutches so that they can get out of bad weather or away from other animals. During the winter, it is important to place a sheet of plastic around the sides of the cage to protect the rabbit from snow and cold.

A Serious Consideration:

If you decide to keep your rabbit outside, remember that you **cannot** bring the rabbit inside during the winter because you think it's too cold. Rabbits need time to adjust. If for some reason you decide your rabbit will be happier in the house, wait until spring when the temperature outside is similar to the temperature inside of your house.

Handy with tools? Several of the books listed in the bibliography have plans for building your own rabbit hutch.

How Do I Bring My Rabbit Home?

Rebecca Wells

Bunny Buddies 4-H Club

Transporting Your Rabbit:

The easiest way to bring your rabbit home is to use an appropriate-sized pet carrier. You can also use a wire cage with a metal pan to keep the rabbit from sitting in its droppings. Cardboard boxes are not always a good way to transport your rabbit home because urine can soak through the box, ending up on the car seat or your lap. If the car ride home is long, you may want to provide your rabbit with a piece of carrot or apple as a source of moisture for the trip.

Getting Your Rabbit Used to Its New Home:

When you first get your rabbit home give it a few days to adjust to its new surroundings before you handle it a lot. Start off by talking to and petting it in the cage. When the rabbit seems to be comfortable with you, take it out of the cage in the appropriate way and hold the rabbit in your lap. If the rabbit becomes restless put it back in the cage allowing the rabbit to take a break.

When you handle your rabbit, make sure it is comfortable. You want the rabbit to learn it's a good experience to be out of the cage. When you groom or handle your rabbit, you should have something soft under it (like an old blanket) so it doesn't have a slippery footing. By handling and grooming your rabbit often, you will make it a more enjoyable experience for both of you. A rabbit should never be left unattended when out of its cage. When the rabbit is not being watched, it will likely chew on any wires or wood in the room.

Probability of Illness:

During the first couple weeks be sure to watch for signs of disease. Diarrhea, sneezing, and lack of appetite are common signs that your rabbit is sick. If you notice anything unusual with your rabbit, contact the breeder or your local veterinarian.



How Do I Feed My Rabbit?

Allison Reidy

Kritter Keepers 4-H Club

Feeding your rabbit is a lot easier than you realize. Although there are items that can harm your rabbit, there are many beneficial products available for feeding and brands of food that can be provided for your rabbit.

Equipment:

You can find all the equipment you need at your local pet store or in a pet catalog. You will need:

- a feeder
- a water crock
- a water bottle (optional)
- a small garbage can (or other storage container)
- a food scoop (optional)

There are a few types of feeders. There is one feeder called a *hopper* that hooks to the side of the cage so that you can feed your rabbit without opening the cage. This one, I believe, is the most convenient. There are also metal feeders that hook to the inside of the cage. You can also use a crock to feed your rabbit.

Equipment used to give water may change seasonally. The water bottle can be used only in the summer because it will freeze quickly over the winter, preventing your rabbit from drinking. The other is the water crock, which you can use all year round. In the winter, if the water freezes in the crock all you have to do is hit it up against something hard and the ice will come out. Avoid using a crock for lop-eared rabbits to prevent frozen ears.

A small metal garbage can is useful to keep your rabbit food in. You should keep the food in a garage or closed-in place so that other animals cannot get to it. It is best to store the rabbit food where moisture will not affect it. An optional tool is a food scoop to put in the garbage can so that it is easier to take out and measure the food.

Types of Food:

There are many different kinds of feed that you can provide for your rabbit to keep it healthy. Rabbit pellets should be the main part of your rabbit's diet. The pellets come in different protein percentages contained in the food. Between 15 and 17 percent is the best. Another important type of feed would be hay. You should always have fresh grass hay. Never feed alfalfa; it's too rich for pet rabbits.

You can also feed fruit and some vegetables as a treat. Oranges, bananas, and apples are okay in small amounts. Baby carrots are the best type of vegetable for rabbits if you decide to feed vegetables. These are just treats and should only be fed twice a week in small amounts.

