

Bunnies Matter Rescue

Bunniesmatter.org



Congratulations on your new member of the family! It is an exciting time to bring home your INDOOR bunny/bunnies and knowing that they will be with you for ***THEIR LIFE*** (10-15 years).

Bunnies are an exotic animal and will need specific care from an exotic (rabbit savvy) veterinarian. We have included a business card for one exotic bunny vet that we recommend:

Southern Hills Animal Hospital
6545 S Fort Apache Road # 150
Las Vegas, NV 89148
702-586-1300
Dr. Blakesley
southernhillsah@gmail.com
www.southernhillsah.com

If you choose to use a different veterinarian, please verify that they are an experienced ***EXOTIC*** bunny veterinarian. Not all veterinarians know how to properly care for or treat a bunny.

I just got home with my bunny, now what?

We just gave you a ton of information, so let's review.

Food:

HAY is their primary food, 80% of their diet. Always provide access to an unlimited amount of hay, giving them a large portion in their litter box ***TWICE A DAY***.

PELLETS can be given every morning and evening, ¼ cup PER BUNNY per day (pellets are 5% of a bunny's diet – should be treated similar to a treat). We supply you with a bag of Alfalfa based pellets, which is perfect for younger bunnies. As your bunnies get older (1 year old), we recommend that you switch to a Timothy based pellet, so they don't gain too much weight. We recommend ***OXBOW ADULT!***

GREENS are about 10% of a bunny's diet. At the rescue we mostly give Romaine lettuce, but we have included foods that are "***Bunny Approved***", and you can "mix" in. Please refer to that guideline as to how to introduce new vegetables and fruits to your bunny's diet.

TREATS: we all want to spoil our buns and treats are great for you bunny. They can comprise 5% of their diet, but stay away from packaged treats, unless you get them from our "Bunny Approved" sites, such as Small Pet Select or The Green Bunny. Otherwise give small pieces of apple, carrot, or banana or some of the other fruits on our list. Just like humans, Fresh is Best!! Stay away from "processed" treats.

Water: Fresh water should always be provided for your bunny; they drink ***A LOT*** of water. We use "Chicken Feeders" for the water bowl, and they can be purchased from us for \$10, or at Walmart.

Pen Set Up:

We have included a complete guide as to how to set up your pen, please refer to the included diagram for the pen, and how to make a litter box (change twice a week).

We hope that the bunny or bunnies you adopted from us will be your companion for "***Their Life***". If for some reason you can no longer care for your bunny, we want you to bring them back to us so that we can rehome to a good home.

If you ***EVER*** have any questions, feel free to reach out. If your bunny is acting quiet or "different", becomes sick or needs help, ***please contact you veterinarian immediately***. If you cannot reach them, contact us as we might be able to help, offer guidance or provide emergency vet options. Even though the bunny is yours, they will always be a part of our rescue!

Thank you!

Team Bunnies – Dave, Jackie, Sandy, Darla, Denise and more!

BEST PLACES TO GET YOUR BUNNY SUPPLIES

Bunny Item	Location	Approximate Cost
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36" Exercise Pens	www.chewy.com	\$45
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Timothy Hay	Jones Feed or CAL Ranch	\$29 per bale
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Hay can also be purchased at Walmart or pet stores but are more expensive. We off 3 "flakes" of hay for \$10. Just let us know you want to come get some so we will have it ready for you.

Bunny Pellets	Jones Feed, CAL Ranch	\$13 for 25lb bag
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Pellets can also be found at Walmart or pets stores – avoid pellets that have seeds or treats in them.

Woody Pellets (Litter)	Jones Feed, CAL Ranch	\$7.50 for a 40lb bag
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Paper Pellets (Litter)	www.chewy.com	\$20 for a 30lb bag
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Litter Boxes-Small	Walmart	\$4
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Litter Boxes – Large	Walmart	\$9
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Hidey Boxes	Costco	FREE
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Food & Water Bowls	Any \$1 store	\$1
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Gravity water dispenser	Walmart (Chicken feeder)	\$10
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Timothy Bunny Logs	Walmart or Pet Store	Varies
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Bunny Treats:	Its best to give SMALL pieces of carrots, banana, apple etc. Avoid pet store treats and treats with yogurt as they are generally unhealthy.	
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Toys:	Small Pet Select - https://bit.ly/2Rwsnue Use our discount code for 15% your first purchase, plus we will receive up to 15% back that goes back to the bunnies. RES-BUNNIESMATTER	
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The Green Bunny www.thegreenbunnystore.com/shop

