New Small Pets: Tips for Picking a Rabbit

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House rabbits should be acquired through a reputable source: Rabbits are usually acquired through breeders, pet shops, and rescue agencies or shelters.

Private or hobbyist breeders:

If you are looking for a specific breed of rabbit, breeders will be the best source. You may be able to see the parents and/or siblings from previous litters. Rabbits from smaller breeders have usually been handled when they were young, which is critical for good socialization. And, breeders can be excellent sources of information, as well as providers of quality rabbits.

Rescue organizations and shelters:

Shelter staff are usually willing to counsel new owners and take back rabbits that do not work out in the new home. An advantage of shelter rabbits is that they are usually older and have already been neutered, litter-trained, and have gone through the more difficult adolescent stage. They have also been observed by knowledgeable staff for signs of behavior or health problems. If acquiring a rabbit from a shelter or rescue organization, you may need to complete an application, and possibly an interview and home visit to assure you will provide a good home to a rabbit who lost a home.

Pet shops:

Pet stores are convenient, may have several different breeds, and also carry many of the supplies you will need. The quality of care, knowledge of the staff, and information on the specific rabbit you would like to purchase can vary considerably from pet shop to pet shop. Be sure to get the answers to the questions listed below.

Whatever the source, it is important to ask certain questions and be observant:

- Is the rabbit kept in a clean cage with fresh water and a good diet?
- Is the rabbit housed with many others? If so, it could be exposed to more diseases and be under more stress. Male and female rabbits should be housed separately.
- Is the rabbit eating, or does it appear to have difficulty, which could indicate dental or other oral problems?
- Is the rabbit easily startled when approached?
- Is the rabbit alert and of optimal weight, with clear eyes, clean ears, and a well-kept coat? Or does it show any signs of illness such as sneezing, nasal discharge, lumps or bumps, lethargy, soiled areas around the tail, or patchy hair loss? Never buy a rabbit showing signs of illness, and have your rabbit checked by a knowledgeable veterinarian within 1-2 days of purchase.
- Does the seller have references you can contact?
- If the seller is a breeder, can you see the parents of the rabbit you would like to purchase? If at a pet shop, can the staff give you the origin of the rabbit?
- Are the sellers/staff knowledgeable?

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