



# Rabbit Care

In the following pages you will find everything you need to know to take care of your new rabbit. We consider these guidelines to be our standards, particularly when it comes to food and cage size. Make sure you read over all of this information before adopting your rabbit to make sure that you will be able to properly care for her.

## Which Rabbit?

We often find that people call us and want small, floppy eared rabbits. While these rabbits are very cute, they are not necessarily the best choice of pets for some people. Dwarf rabbits are often overly hyper, which is not always a desirable quality, especially when children are involved.

We also think that larger rabbits with straight ears are cuter than most people think. Rabbits with straight ears are very expressive—their ears correspond to their moods and say a lot about how they're feeling. Larger rabbits tend to be calmer than smaller ones and are better lap pets. People want rabbits that will sit on their laps and be petted. The larger rabbits are more likely to do that.

That said, these traits are just stereotypes. Just like with people, we find rabbits breaking stereotypes all the time. That's what's great about adopting from a rescue. We can tell you about the personalities of the various rabbits in our care. We simply ask that you keep an open mind and adopt based on personality and not necessarily on looks. Talk to us about what you're looking for in a pet, and we can tell you which rabbits best fit your needs, desires, and lifestyle.

## One Rabbit or Two?

We have many bonded pairs of rabbits. This is a particularly good idea if you are gone a lot during the day. It gives the rabbit a friend to keep it company and helps to avoid boredom and depression. Some rabbits (though definitely not all) are very lonely by themselves and need a friend to be happy and satisfied. Two rabbits share one cage, so it doesn't take any more work to keep the cage clean. There is, however, some extra cost in terms of food and potential vet bills. So it really depends on your financial situation, your lifestyle, and your pet's needs. If you're not sure, ask us! We can help you make the right decision for your family.

## Bonding Rabbits

Not all rabbits will bond with another. Some just don't like other rabbits. Others desperately want company. For that reason, if you are looking to



bond a rabbit, we will not just give you another rabbit. We allow rabbits to pick each other. In the same way that you can't just match up two people at random based on looks, you can't do that with rabbits either. We go through a specific bonding process. We have you bring your rabbit to one of our foster homes once or twice and introduce them to rabbits in our care. From there, we watch their behavior to see which rabbits are interact well. If your rabbit does well with one of ours, then we go through with the adoption of that rabbit.

The process sounds more complicated than it is. We can usually tell you up front which rabbits are lonely and likely to accept a bond. You can choose from there which ones you want to try first. Email us ([rasa.rescue@gmail.com](mailto:rasa.rescue@gmail.com)) for more information or to ask questions about the process. We do request that you fill out the adoption application under "Adopt a Friend" at the left before making a bonding appointment at a foster home, but questions are welcome any time.



## Social Needs

Your rabbit needs to be out of its cage every day. She needs interaction and attention in order to thrive. Unlike hamsters and gerbils, rabbits get bored, just like you do. Be sure to provide plenty of time out of the cage every day—at least one hour, but the more the better. When she's out, your rabbit will most likely want to explore the room and play. After play time, she'll want attention—lap time and petting. Most rabbits are fairly clean. If her cage is on the floor, she'll probably return to it when she has to go to the bathroom.

## Play Safe!

The area where your rabbit plays should be rabbit-safe. This means the rabbit should not have access to wires that can be chewed. We recommend covering any exposed wires with vinyl tubing that can be purchased at pet stores, Lowes, or Home Depot. In addition, if the rabbit has access to the kitchen, make sure she can't get behind the oven. If your rabbit goes under the couch or other furniture and sitting on it while she's under there will hurt her, you'll have to block access. Placing two by fours behind the legs of the couch and then tying the wood to the legs works well—it's not highly visible because the wood is under the couch and it keeps your rabbit out. You may need to put something on either side of your entertainment center to keep your rabbit away from those wires. Pieces of plywood work well and so do the pieces from cube shelving (Google "cube shelving" to see these). As for other issues, you can always ask us too—we can give you ideas on how to handle any problems you encounter.

## Diet



Your rabbit should be fed high quality, alfalfa-free pellets (unless she is still growing—see the second note at the bottom of this section). Alfalfa causes potentially fatal health problems, so it should be avoided. The pellets should be timothy-based. Be sure to read the labels on the back of any food you purchase for your rabbit, as some brands put "timothy" on the front and then still put alfalfa in the food. The ingredients label is the place to see if there's alfalfa in it. We recommend two brands—**ZuPreem**, which can be purchased on [www.petfooddirect.com](http://www.petfooddirect.com) and in most Petco stores (be careful to avoid Supreme), and **Oxbow**, which can be purchased at [www.oxbowhay.com](http://www.oxbowhay.com) but



not in most stores. Use the feeding guide on the bag according to the weight of your rabbit. You will be tempted to overfeed—be strong! Your rabbit should only need  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of pellets per day if it's 4-6 pounds and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of pellets per day if it's larger. Overfeeding will make your rabbit fat, which can become a fatal problem very quickly in small animals.