RABBIT 101

A BASIC CARE GUIDE



HOUSING

INDOORS VS. OUTDOORS

- Rabbits will live a lot longer life when they are kept indoors. The average lifespan of an indoor rabbit is more than twice that of an outdoor rabbit (7–12 years vs. 1–5 years). Rabbits kept outside are exposed to bad weather, diseases, toxins/poisons (e.g., pesticides, fertilizers), and predators, that can shorten or end their lives. Even when kept in securely locked hutches, the sight, sound, or smell of a nearby predator can cause a rabbit to panic, resulting in injury or even death due to shock.
- As such, bunnies should spend most of their time indoors, with occasional excursions outside to play in a secure, safe area (supervised only). Please be aware of any dangerous chemicals (pesticides), plants or a recent fertilization of your lawn.

ENCLOSURES

- Bunnies need a place to call their own for safety and privacy. This space should be large enough for a litter box, food bowl, water bowl, hideaway or nest box, and toys with room left over for relaxing and hopping. The enclosure should be at least 4x the length of your rabbit when fully grown and tall enough to stand up in without his/her ears touching the top.

The following are three housing options that many bunny owners use:

- **Exercise Pens:** Pens can be constructed from a variety of materials, but some of the best are the metal exercise pens you can buy online for around \$40 - \$60 (Chewy.com, Amazon.com or Petco.com) for a 4 ft. X 4 ft. x 3 ft. when set up as a square. These pens are particularly useful for nonstandard spaces and are often much easier to clean than cages or condos. When using a pen, you may want to cover the native flooring with a tarp, cotton rugs, carpet remnants, linoleum, vinyl, or plastic mats to prevent damage from chewing/digging or stains from accidents.

- **Cages:** Are *not* recommended by most bunny rescues. Most rabbit cages sold are too small for a bunny to spend any significant amount of time in. Many have wire floor bottoms that can cause your bunny to develop sore hocks which can require lots of work and expensive medical treatment to correct.
- **Hutches/Condos:** Are also not recommended by bunny rescues. While multi-tiered hutches or condos can provide more overall space than cages by utilizing vertical space as well as horizontal space, it still prevents a bunny from freely moving or hopping and eventually will hurt their health. Hutches are hard to put together and are expensive.
- **Note that the smaller the enclosure, the more time outside of it your rabbit will need.** In general, rabbits need at least 2 hours per day in a space large enough for running/jumping. A rabbit confined to a small enclosure will not have the room to run or binky (a happy rabbit jumping into the air) and are prone to develop arthritis earlier on.

LITTER BOXES

- When choosing a litter box, opt for a plastic bin that is large enough for your bunny to lie stretched out in, as small boxes often promote peeing outside the box. Extra-large cat litter boxes work great for most rabbits and under-the-bed storage bins work well for very large buns.
- Woody pellets (inexpensive) and/or recycled paper litter (more expensive) make the best bunny litter and are available in most feed and pet stores. **NEVER use clumping cat litter, corn cob litter, or wood shavings.** The dust in these can cause respiratory infections and are toxic to your bunny if consumed.

FOOD & WATER DISPENSERS

- **Food:** Ceramic or glass bowls are ideal for serving pellets and veggies, as they are heavier than plastic bowls and much less likely to end up as toss toys. Fresh hay should be placed in the litter box (on top of the litter pellets) to promote good litter habits, as bunnies typically poop and pee where they eat and prefer to be clean. A secondary source of always clean hay can be put in a hay dispenser (e.g., hay feeder, wire basket, plastic bag dispenser, wood hopper) over the litterbox edge to minimize waste.
- **Water:** Bowls are generally preferred over bottles because bottles require bunnies to work harder for their water, which can result in chronic dehydration and predispose them to GI stasis. Rabbits can drink as much as a large dog and will not get all that they need from just a bottle. Large ceramic bowls that can hold at least 3 cups of water are ideal as these will provide sufficient water throughout the day and are not as likely as plastic bowls to be tossed around and dumped. They are also much easier to clean. **Providing fresh water everyday will help to keep your bunny healthy.**

HIDEAWAY BOXES

- Your rabbits need a secure place within their enclosure to hide in. Hideaway boxes can include plastic shelters, wicker tunnels/tents, wood houses, or cardboard boxes with an entryway cut out of the side. You can find hideaway boxes for FREE just by visiting your local Costco or Sam's Club (they have lots of empty boxes they will allow you to take). Many commercially available hideaways run on the small side, so make sure to check the dimensions and choose something that is large enough for your rabbit to lie down in.