Never feed the following foods to your rabbit:

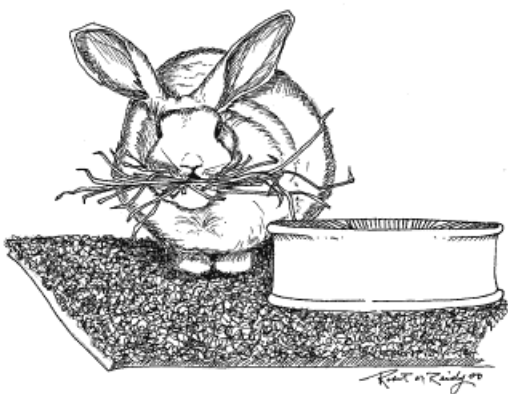
- foods that contain sugar or are high in water content,
- lettuce, cabbage, or spinach,
- potato peels,
- grass that has had chemicals sprayed on it or has sat around for more than a few hours after being cut.

Schedule:

You should give your rabbit fresh water twice a day, one time in the morning and the other in the evening. Make sure that no food has dropped into the water dish. You may have to check the water supply more often if it is very hot or very cold.

You should feed your rabbit at the same time every day, whether it is in the morning or evening. During the winter, you can provide your rabbit with an extra treat or scoop of food to provide extra energy on those really cold days. During the summer, it is sometimes better to feed them in the evening when it's cooler. You should always check to make sure that your rabbit's food is not wet or soggy.

All the things mentioned are very important to keeping your rabbit happy and healthy.



How Do I Housetrain My Rabbit?

Kelly-Rose Gibbons
County Carrot Crunchers 4-H Club

What You Need:

Litter box	It should be low enough for the rabbit to jump in and out of.
Litter	You will have the best results with a paper product such as "Yesterdays News" or pine shavings. Cedar shavings are not suggested because they can cause a reaction with your rabbit.
Training Area	A confined area with easy to clean surfaces. (Bathroom floor as opposed to a living room rug.)

What You Do:

1. Keep the rabbit in the training area for a few days. The rabbit will pick a "bathroom corner" and thus choose the area where you should put the litter box.
2. Put the litter box in the area the rabbit has chosen. Fill it with some litter and some droppings. By placing the rabbit's droppings in the pan, the rabbit will recognize its own smell and will return to the same spot to go to the bathroom.
3. Each time the rabbit goes outside the box, sweep up the droppings and put them in the box.

Remember be patient - this is new for you and your rabbit.

Tips to Remember:

- Be consistent and patient.
- Older rabbits are easier to train, but with younger ones, stick with it!
- All rabbits will drop "pills" around their cage to mark it as their own. This is not a failure.

Important Safety Do's and Don'ts for Indoor Rabbits

Do's

- Always provide a safe place for your rabbit to play.
- Keep electric cords and plants up high out of your rabbit's reach.
- Put your rabbit back in its cage before you leave the house.
- Be careful about what you feed your rabbit. Only feed food especially made for rabbits or recommended for rabbits.
- Trim your rabbit's nails regularly, so they are short.
- Health check your rabbit often. Check for signs of illness and overgrown teeth and nails.
- Introduce other pets slowly.
- Be patient and keep your cool!

Don'ts

- **NEVER** leave your rabbit unattended outside of its cage.
- **NEVER** feed your rabbit sweets or other foods not recommended for rabbits.
- **NEVER** have curtains and wires close to your rabbit's cage.
- **NEVER** feed your rabbit iceberg lettuce. It causes severe diarrhea.
- **NEVER** let your rabbit chew on anything.

How Do I Groom My Rabbit?

The 4-H Bunny Basics Writing Team

Guided by Brandie Gibbons

Just as there are different kinds of rabbits, there are different kinds of rabbit fur. Each fur type has different grooming requirements.

Normal Fur

This type of fur is soft, medium in length, and easy to maintain. It is found on the majority of rabbit breeds including dwarfs, lops, and Dutch.