The rest of your rabbit's diet should be timothy hay and vegetables. You should free-feed timothy hay. This means the rabbit should always have timothy hay available and should eat as much as she wants. Veggies should be fed once or twice daily and should NOT include iceberg lettuce. The veggie diet should be some combination of romaine lettuce, endive, and escarole. You should feed 10-15 leaves or so. Kale and parsley can be fed sparingly—they cause painful gas, though, so don't feed too much of these. Baby carrots make great occasional treats.

Make sure you feed your rabbit every day. Unlike rodents (and sometimes cats), rabbits will not save food for later.

So here's the daily diet:

$\frac{1}{4}$  -  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of high quality, alfalfa-free pellets

10 - 15 or so leaves of romaine lettuce, endive, and/or escarole once or twice a day

As much timothy hay as your rabbit will eat.

*\*Note: If your rabbit refuses to eat alfalfa-free pellets, try feeding both timothy and alfalfa pellets (half and half) for a week and then easing the alfalfa pellets out entirely. If she still won't eat the alfalfa-free pellets, you'll have to feed her alfalfa pellets. Make sure you use high quality pellets (Zupreem or Oxbow) and don't overfeed.*

*\*\*Note: Rabbits who are young and not yet full grown should be fed alfalfa-based food. Feed  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup daily to growing rabbits. Should you adopt a growing rabbit from RASA Rescue, we will go over the diet with you. Once your rabbit is full grown, you should switch to timothy-based pellets and follow the instructions listed and explained above.*

## Hygiene

You should trim your rabbit's nails every 4-6 weeks. Baths are not necessary for rabbits unless they have a messy butt. If this is the case, you should clean their rear ends using kitten shampoo and warm (not hot) water and then call the vet, as there is most likely a health problem. This site has instructions on how to trim your rabbit's nails. If you're new to nail trimming, you should have someone help you hold the rabbit. Nail trimming is very important, as long nails can break, which is very painful for your rabbit. It's better to trim them regularly yourself than to let your rabbit's nails get caught and break.



## Cage Size

RASA Rescue requires that you purchase an appropriate cage for your new rabbit. The minimum acceptable length for a small rabbit is at least 40 inches. All pet stores have cages of this size, but the smallest cages labeled "rabbit" cages at the store are most likely too small. This is true of most animal cages at the store—the smallest cages labeled "guinea pig" cages are not large enough for guinea pigs either. So be sure to pay attention to the inches. 40 inches for one smaller rabbit, 46 inches for one larger or two rabbits. You can also look into using large dog crates if these are more affordable.

## Cage Placement

Rabbits are much more like dogs and cats than rodents. They want to be in thick of things, part of the family. So your rabbit's cage should be in the room where your family spends the most time—the living room, or if you're a teenager, your well-used bedroom. Make sure that the spot in the room where you put the cage is not drafty. Putting your rabbit in a drafty area can result in serious and expensive illnesses.



## Bedding

Rabbits do not need bedding in their cages. Bedding makes them think it's a litter box—it confuses them. If they are chewers, you can put a seagrass or maze rug down. If they aren't chewers, a towel or rug works well for the bottom of their cage.

## Cleaning

Your rabbit's litter box should be cleaned at least every other day, more often if it's filled with feces or soaked in urine. Most rabbits are clean, and their cages can just be swept out with a small broom every day.

## Why Sterilize?

We sterilize all of our rabbits. Rabbits are highly overpopulated, much like cats. We get several calls every week asking us to take in rabbits, and every humane society in the area puts down several rabbits every day. We can't risk rabbits breeding, either on purpose or accidentally. In addition, rabbits who aren't sterilized are more likely to get cancer and other fatal diseases.

Sterilization surgery, while it does present some risk, is usually successful and safe. If you are looking to get your rabbit sterilized (which we highly recommend), make sure you ask the vet how many sterilizations she's done in the past and what her death rate is. Some vets are not experienced and do not tell you unless you ask. As a rescue, we only work with highly qualified vets and rarely encounter problems with sterilization surgeries.



All of the rabbits we adopt out are sterilized before going to their new homes.