TOYS

- Rabbits love to play and will need variety of toys to chew, dig, and toss around to prevent boredom. Bored bunnies are destructive bunnies and will turn to whatever they can find (e.g., carpets, baseboards, walls) when their options are limited. *Chew toys are particularly important for bunnies as rabbit teeth are constantly growing and need to be worn down to prevent overgrowth.*

The following is a list of things you can offer your bunny, many of which you may have lying around your house:

- **Cardboard boxes:** Cut holes in the sides to make a house and fill it with shredded paper to create a digging box. Avoid pieces with lots of ink as the ink can cause poisoning in large quantities.
- **Toilet paper or paper towel tubes:** Fill them with hay and put a piece of dried fruit in the center or cut them up and create little balls or garlands for them to toss.
- **Wicker balls, baskets, or wreaths:** Buy from the store or create your own from willow branches. If bought from a store, make sure the wicker is untreated.
- **Newspapers:** Newspapers make great shredding toys since the ink in these is non-toxic to rabbits.
- **Baby toys or cat toys:** Hard plastic balls, rattles, and plastic keys make great toss toys!
- **Cotton towels or fleece blankets:** Great for digging around and nesting in.
- **Wood blocks or branches:** Make sure to use non-toxic woods.
 - **Safe** = Apple, ash, aspen, cottonwood, pine (dried), sugar or silver maple, willow
 - **Toxic** = Beech, birch, cedar, cherry, elm, fir, mahogany, red maple, spruce, walnut
 - See also: <https://www.thespruce.com/safe-woods-and-plants-for-rabbits-12>
[HYPERLINK "about:blank"39351](#)

DIET & NUTRITION

BASIC NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- The general rule for a good bunny diet is 80% hay, 10% veggies, 5% pellets and 5% healthy treats.
- Rabbit diets should consist of unlimited fresh hay fed through a litterbox-side feeder and/or directly in the litterbox.
- Veggies can be fed once or twice a day. Certain veggies must be moderated carefully because they contain certain nutrients that are toxic or harmful to bunnies in high amounts. A good main staple used by many rescues is romaine lettuce.
- Sweet fruity treats should be given sparingly, once a day at most, because they can cause digestive or teeth issues. **NEVER feed treats that include grains or dairy products even though they may be advertised as safe for rabbits.**
- Always introduce new foods sparingly to see how your rabbit responds before giving larger amounts.
- Droppings are a good indicator of digestion abnormalities. **If any loose stools occur revert to a strictly hay only diet until it returns to normal.**

AGE	HAY	PELLETS	VEGGIES	TREATS
7 weeks – 7 months	Unlimited alfalfa hay	Unlimited	Introduce in tiny amounts one at a time keep them simple for example, romaine lettuce	None
7 months – 1 year	Transition from unlimited alfalfa hay to timothy hay Slowly mix in timothy hay over time to not cause digestive issues	5 tbl spoons per 6 lbs. body weight	Increase gradually to 1–2 cups per 6 lbs. body weight	1–2 small treats a day
>1 year	Unlimited timothy hay	3 tbl spoons per 6 lbs. body weight*	1–2 cups per 6 lbs. body weight	1–2 small treats a day

*If you own a small rabbit breed that weighs over 6lbs it is likely overweight and should have no pellets, and reduced treats and veggies until it returns to a healthy weight.

HAY

- Alfalfa hay is higher in protein and calcium and is only recommended for young rabbits who are actively growing, nursing mothers, and any rabbits who have trouble maintaining weight.

- Grass hays, such as timothy grass hay or orchard grass hays, are lower in protein and calcium than alfalfa hay, but higher in fiber. **Timothy hay is recommended for most rabbits to promote dental and digestive health.**
- Hay can be purchased cheaply at many feed stores as large bales, but make sure they are not lower quality. Avoid any hay that is moldy, brown, or contains “weeds” or sticker Small Pet Select and Oxbow both offer high quality hays and can be purchased online and, in most pet & feed stores.
- Hay should be stored in a cool, dark, dry place to prolong its shelf-life.
- ***Bunnies should always have access to unlimited supply of fresh hay.***

PELLETS

- When choosing a good pellet, **avoid anything that contains seeds, nuts, corn, or fruit bits** as these “gourmet” blends cause digestive issues that can be lethal to your rabbit.
- Be very aware that many feed companies will put a picture of a bunny on their labels even when the food content is very bad for your bunny’s health.
- Pellets are not necessary to a rabbit's health as they cause weight gain, and a bad fiber count can lead to stasis. Pellets are good for rabbits that need to gain weight, growing babies, and mothers that need more energy.
- ***A good pellet should contain at least 18% fiber to maintain gut motility.***

The following brands are generally considered good for most rabbits:

- Oxbow (Essentials, Garden Select), Small Pet Select, Kaytee (Timothy Complete, Complete Plus), Sherwood Forest
- Avoid buying large quantities as pellets lose nutritional value over time and can become rancid when exposed to moisture. Discard unused pellets 6 weeks after opening the bag.

