

Habitat Tips for Rabbits

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Many of the problems with hygiene-related disease, arthritis, boredom, and depression in rabbits can be linked to poor housing. If you make a commitment to keeping a house rabbit, make sure you are willing to provide him with adequate housing. By adhering to the following recommendations, you will be able to successfully provide a living space that keeps your pet happy and healthy.

The Bigger the Better

If selecting a [cage](#) to house your rabbit, we advocate choosing the biggest you can provide. The cage needs to be at least large enough for your rabbit to lie down stretched out and high enough so your pet does not hit his head on the cage top. At a minimum, the cage should be at least 4 times as large as the rabbit, and larger if he is not routinely out of his cage for exercise. Your cage will need to be large enough for, and should be divided into, sleeping, activity, litter, and food/water areas. Do not select a cage based upon the size of your young rabbit. Research his adult size and purchase a cage large enough to meet your rabbit's needs as an adult. If you have a restricted amount of floor space, consider a two-level cage, with a ramp connecting the two levels.



Rabbits need cages with good ventilation. Do NOT use an aquarium or cage with all solid sides. A wire cage is a good choice, but make sure it has no sharp edges and no plastic coating for your pet to chew. Select a cage with wire spacing close enough so that it won't allow body parts to get stuck. Likewise, if you allow your pet to go in and out of the door independently at playtime, make sure the door opens to the side instead of downward, so paws won't get embedded in the wire mesh when your pet steps out. If you desire the ability to access your pet, or litter box, from the top of the cage, make sure to choose one with a door on top.

For the cage floor, you have a couple of options, both of which present challenges: a solid metal/plastic cage floor or a wire mesh bottom. Solid floors tend to trap urine and water bottle leakage, which can be absorbed into the bedding, and encourage bacteria growth and produce foul odors. Clean a cage with a solid floor frequently. A wire-mesh bottomed cage, on the other hand, can cause hock sores, so make sure you cover at least a portion with a board, rug, grass mats, cardboard or layers of newspaper if you choose this type of cage.



To provide a maximum amount of roaming space for your pet, you may want to house him in an [exercise pen](#), similar to those used for dogs, instead of a cage. Advantages to this option are that your rabbit



will have much more room, can be kept uncaged all the time, and will get more exercise. It is also less likely that your pet will suffer from the health conditions resulting from being cramped up in a small cage, such as arthritis, overgrown toenails, boredom, and depression. If you choose a pen, it is a good idea to place it in an area with easy-clean flooring like linoleum, wood, tile, or laminate. You will still need to provide a covered area, such as a crate or cardboard box, so that your pet has a place to retreat for privacy.

Some rabbits, however, can jump very high and easily scale an exercise pen, so this may not be an option for every rabbit. Even if you think your rabbit is incapable of escaping the pen, it's a good idea to place it in an area of your home that is fully "rabbit proof." This means taking measures to make sure your rabbit cannot chew or ingest electrical cords, toxic plants, carpets, furniture, etc. or that he cannot squeeze into gaps behind furniture or behind appliances.



Make it Homey

Rabbits are curious creatures, and they appreciate [exploring toys](#), biting at pieces of wood, and hiding out in [cubbies](#) and hide boxes. Make sure to provide the cage with a few of these items to stimulate and challenge your pet. They will go a long way in alleviating boredom and ensuring a happier environment. Many owners choose hanging toys, the kind used for [caged birds](#). Make sure all parts are securely attached and won't present a choking hazard. Chew sticks are a fun way to provide wear for your rabbit's ever-growing teeth. A sturdy piece of cardboard, folded into a cave shape, makes an excellent cubby for exploring.

For your pet's comfort when it's time to sleep, we recommend [Aspen bedding](#). You can also use shredded papers or other natural materials that do not contain irritating oils or preservatives. Avoid cedar or pine shavings. Don't forget to have a [water bottle](#) available all the time. If switching from a water bowl to a bottle, be sure your rabbit has learned to use the bottle before you remove the bowl. Change the water on a daily basis. Remove stale foods and provide fresh [hay](#) each day.

Locating your Cage

Whenever possible, we advocate keeping your rabbit housed indoors. Even within the confines of a cage, outdoor predators can stalk your pet. We've even seen rabbits suffer injuries because a predator was able to bite and injure a rabbit right through the wire mesh when outdoors. In addition, rabbits housed indoors are not exposed to extreme weather or insects, and they tend to live longer, healthier lives.

Locate your indoor cage out of drafts and out of direct sunlight. Rabbits like interaction with human beings, but they are startled easily. Place the cage in a peaceful area of your home that still allows you plenty of opportunities to socialize with your pet daily.

Cleaning the Cage

On a daily basis clean up spills, stale food, shed fur, and messes inside the cage. If your rabbit is litter trained, change the litter in the [litter pan](#). Placing the litter box in a corner of the cage will help prevent urine and feces from spreading to places where your rabbit eats or sleeps. Only use rabbit-safe litters. Clay-based and corncob litters are not acceptable.

On a weekly basis, remove your rabbit from the cage and do a thorough cage cleaning. Take out litter pans, wash them down with hot soapy water, rinse well, allow to dry, and then refill with clean litter. Wipe down the cage sides and floor with hot soapy water and allow to dry. Periodically, use bleach water to disinfect the cage and litter pans after cleaning. Be sure to rinse thoroughly, and allow to dry before placing items back in the cage. Wash, and rinse thoroughly any toys your rabbit plays with, as well as water and food dishes/bottles. Wash ramps and other surfaces. When all surfaces are completely dry, you can place bedding, litter pans, toys, and your rabbit back in the cage.

Housing More than One Rabbit

We recommend housing each rabbit in a separate cage, but if you are housing in an exercise pen, you may consider housing more than one together. The rabbits must be a bonded pair in order to be housed together. This means they have been properly acquainted with each other and have accepted each other. Pairs bond



more easily if they are spayed or neutered. Avoid placing two rabbits together until after they have had plenty of time to heal from the spay/neuter surgeries. Generally, bonded pairs won't fight, but territorial skirmishes can happen from time to time.

The best rabbit housing meets your rabbit's adult size and personality needs comfortably, while providing a setting (out of direct sunlight) where your pet will feel secure and safe and allow you daily interaction. Your pet will be happier and healthier for it.