Rabbit-Proof Your Home, How to

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Rabbits are chewers. They enjoy small, dark spaces. They're naturally curious. These three characteristics alone are reason enough for you to "rabbit-proof" prior to allowing your rabbit free access to your home. Rabbit-proofing your home will protect your rabbit *and* your belongings. Get down on the floor, and imagine for a minute, that you are a rabbit. Look at all of the wonderful places you have to explore and the many chewable items available for your enjoyment. Now, think of yourself as your rabbit's guardian, and what you need to do to protect him. Rabbit-proofing your home is absolutely necessary if your rabbit will have any free roam outside of his cage.

Remember, daily exercise is crucial for rabbits, so it's important to allow some outside cage time for exploring. Many owners set up an indoor fenced exercise pen for their rabbit, so the rabbit-proofing does not need to be quite so intense. The following potential problem areas exist in many homes. If you carefully address practical solutions, you will be able to provide a safe environment for your rabbit.

Potential Problems and Solutions

Electrical and other cords	**Cleaning supplies**
Wooden furniture and baseboards	**Plants**
Upholstered furniture	**Fireplaces, space heaters, and candles**
Carpet and drapes	**Fans and air ducts**
Books, newspapers, and magazines	**Open exterior doors and windows**
Closets	**Child - rabbit interactions**
Kitchen area	**Interactions with other pets**

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Food

Potential Problem: Electrical and other cords

Electrical cords are a very serious threat to a rabbit. Chewing through a cord could cause severe burns, or even electrocution. There are other cords that can be chewed, including phone, computer, stereo, cable TV, and appliance cords.

Solution: Simply raising the cords above floor level may not work. Remember, when sitting up on their hind legs, rabbits can reach a foot or more in the air. Placing cords behind furniture will not prevent your rabbit from reaching them, either. Rabbits can fit into some pretty tight spaces. Bitter sprays often do not work, since rabbits tend to like bitter tastes. Three possibilities that may be effective include:

- Spiral cable wrap: This is a flexible plastic sheath that can be wound around the cords. **CAUTION:** Some rabbits may still try to chew through this. Monitor your rabbit closely, and if he chews on this, try one of the other two alternatives.
- Cord Protectors: These are hard plastic, come in various colors and sizes, and are usually applied to the area above the baseboards.
- PVC pipe or polyethylene hard tubing: A slit can be cut through the pipe or tubing, and the cords slipped inside. Tubing that is already split is also available.

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Potential Problem: Wooden furniture and baseboards

Rabbits especially love to chew wood. Again, a bitter spray will probably not be effective since rabbits tend to like bitter tastes.

Solution: A rabbit has a basic instinct and necessity to chew. Training the rabbit not to chew these items may help, but just saying "no'" will not be enough.

- PVC pipe or hard tubing can be placed around the legs of furniture.
- Place boards that you will allow your rabbit to chew in front of the baseboards.
- Provide a variety of chew toys as alternatives to chewing furnishings.

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Potential Problem: Upholstered furniture

Rabbits may not only chew the upholstery that you can see, they may get underneath the furniture and chew the underside. Some rabbits will climb into the hole they have made. Use caution with recliners, since rabbits may get underneath them and into the mechanism.

Solution:

- Always know where your rabbit is before you lower or raise a recliner.
- Block the rabbit's access to the underside of the furniture by attaching a wooden frame, or other solid-material frame, under the furniture.
- Purchase clear plastic carpet runners with the small spikes on the bottom. To discourage your rabbit from hopping over to the upholstery, place the runners, upside down, near the furniture. If your rabbit chews on the runner, you may need to find another alternative.

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Potential Problem: Carpet and drapes

Some carpets and drapes appear to be almost irresistible to some rabbits. Often, they will start to pull up or chew on carpets in the corner of the room or chew on floor-length drapes.

Solution:

- Hem up your floor-length drapes, or replace them with shorter ones.
- Protect the carpet in areas most likely to be chewed by covering them with wood or carpet runners (unless the rabbit also chews on the runner). Or, restrict access to carpeted rooms with a gate or barrier.
- Be sure drapery cords do not hang down to the level where your rabbit can reach them.

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Potential Problem: Books, newspapers, and magazines

You may not care if your rabbit chews last week's newspaper, but there are many paper items you do not want your rabbit to chew.

Solution:

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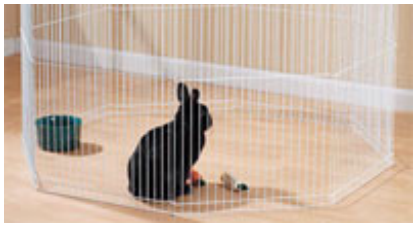

- Use book cases that shut completely.
- Place books and newspapers you are still using in chew-proof bins, either hard plastic or metal. There are copper and brass wood bins for fireplaces that are very serviceable and aesthetically pleasing.
- Do not place books on the lower shelves of open bookcases.
- If you give your rabbit paper to chew, be sure the ink is soy-based.

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Potential Problem: Closets

Open closets can literally provide a feast for your rabbit. Shoes, clothes, belts, boxes - all of these are potential chew toys. In addition, your rabbit could accidentally be locked in a closet without access to food, water, or a litter box.

Solution:

- Keep closet doors closed. A childproof latch would prevent a curious rabbit from opening the door.
- Keep the floor of the closet empty. Use hanging shoe racks and shelves over 2 feet high.