VEGGIES

- When starting to feed vegetables to your rabbit, start with one variety at a time (we start with Romaine lettuce) to see how your bunny tolerates it. If your bunny experiences loose stools with a certain vegetable, avoid that vegetable.
- Some vegetables are high in oxalic acid, which can cause kidney stones if consumed in high quantities. Only 1 out of 3 varieties of greens per day should be high in oxalic acid, and these vegetables are noted below.
- Non-leafy vegetables should be given on a more limited basis because these tend to have more sugar content or may cause gas. It is best to limit these vegetables to roughly 1 tablespoon per 2 lbs. of body weight per day.
- ***If a rabbit starts to get loose stools, stop feeding vegetables immediately and stick to mostly hay until their gut recovers.***

LEAFY GREENS (High Oxalic Acid Content)	LEAFY GREENS (Low Oxalic Acid Content)	NON-LEAFY GREENS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parsley • Spinach • Mustard Greens • Beet Greens • Swiss Chard • Radish Tops • Sprouts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arugula • Endive • Escarole • Kale • Red/Green Leaf Lettuce • Romaine Lettuce • Spring Greens • Turnip Greens • Dandelion Greens • Mint • Basil • Cilantro • Radicchio • Bok Choy • Fennel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broccoli/Broccolini • Edible Flowers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roses, Pansies, Hibiscus, Dandelion • Bell Peppers • Chinese Pea Pods • Brussel Sprouts • Summer Squash • Zucchini Squash • Pumpkin

TREATS

Treats for rabbits include fresh or dried fruits, and starchy vegetables (e.g., carrots). These foods should be given in very limited quantities due to the high sugar content of each.

Typically, an adult rabbit should only receive 1–2 tsp or 1–2 oz of treats per day.

- Fruits that are safe to eat include: Apples, apricots, bananas, berries (e.g., blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, etc.), cherries, kiwi, mangos, melons, nectarines, oranges, papayas, peaches, pears, pineapples, plums, and tomatoes.
- ***Make sure to remove any pits or larger seeds*** (e.g., apple seeds) from the fruit before giving it to your bunny as many of these are toxic to rabbits. Fruits with thick skins or peels should have these removed as well.
- Dried fruits with additives (check if anything else is on the ingredients list) should not be fed.

COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION

BUNNY LANGUAGE

- Rabbits are prey animals, which means they are generally wary of larger animals, startle easily, and hide when scared or ill. Learning to read body language, including posture and ear position, will help you understand how your bunny is feeling so you know how to respond. Fast nose movements and rapid breathing can also be a sign of nervousness or stress. The following infographic shows some of the most common bunny body language postures:



Understanding rabbit behaviour

YOUR RABBIT'S BODY LANGUAGE CAN HELP YOU TO UNDERSTAND HOW THEY ARE FEELING

A happy rabbit

These rabbits are relaxed and happy.

Rabbits 1-3 show ears close together, facing slightly backwards and pointing outwards. Eyes may be partially closed.



Rabbit is lying down, with a relaxed body posture and legs tucked under the body.



Rabbit is lying down, with front paws pointing forward and rear legs stuck out sideways. Body is relaxed and extended.



Rabbit is lying down with a fully extended, relaxed body. Back legs are stretched out behind the body and the front paws are pointing forward.



Rabbit jumps into the air with all four paws off the ground and twists in mid-air before landing.

A worried rabbit

These rabbits are telling you that they are uncomfortable and don't want you near them.



Rabbit is in a crouched position, muscles are tense, head held flat to the ground, ears wide apart and flattened against the back, pupils dilated.



Rabbits who are worried or anxious may hide.

An angry or very unhappy rabbit

These rabbits are not happy and want you to stay away or go away.



Rabbit turns and moves away flicking the back feet. Ears may be held against the back.



Rabbit is sitting up on back legs with front paws raised displaying boxing behaviour. Ears pointed upwards and facing outwards, rabbit may be growling.



Rabbit is standing tense, with back legs thumping on the ground. Tail raised, ears pointing upwards and slightly turned outwards, facial muscles are tense and pupils dilated.