Normal fur should be groomed with a soft comb or brush, wet washcloth, or pumice stone at least once a week. A pumice stone may be found in a health food store, pet shop, or body and bath shop. Avoid harsh brushes because they can cause irritation to the rabbit's skin. When you groom your rabbit, work from head to tail following the natural direction the fur lays. If you are showing your rabbit, we recommend the pumice stone as your grooming tool.

Rex Fur

This fur is shorter and softer than normal fur. It stands upright, while other fur types lie along the rabbit's body. Rex fur was developed from a genetic mutation and is only found on the Rex and Mini-Rex breeds.

When grooming a rabbit with rex fur, use a wet washcloth or pumice stone. This type requires only occasional grooming. Harsh brushes should not be used. They can break the hair and damage the pelt.

Satin Fur

This fur can be recognized by its shiny appearance. It lays along the rabbit's body, reflecting light through its transparent guard hairs. It is silky, dense, and fine to the touch; separating it from all the other fur types. This fur is only found on Satins and Satin Angoras. (Satin Angoras should follow the guidelines for Wool.)

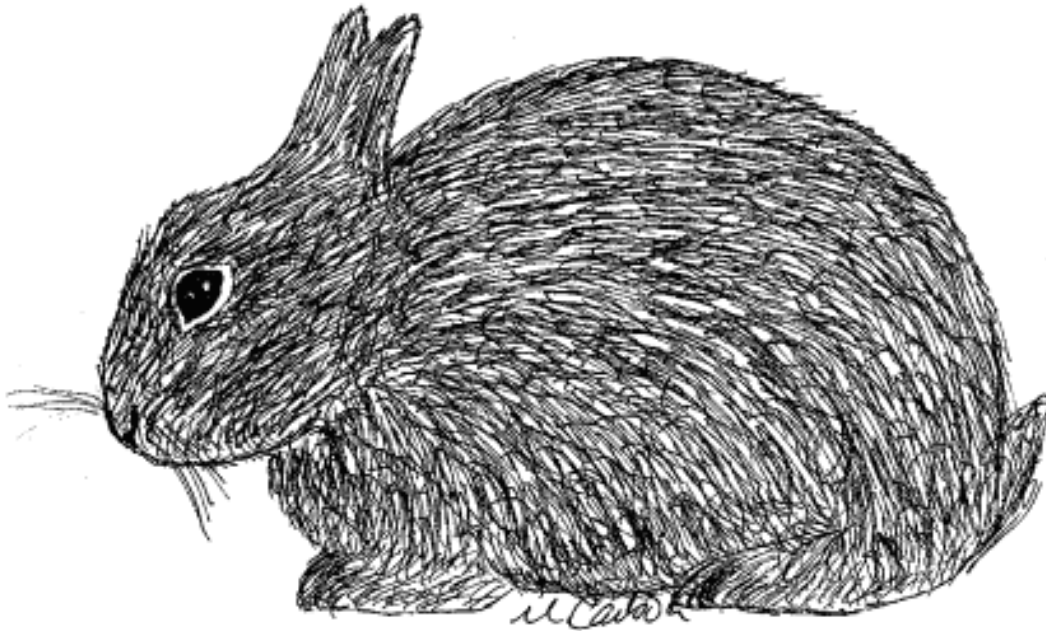
Satin rabbits may be groomed with a wet washcloth and pumice stone. Harsh brushes should be avoided so that the fur is not damaged. Fur on a well-groomed Satin is beautiful, so make sure to groom it gently and properly.

Wool

Wool is easily recognized due to its length, texture, and unique appearance. Wool rabbits have thick soft hair with great density and straight guard hairs. Wool is found on Angoras, American Fuzzy Lops, and Jersey Woolies. Satin Angoras have wool with satin sheen present in the guard hairs. It is the finest of all wools.

Wool rabbits require the greatest amount of grooming. They may be groomed with a comb or hand plucked. This should be done on a daily basis to avoid matting. Well-groomed wool rabbits are not only beautiful but are healthier.

These are general guidelines for pet rabbits. Grooming rabbits shown in exhibition can become an art.



What Do I Do?: A Summary

Things to Do Daily

Feeding and watering are basic. Establish a daily schedule and stick with it, 7 days a week.

