



Owning and Caring For Pet Rabbits

These cuddly, social animals are great companions for people who are willing to dedicate the time to learn about their needs. Anyone considering adding a rabbit to their family should carefully research books and web sites on rabbit care before making a decision.

Facts:

- Lifespan 8-12 years
- Weight 1-10 lbs
- Suggested spay/neuter 4-6 months
- Gestation (pregnancy) about 30 days
- They are herbivores
- Teeth never stop growing
- Inability to vomit

Common Problems:

- Gastrointestinal stasis/hair balls
- Dental problems
- Internal/External parasites
- Head tilt
- Respiratory infections
- Abscesses
- Bladder stones/UTI
- Obesity
- Fractures

Preventative Care:

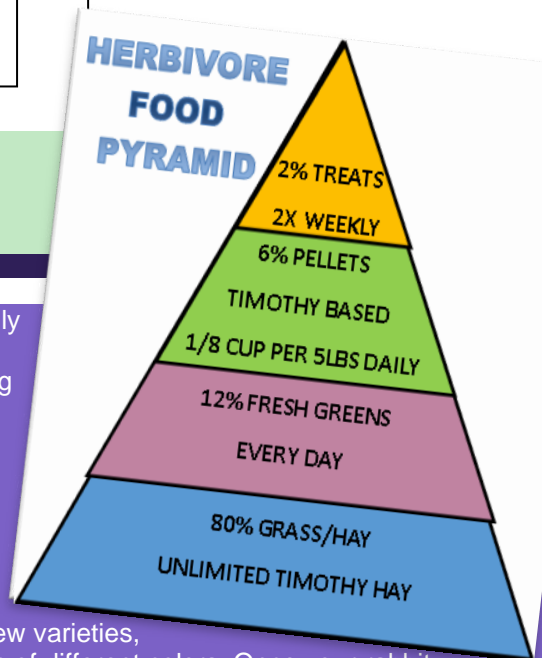
- Complete physical exam every 6-12 months
- Yearly fecal exam to check for parasites
- Spay/Neuter
- Annual blood work to monitor organ function
- Routine dental exam
- Regular grooming

DIET ESSENTIALS

Pellets: Pellets are most important in young/thin rabbits because they are highly concentrated in nutrients. As a rabbit reaches maturity, pellets should make up less of the diet – replaced with higher quantities of hay/vegetables. Overfeeding pellets in mature/healthy rabbits leads to obesity and other medical conditions.

Hay: Fresh hay should be available 24 hours a day. Hay is essential to a rabbit's good health, providing the roughage that helps reduce the danger of hairballs and other blockages.

Vegetables: Vegetables provide valuable roughage, as well as essential vitamins to your rabbit's diet. Introduce new vegetables one at a time. This way, if a gastrointestinal upset occurs (in the form of diarrhea), you will know which food is the culprit, and thus know not to offer it again. Continue to add new varieties, including both dark leafy vegetables and root vegetables, and serve vegetables of different colors. Once your rabbit is used to several vegetables, feed him or her at least three different kinds daily for a mix of nutrients.





Say NO to...

- Avocados and apricots
- Beans and nuts
- Biscuits/bread/toast
- Cereal and chips
- Cherries
- Chocolate
- Corn
- Evergreen leaves
- Iceberg lettuce
- Nuts
- Onion
- Pasta
- Rhubarb
- Seeds
- Tomatoes and potatoes
- Anything grown from a bulb



Fresh, clean water should be available to your rabbit around the clock.

Each day, change out the water in the dish or water bottle for fresh water. On a weekly basis, sanitize the water dish/bottle with a mild dish detergent and rinse thoroughly before adding drinking water.

More on Diet

Because their diets contains so much cellulose, rabbits pass two different types of feces in order to completely break down their food. Other grazers will swallow their feed, then “burp” it back up (as cows chew cud), but instead rabbits will re-ingest their feces on the first pass to get all of the nutrients they need.

Behavior

Rabbits are highly social animals. Their ease to be handled is highly dependent on socialization with humans at a young age. They are extremely curious creatures and some need constant supervision while outside of their cage environment as they may eat things they shouldn't or chew on electrical cords. They are rather talented escape artists, therefore it is important to “rabbit proof” areas in which one might escape of get injured. Rabbits are meticulously clean animals and are easy to housebreak and train. Much like a dog or cat, a pet rabbit can be taught to come to his/her name, sit in your lap, use a litter pan, and do simple tricks.

Environment

We recommend a large, indoor cage, preferably with a solid bottom and ample, soft bedding as to not cause sores on the feet. The cage should be placed in a quiet location with an average temperature from 50°F to 75°F. Be sure to put the cage in a room you will be present in often, not a garage or basement. Your pet should be taken out of the cage for regular exercise in a pen, ball, or monitored free roaming. A litter box with pelleted/recycled shredded newspaper or aspen shavings is suggested. Pine and cedar shavings should be avoided as those may cause respiratory irritation. The litter box should

be cleaned daily. Your pet will also require a nest box/basket made from untreated materials that can be filled with bedding to provide a place to hide and a sense of security. Playtime and enrichment is also very important. Untreated wooden toys, cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls, or paper bags are cost effective ways to prevent boredom.

Teeth

A rabbit's teeth never stop growing; therefore regular dental exams are wise. Even if the front teeth look fine, the back teeth may have severe issues you can't see. Rabbits frequently develop tooth root abscesses and spurs, or points to the teeth that cause painful ulcers inside the mouth. You may notice hypersalivation, a decrease in appetite, swelling/pain from the jaw, tooth grinding, nasal/ocular discharge, or a change in behavior if your rabbit is suffering from dental problems. Treatment depends on the severity of the condition. A surgical procedure, in which the cheek teeth are trimmed down, is one option. In some cases, extraction may be necessary. To help prevent dental disease due to malocclusion- limit the intake of pellets, soft fruits or vegetables from the rabbit's diet. Instead, provide adequate tough fibrous foods such as hay and grasses to encourage normal wear of teeth.

Weight

Increased weight interferes with normal activities and puts a rabbit at higher risk for many health problems. Some of the issues obese rabbits are predisposed to include the cardiovascular, joint, gastrointestinal, urogenital, and liver systems. A lack in appropriate exercise and feeding too much of a pelleted diet will predispose rabbits to obesity.