Rabbit is standing tense with body down and weight towards the back, head tilted upwards, mouth open and teeth visible. Ears held back and lowered, tail raised, pupils dilated.

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Wilberforce Way, Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 9RS


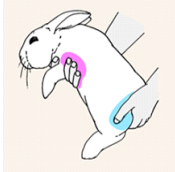

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The RSPCA helps animals in England and Wales. Registered charity no: 219099 The RSPCA only exists with the support of public donations.

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BONDING WITH YOUR BUNNY

- Your bunny may be shy when you first start, and it can take some time for them to learn to trust you. To begin to build trust, start by sitting or lying on the floor nearby while they explore their surroundings. Rabbits (especially younger ones) are curious and will come to you when you are at its level. Allow your bunny to come to you and resist the urge to pet them when they first approach you. In doing so, they learn that you are not a threat to them.
- Once your rabbit is comfortable with you, begin to offer treats while saying his/her name. This teaches your bunny that hands bring good things and helps him/her get used to your voice.
- Advance to petting once your rabbit readily accepts treats from your hands. Slowly approach from above his/her head and gently stroke upwards from the nose to the forehead. Most rabbits prefer being pet on the head rather than their whole body. Try to avoid coming from directly in front of his/her face, as this is a blind spot and will likely startle them at first. You may need to offer treats with one hand as an incentive while you try to pet him/her with your other hand. Once he/she accepts forehead petting, gradually expand to the ears, cheeks, shoulders, and back to discover what your rabbit enjoys most. Avoid petting the tail, feet, or belly as most rabbits do not enjoy being touched in these areas.

HANDLING

- **Most rabbits do not like to be picked up as this feels a lot like being carried off by a predator. For this reason, it is best to limit handling of your rabbit to situations in which it is necessary.** To prevent injuries to yourself and your bunny, use the following steps to provide adequate support each time you pick up your rabbit:
 - Place one hand on your rabbit's chest and the other hand on his/her bottom. **Never let your rabbit "dangle" as they have very fragile backs and can sustain serious or even FATAL injuries if they kick while hanging.** Similarly, **never scruff a rabbit or pick them up by their ears** as it is very painful and extremely likely to result in injuries!
 - Smoothly lift your rabbit off the ground and place him/her gently, yet firmly against your chest. You can either hold your bunny sideways with your arm across his/her body or facing you with his/her feet against your chest.
 - **Never hold your bunny upside down.** When a bunny is on its back it becomes stunned and cannot move which can eventually scare it into **shock**.
 - While holding your rabbit, even if you believe you believe you are holding them securely, be aware they may tense up and jump at any time.
 - To put your rabbit down, get close to the ground and gently release them.
 - **If you ever feel like you are in danger of your rabbit escaping your grip, lower yourself to the ground as fast as possible so it does not fall far and sustain serious injuries.**

LITTER TRAINING

- Just like cats, rabbits can be trained to use a litterbox! To start, prepare a large litterbox by covering the bottom of the box with a thin layer of recycled paper or woody pellets and placing a large amount of hay at one end. Bunnies poop and pee where they eat, so placing the hay directly in the box encourages them to go there. You can also place their pellet or veggie dish in with the hay if your box is large enough and it doesn't take up too much room.
- Rabbits often like to go in corners, so start by placing the box in a corner of his/her pen. If he/she repeatedly goes in a different place, move the litterbox to that spot to encourage use.
- Place any stray poops you find inside the litterbox and cover with hay. If your rabbit pees outside of the box, soak up the urine with a paper towel and place the towel in the box and cover with hay. You should clean the urine spot with a mix of apple cider vinegar and water to remove the scent and deter them from going there again. By doing these things, your rabbit will eventually learn to go only in the litterbox.

HEALTH

SPAYING & NEUTERING

- **Getting your rabbit fixed is critical**, not only because it will improve territorial behaviors (like biting and spraying) and eliminate the risk of unwanted litters, but also because it reduces the risk of a variety of diseases (uterine cancer in females) and increases the lifespan of your rabbits. **Spaying is particularly important for females as up to 80% of females develop uterine cancer by 5 years of age if left intact.**
- Rabbits can be fixed as soon as they reach sexual maturity. For males, this typically occurs at around 3 months of age, whereas females typically mature after 4 months of age. For smaller breed bunnies, your vet may opt to wait until 6 months of age before spaying a female rabbit to ensure she has reached a healthy weight and will better tolerate the surgery.
- It is important to keep in mind that while there are risks associated with any type of surgery, the risks of spaying or neutering are minimal when performed by a trained veterinarian.
- A good rabbit veterinarian will assess your rabbit prior to the surgery and will only perform the procedure if the risks of remaining intact outweigh the risks of undergoing the procedure.