Observe your rabbits and their environment. Daily observation helps you catch small problems before they become large problems.

Keep things clean. Attend to small cleaning needs so they don't grow into large cleaning chores.

Handle your rabbits. Regular handling will make your animals gentler, and you will become more aware of their individual condition.

Things to Do Weekly

Clean cages. Solid bottom cages and cages with pull-out trays must be cleaned and re-bedded weekly. On wire-bottom cages, use a wire brush to remove any build-up of manure or fur.

Clean feeders. Rinse crocks with a water-and-chlorine-bleach solution (1 part household bleach to 5 parts water). Check self-feeders for clogs of spoiled feed.

Check rabbits' health. Check your animals for abnormal fur, eyes, teeth and genital areas.

Check supplies. Do you have enough feed and bedding for the coming week? Your family will appreciate knowing ahead of time if a trip to the grain store is going to be needed.

Make necessary repairs. Have you noticed a loose door latch or a small hole in the floor wiring? Take time to do these small repairs before they lead to larger problems.

Prepare for coming events. Is a doe due to kindle in the next week? Is a show entry due soon? Check your rabbitry calendar, where these things should be noted. Do what's necessary to be ready and organized.

Check growing litters. Is the nest box clean? Is it time to remove the nest box? Is there any evidence of eye infections? These are just a few of the conditions to check in developing litters.

Things to Do Monthly

Check toenails. You will not have to trim the toenails of every rabbit every month, but you should check each animal and trim those that need it. This is an important management skill to learn, because properly trimmed toenails decrease the chances of your rabbit's being injured. Long toenails can get caught in the cage wire and cause broken or missing toenails. The time spent trimming toenails will also benefit you. If your rabbit's toenails are properly trimmed, you will be less likely to be scratched when you handle your rabbit.

Update written records. Catch up on writing pedigrees. Record feed costs and other rabbitry expenses, so you will have a sense of how much your rabbit project is costing.

Provide preventative medicines. If you have identified a need to offer preventative medicine, most are offered on a monthly schedule. Check with your veterinarian before administering any medicines.

Tend to the needs of developing litters. Young rabbits grow a lot in one month's time. Litters should be weaned by 8 weeks of age. This is also the time to tattoo and to separate littermates by sex.

Check fans and air vents, if your rabbitry is indoors. Good ventilation is extremely important to the health of your rabbits.

Things to Do Seasonally

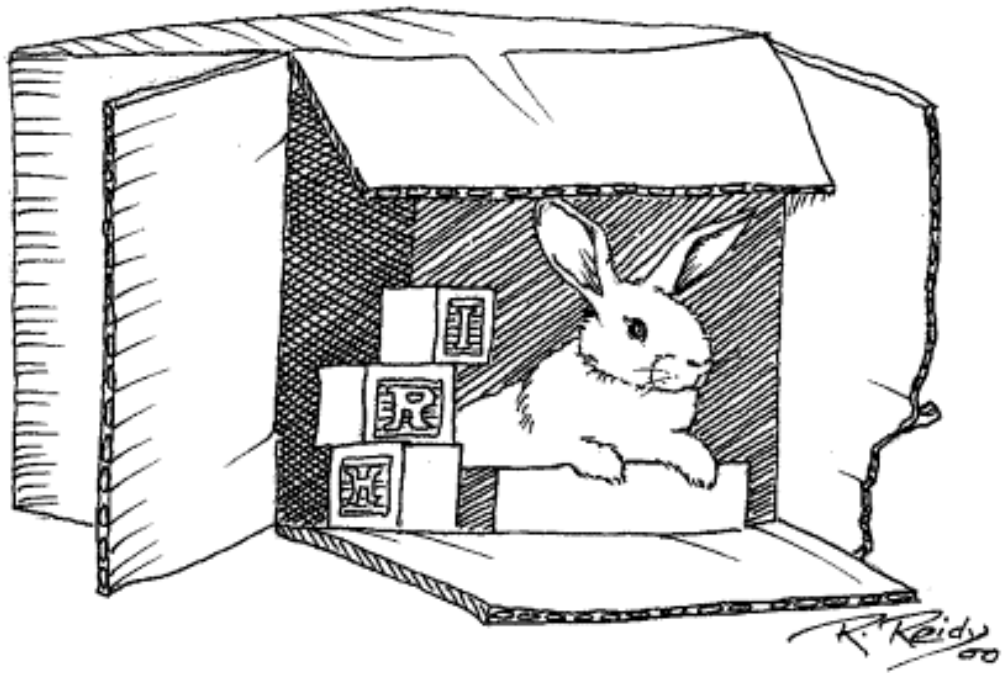
Cold-weather care - Rabbits do quite well in cold weather and can survive temperatures well below zero. However, you need to provide protection from winds, rain, and snow. If your cages are outside, you will want to add protection as the temperature drops.