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Potential Problem: Kitchen area

The kitchen can pose special hazards for a curious rabbit. Open cupboards and drawers, open areas on the back of appliances, and toe kicks on lower cupboards are just several of the places that may look inviting to a rabbit. Removing the rabbit from one of these areas may mean moving the heavy appliances, with the possibility of hurting the rabbit in the process, or removing the bottom of the cupboard to free the trapped rabbit underneath.

Solution:

- Close cupboard doors and drawers after use.
- Use childproof latches to keep doors and drawers closed.
- Block off any open areas in the cabinetry.
- Block off areas around appliances to prevent the rabbit from getting behind them. Keep in mind that there must be adequate air circulation around the appliances.

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Potential Problem: Food

Food for other pets, grocery bags full of food, waste baskets containing food items, and food set out on low tables will all appear as fair game to a hungry rabbit.

Solution:

- Use covered waste baskets of sufficient size and weight to prevent a rabbit from getting into them or tipping them over.
- Keep foods at least two feet off of the ground. Any snacks, candy, or holiday foods should be placed on tables at a height of at least two feet off of the ground. Also, be careful with hot drinks that could burn an inquisitive rabbit.
- Cigarettes and cigars are toxic to rabbits, and should never be placed where a rabbit would have access to them. Keep them at least two feet off the ground, as well.

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Potential Problem: Cleaning supplies

Chemicals, detergents, rags, sponges, rubber gloves, and other cleaning supplies can be very dangerous to rabbits. Even if the chemical is in a closed container, the container should be out of the reach of the rabbit. Rabbits can chew containers, knock them over causing spills (if the cap is not tight), or there may be chemical drips on the outside of the container.

Solution:

- Keep cleaning items in high cupboards.
- Use childproof latches to secure the doors of lower cupboards that may contain dangerous supplies.
- Remove your rabbit from the area when you are using cleaning supplies.

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Potential Problem: Plants

Some common houseplants can be poisonous to rabbits. Even if they are not poisonous, a rabbit can make a disaster from a potted plant, chewing the leaves

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and digging into the soil.

Solution: Plastic/artificial plants are not a good alternative, since the plastic could cause gastrointestinal irritation or blockage.

- Plant selection: Select plants that are not poisonous/toxic for rabbits. See Plants That Are Poisonous to Small Pets.
- Plant location: Hanging plants from the ceiling or placing them on tables several feet high will prevent the rabbit from reaching them. However, leaves may still drop to the floor, so select safe plants, even if you are going to place them out of the rabbit's reach.

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Potential Problem: Fireplaces, space heaters, and candles

Any type of fire is always dangerous. Your rabbit can become seriously burned, or tip over a hot object and start a fire. Take special care to protect your rabbit and your home.

Solution:

- Never leave a rabbit unattended in a room with an open flame or space heater.
- Use screens or glass doors on the fireplace to prevent sparks from coming into contact with your rabbit.
- Barriers should be placed around hot wood stoves.

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Potential Problem: Fans and air ducts

As they are for children, fans can be hazardous to rabbits. An ear or inquisitive nose could be seriously injured. A fan could also be potentially tipped over by a rabbit.

Solution:

- Never place a fan within reach of a rabbit.
- Cover all air ducts to prevent a rabbit from exploring and becoming lost in the maze.

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Potential Problem: Open exterior doors and windows

Open doors and windows provide an easy escape for a curious rabbit.

Solution:

- Keep screens on all windows and doors.
- If doors need to be propped open, first place the rabbit safely in her cage.

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Potential Problem: Child - rabbit interactions

A rabbit could be hurt, or hurt a child if he is handled improperly. For a child, a rabbit litter box may have the appearance of being a fun place to play.

Solution:

- Take into account the age of children, their maturity, and experience with handling rabbits and other pets when deciding if they may be left alone with a rabbit.
- Establish household rules regarding the handling of the rabbit.
- Show children the correct way to pet and play with a rabbit and praise them when they do it properly.
- Always have a safe area where your rabbit can retreat.
- Use childproof gates to separate younger children from the rabbit, and his litter box.

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Potential Problem: Interactions with other pets

Care should be taken when introducing your rabbit to other pets, including other rabbits. Fights between two rabbits can be very serious and cause severe injuries. It is natural instinct for wild canines and felines to prey on rabbits. Sometimes, the reverse is true, and the rabbit can actually be more aggressive.

Solution:

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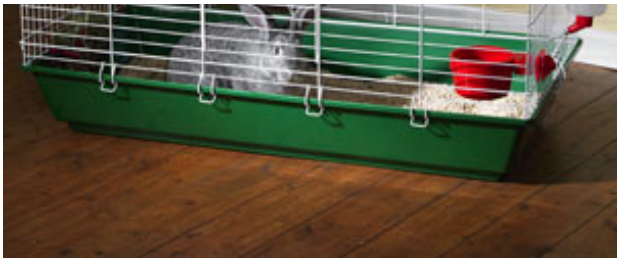
- Take your time in introducing a rabbit to another pet. One of the most common mistakes is to put them together before they are ready.
- Never leave a loose rabbit unattended in a room with another pet if there is even a remote possibility that aggression or rough playing could occur. It is always better to be safe than sorry.



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