FINDING A GOOD EXOTIC "BUNNY" VETERINARIAN

- Despite being a small animal, rabbits are considered "exotics" in the veterinary world and only certain veterinarians can provide proper care. Rabbits in general are more expensive to vet than a dog or a cat. To find a rabbit-savvy vet, ask your local rabbit rescue or shelter or follow this link <https://bunniesmatter.org/bunny-vets-vegas/> **Don't wait for an emergency to start looking for a good regular and emergency vet. You want to have one at your fingertips if possible.**

GENERAL CARE

- **Grooming:** Rabbits require regular grooming to maintain a clean and healthy coat. While most bunnies groom themselves, they will need your help at sometimes, particularly if they have longer fur or have difficulty reaching. Daily grooming is necessary for long-haired breeds as their fur is very prone to matting. Rabbits with medium or short coats generally need extra grooming during periods of heavy shedding. There are a variety of brushes and combs available, though many owners like Furminator® type brushes and slicker combs. We also recommend the **Hair Buster Comb sold by Small Pet Select**. Regardless of which one you use, be gentle when brushing as bunnies have very delicate skin. If your bun develops mats, use a mat splitter to remove it. Avoid scissors as it is very easy to nick the skin. ***If a bunny is not groomed it may ingest too much of its own fur causing a blockage and GI stasis.***
- **Bathing:** ***Rabbits should NOT be given full body baths except under extremely special circumstances and after consultation with your vet.*** Baths are extremely stressful for a rabbit and they ***lose body heat quickly when wet, both of which can put your bun in shock.*** Some buns may occasionally need to have their bottoms cleaned to remove stuck stool or urine (called a Butt Bath). If this happens, spot clean the area with a wet cloth, gently dip the soiled area in a sink/tub filled with 2–3 inches of water or hold your bun and place the soiled area under a running faucet. Make sure to thoroughly dry the area after cleaning to prevent irritation and infection.
- **Nail Trims:** Nails should be trimmed regularly (monthly) as long nails make hopping difficult and are prone to breaking. To trim your buns nails, first examine the nail and find the Quick, a small vein that appears as a dark line in the nail. For buns with dark nails, you may need a flashlight to help you see it. Cut the nail just past the Quick using clippers designed for pets. If you accidentally nick the Quick, dab a bit of **styptic powder (aka Quick Stop)** onto the nail to stop the bleeding. When trimming nails, you can always give the cutters a test squeeze before you cut to see if your rabbit reacts. If it pulls its paw away like it feels it, then it is likely you would have cut the vein.

BASIC BUNNY HEALTH

- ***Being prey animals, rabbits are exceptionally good at hiding illness.*** As such, it is important to become familiar with your rabbit and to watch for changes in behavior or bodily functions. ***Feeding time is a good time to notice that your bunny might not be feeling good (if they don't run out for food as usual or some other normal habit).***
- Abnormal stool is often one of the first signs that something isn't quite right, and changes can be helpful in identifying GI stasis, one of the common causes of death in rabbits.

Normal Stool

- **Cecal Pellets** = Hard, round marbles or “cocoa puffs” that consist of undigested fiber. The average rabbit will produce ~300 of these per day!



- **Cecotropes** = Soft grape-like clusters made up of protein, vitamins, and essential bacteria. Rabbits must re-ingest these to maintain adequate nutrition and do so almost immediately, so you should only see these occasionally.



Abnormal Stool

- **String of Pearls** = Cecal pellets strung together by pieces of hair. This is common during molts and is ok if there are only a few. If you see several, groom your bun to prevent them from ingesting too much fur and getting a blockage.



- **Small, Scant Droppings** = Cecal pellets that are smaller than normal and fewer in number. **This is a sign that digestion is slow and often precedes an episode of GI stasis.** Offer your rabbit a favorite treat and if he/she accepts, consider offering canned pumpkin, applesauce, or wetted greens and monitor them closely. ***If he/she refuses, contact your vet ASAP!***
- **Soft Stool** = Squishy cecal pellets or pudding-like stools. This usually due to a lack of fiber and/or diet too rich in sugar. If you see this, as long as your rabbit is still willing to eat hay, stick to a hay only diet until the droppings return to normal. You may also need to switch to a higher fiber pellet. If the problem persists, *your bun will need to see a vet.*
- **Diarrhea** = True diarrhea is profuse, watery, and can be bloody. **Diarrhea is a medical emergency for rabbits** as they dehydrate very quickly and can go into shock without prompt treatment. ***Stop all treats and veggies and see an exotic vet as soon as possible.***