Hot-weather care - Fur coats that keep rabbits cozy in the winter can sometimes provide too much warmth during the summer months.

- Place hutches in shady locations.
- Provide enough ventilation
- Provide lots of cool, fresh water.
- Use empty plastic soda bottles to make rabbit coolers. Fill the bottles two-thirds full with water, and keep them in your freezer. In periods of extreme heat, lay a frozen bottle in each cage. The rabbits will beat the heat when they stretch out alongside their rabbit cooler.

Adapted from: *Your Rabbit: A Kid's Guide to Raising and Showing* by Nancy Searle, Storey Communications, 1992.

What Adventures Will I Have?



The Midnight Porch Dweller

By Allison Reidy

Raising rabbits is a great, fun, and exciting thing to do. However, there are ups and downs and every rabbit raiser has his or her stories. They can be funny, exciting, sad, or even scary. My story has a little bit of everything in it.

It all started on a warm sunny autumn afternoon. My friend Jessie's mother drove us to a rabbit show. When Jessie and I were done with our business, we decided to look around at all of the different breeds of rabbits. We were walking along the rows when I spotted a "for sale" sign. I decided to check it out. As I drew closer, I saw the most beautiful rabbit. Its plush black fur with glossy texture looked like a beautiful dark night.

When I first saw the rabbit I knew that he needed to be in my arms. He had this look that made me feel warm and comfortable. I quickly ran to the nearest payphone to call my mother. After an exasperating phone conversation, I convinced my mother to let me take the rabbit home.

Jessie and I ran into the building to find the owner who was waiting patiently by the rabbit's cage. When the sale was finished, it was time to go home with my new rabbit. Just as I was leaving, I turned to ask what the rabbit's name was. The former owner told me that his name was Zorro. Zorro—what a perfect name! He was definitely going to keep his name.

As I arrived at my house, I couldn't wait for Zorro to see his new home. First I brought him to my mother who fell in love with him as quickly as I did. Then it was time for Zorro to go to bed. I brought him to his cage with fresh water and a shiny new food bowl. Just as I was putting him into the cage, he jumped out of my arms and bolted for the porch. As I stood there completely stunned, I realized that my cat was out. "Uh-oh," I thought to myself as I noticed that the cat was zeroing in. She stood there eyeing the porch with an evil glare as she watched Zorro's every move. Then, when Zorro realized he was being watched he ran underneath the porch!

I screamed for my mother who ran out of the house supplied with flashlights. As I raced after the cat, my mother tried to coax Zorro out from underneath the porch with a carrot. I quickly caught the cat and rushed her inside. Now the big problem was trying to get a scared rabbit out from beneath the porch. In desperation, I tried to crawl under the porch, which only got me bruises on my knees and scratches on my arms. Finally the rabbit, which was probably starving to death, came out to get a nibble off the carrot that my mother was holding. As he came into my reach I threw a towel over his head and quickly got him back to his cage.

The main idea of this story is to let you know that rabbits are wonderful pets and great friends. However, there are many other things to know about raising rabbits and this story proves it.