Gastrointestinal (GI) Stasis

- When the muscle contractions that move food through the intestines slow down or stop, this is referred to as GI stasis. In rabbits, the slowing of the intestines allows bacteria in the gut to proliferate. These bacteria produce gas that becomes extremely painful as it builds, and some will also produce deadly toxins. The pain and toxins will lead to hypothermia, and if not treated within 48 hours, the rabbit will die from shock. ***It's always a good idea to have infant gas drops (Pediatric Simethicone) on hand to give to your bunny in case you suspect your bunny may have gas.*** Infant gas drops come in a little shaker bottle, and you just administer a syringe worth and put it in the rabbit's mouth. The gas drops don't leave the rabbit's intestinal tract so you can't overdose your bunny on it. We usually give about one milliliter, or one cc per hour for three hours straight. A second dose an hour later, and a third dose an hour later. If there's no difference after the third dose, the gas drops probably aren't going to help, but it never hurts anything.
- There are several things that can cause a rabbit to go into stasis, including stress, dehydration, pain, intestinal blockages, or inadequate fiber intake. **The two key signs to watch for are a refusal to eat or an absence of stool in 12 hours.** Other symptoms include lethargy, tooth grinding, hunching, reluctance to move, or a bloated abdomen. ***If you see any of these signs, get your bunny to a rabbit-savvy vet immediately!***

Common Ailments

- While GI problems are the most common, rabbits can suffer from a variety of other ailments.

The following is a list of things to watch for that will tell you if your bun needs to see a vet:

- **General:** Monitor for lethargy, loss of appetite, or signs of pain, such as: hunching, a reluctance to move, moving slowly/with effort, loud tooth grinding, hiding, aggression, depression, or apathy. If your bun exhibits any of these symptoms, ***see an exotic vet immediately!***
- **Head & Ears:** Watch for head shaking, head tilting, ear scratching, sores, irritated skin, and abnormal discharges. These may be signs of conditions such as ear mites, ear infections, or excess earwax. ***Head tilting is particularly concerning as this could be a sign of a rare but dangerous disease caused by Encephalitozoon cuniculi (E. cuniculi). Head tilting is usually the first sign, and is quickly followed by loss of balance, paralysis, and seizures. If your bun has any of these symptoms, he/she needs to see a vet ASAP!***
- **Eyes:** Check for redness, weepy or watery eyes, and abnormal crusts or discharges. Presence of these may indicate allergies, an infection, or teeth that are overgrowing. Prompt treatment is needed to prevent complications, so ***contact your vet right away.***

- **Mouth & Teeth:** Look for drooling, dropping food while eating, avoidance of “hard” foods or loss of appetite. These are signs that your bun may have overgrown teeth or an abscessed tooth. Because these conditions make eating very painful, your bun should be seen as soon as possible to avoid an emergency visit for an episode of GI stasis.
- **Nose & Lungs:** Listen for any abnormal breathing or sneezing and check to see if your bun has a runny nose. The presence of any of these may indicate your bun has a respiratory infection, allergies, or an underlying heart problem. A vet visit is needed to determine the cause, with immediate care required if breathing is labored.
- **Fur & Skin:** Check for lumps, cuts, sores, itching, flaky or irritated skin, and hair loss. These may be signs of conditions such as fur mites, fleas, ringworm, or fly strike. Fly strike occurs when a fly lays eggs in an open wound or near a dirty bottom and the maggots that hatch burrow into the skin. ***If you see eggs or maggots, or areas of matted fur with underlying irritated skin, get to an exotic vet ASAP!***
- **Feet:** Examine each foot for cuts, sores, red or irritated skin, cuts, or sores. Sores are often the result of dirty environments, wire flooring, or inactivity secondary to obesity or a lack of space to move. Also make sure the nails are not broken or bleeding. Exposed nail beds are very prone to infection, which is also why bunnies should never be declawed.
- **Urine:** Normal rabbit urine ranges from light yellow to a deep orange-red or rust color. Bright red urine indicates blood is present and should be evaluated by a vet. White crusts around urine spots are due to too much calcium, which can lead to bladder stones. Check your bun’s diet and switch out any high-calcium foods.