By: Loreale Reidy

The Great Escape

By Jessie Churchill

One chilly winter's afternoon as I was hurrying to feed my rabbits before nightfall, I sensed a difference in my rabbits' cages. When I went to investigate, I noticed that my Netherland Dwarf Diana was missing, but how did she get out? Well, first I had to find her and then worry about how she pulled off this trick. I had searched everywhere I could think of and when nothing turned up I went back to my house to sleep.

The next day, Saturday, I didn't have school so I walked out to take care of the rest of my bunnies. While giving one of my rabbits water, something caught my attention out of the corner of my eye. I cautiously turned just in time to see it disappear under my doghouse. Not knowing what it was I went back to feeding my rabbits. Paranoia took over while I wondered what that thing under the doghouse was. I fed faster than ever and I was almost done. I came to the last cage—Diana's cage—to finish feeding and something made me stop dead in my tracks. I tried to think of where I would hide if I were a bunny but nowhere came up that I hadn't already looked. There was still that little matter of how she got out, too.

I remembered Diana and her smooth, shiny black and tan fur, the prettiest fur that I had ever seen, and I thought I would never see her again. Everywhere I had looked turned up negative. I could feel something staring at me but I shrugged it off. I remembered seeing Diana's fur somewhere recently. It clicked. I turned to the doghouse and sure enough the thing I had seen go past me before was Diana. She stared at me like I was the dumbest thing that she'd ever encountered then went back under the doghouse.

I bolted into the house and grabbed a flashlight. Then, running into the old moth-eaten shed, I picked up a broom handle. I dashed up to the doghouse, used the flashlight to locate her, and pushed her out gently with the broom handle. Briskly picking her up, I hugged her, kissed her forehead, and put her back into her warm and cozy home. Of course, I was sure to place an extra clasp on her cage to prevent this disaster from happening again—but I still wondered how she got out.

The next week I fed my rabbits and forgot to put on the clasp. As I was leaving, I remembered and naturally went back to fix the problem. From about twenty feet away, I watched as the goats that live outside my rabbits' cages opened Diana's cage. She leaped out and ran as they ate her food. At least I knew where to find her and how to get her out and the mystery as to how she escaped was solved.

The Trouble with Specs

By Dorothy Shanahan-Roberge

The dog was a mass of long hair, with a long tail that acted more like a car wash brush. It wagged side to side endlessly as he came closer. I put my hand out to pet him, but his strength nearly knocked me over. He was beautiful and in need of a loving home. After talking to his previous owners, we opened the car door and let him in. I now had a dog. After too many years of being canine-deprived, a collie mix sat in the back of our car. Maybe he wasn't the tiny little puppy I had dreamed of, but he was close enough. Little did we know what trouble he would cause.

Specs, as he had been called, ran away if he was let off his leash. He was hyperactive which made it impossible for my sister and me to pet him. He had a terrible craving for chickens, but enjoyed chasing them most of all. Several times, we would find his prey, cold and limp, with Specs nowhere to be found. When he did finally appear, the guilt expressed on his face was a dead giveaway. After we found another home for the chickens, Specs discovered that rabbits would run too if he chased them. My sister and I tried very hard to teach him not to enter the rabbitry, not to scare the bunnies in their cages. Our efforts seemed very successful. Specs would not go beyond the gate, even if it were accidentally left open.

Just last summer, I was preparing to show the most adorable Holland Lop rabbit at the fair. I spent time daily brushing his hair and handling him. Several days before fair set-up day, his cage had been left open accidentally. He was nowhere to be found. My heart sank. The morning after the bunny's escape, I noticed Specs coming from the woods, carrying a limp, brown animal. I ran to meet him and screamed for him to drop it. I was hysterical. The rabbit I had worked so hard to raise was in the jaws of the dog I worked so hard to train. Specs dropped the bunny and it just sat there. I bent over and realized it was alive, perhaps in a state of shock, but alive! I couldn't believe it. There he sat, scared but unharmed. The hair that had been in Specs mouth was wet, but his skin had not been broken. Specs sat there, wagging that tail of his. To this day, I don't know how Specs found the rabbit in the woods and, without hurting him, picked him up and carried him home to me.

Where Can I Learn More?

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Notes:

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