Introducing Other Pets/Rabbits

- Let your rabbit get used to their new home before introducing them to other pets, like your dogs or cats.
- If you already have one or more resident rabbits, keep your new rabbit separate from them until you can do introductions in a neutral location.
- Go to <https://rabbit.org/faq-bonding-multiple-rabbits> for more information on bonding.

RESOURCES

- Bunnies Matter Rescue (www.bunniesmatter.org)
- House Rabbit Society (www.rabbit.org)
- My House Rabbit (www.myhouserabbit.org)
- House Rabbit Network (www.rabbitnetwork.org)
- Binky Bunny (www.binkybunny.com)
- Medi-Rabbit (www.medirabbit.com)
- House Rabbit Handbook (by Marinell Harriman, available at www.rabbit.org or via Amazon)
- Rabbits for Dummies (by Connie Isbell and Audrey Pavia, available on Amazon)

New Bunny Litter Box & Pen Set Up Information

How to make your litter box

Step 1 - Add a thin layer of the "Woody" pellets to the bottom of the litter box. Just enough to line the entire bottom of the litter box

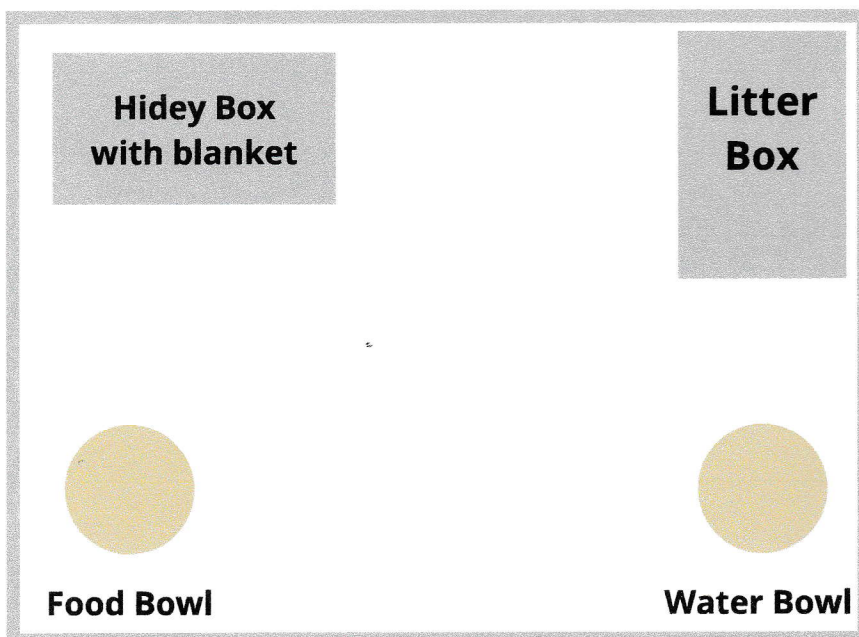
Step 2 - Add a generous layer of hay over the pellets. Bunnies should always have unlimited hay.

Every morning and evening, your bunny should be given fresh Timothy hay. Giving more hay at one end of the box allows your bunny to sit in the box and eat fresh hay, and pee & poop at the same time. When you can see the "Woody" pellets at the bottom of the litter box, it's time to add more hay. You can always get a "Hay Feeder" that attaches to the pen to supplement your bunnies fresh hay. You should change the entire litter box a minimum of once a week, but your bunnies will love you if you change it twice a week.

Pen set up

When setting up your X-pen for the first time, always protect your carpet or tile with a 6x8 foot tarp. Next, you will set up your x-pen and make sure that the door opens **OUT** and that then x-pen door doesn't drag on the tarp (that means your pen is upside down). The minimum contents of the pen includes: Hidey box with blanket underneath, Litter box, Food bowl, Water bowl, & toys. We **DO NOT** recommend the water bottles that attach to the pens. They do not supply enough water as bunnies drink **A LOT** of water, and they are bad for their teeth. Toys should include: Wood blocks, paper towel holders, **HARD** plastic toys etc. They love applewood chew sticks, willow balls and Bunny "Logs" just to name a few.

This is our typical set up. We always make sure that the water bowl is away from the blankets. Bunnies like to "rearrange" their pen, and if the water bowl is too close to their blankets, the blanket will absorb the water and you will have a soggy blanket and the bunny will have no water. (We get our water feeders from Walmart. They are actually a "Chicken feeder" and they are \$10



NEVER

place the pen next to any electrical cords, extension cords or outlets where they can possibly chew them and get electrocuted.

NEVER

hang any "cute" decorative lights in or along the pens. Remember, bunnies LOVE to chew ANYTHING!