

Can You See My Will-to-Be?

# Bright Eyes Sanctuary

Rabbit Care Info



## HOUSE RABBIT CARE INFORMATION

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## DIET

### HAY

Racehorse quality hay must be available at all times and should comprise **90% of the rabbit's diet**. This indigestible fiber is the fuel that keeps their gastrointestinal system humming nonstop like a little engine. It pulls fur through the system which they invariably ingest while **grooming** (see [GROOMING](#)).

Types of hay that should be made available are: western timothy, orchard grass, or brome.

Brome is considered a 'diet' hay for pudgy rabbits and has a nice pasta-like consistency. If possible, obtain a nutritional analysis of the hay to determine if the recommended nutrients for rabbits are included. The hay should be green. They will not eat brown leaves. Store hay properly out of sunlight in an open container so it can breathe. **All hay has moisture content** (or it would turn to dust) and therefore will mold if improperly stored.

Babies may receive alfalfa hay up until one year of age and then be weaned onto the above-mentioned hays. While most hay will not attract mice or insects, beware that alfalfa, a legume, will. Poor quality alfalfa can also cause fatal bloat.

See our [internet sources for hay](#) or visit a local feed store for horses to obtain high quality local hay. Stick your face in it.

Does it smell fresh? Is it dusty? The dust is often moldy so avoid dusty hay. Fresh hay should be aromatic. If you are allergic to one type, try another. Many people allergic to timothy hay use orchard or brome instead.

**Keeping your rabbits slim and trim as well as feeding a variety of top quality hay is the best thing you can do for their health.** And not only that, a great cutting of hay is far and above the **BEST** and **LEAST EXPENSIVE** rabbit **TOY**.



This "hay hopper" box makes a great way for rabbits to enjoy pulling their favorite toy out of something and devouring it.

## **FRESH VEGETABLES**

Babies aged at least six months and adult rabbits should get fresh, washed vegetables daily.

**AVOID GAS-CAUSING VEGGIES WHICH CAN BE FATAL - THEY MAY BE CHEAP BUT THEY CAN KILL** (chard, cabbages, kale).

**AVOID HIGH CALCIUM VEGGIES** - are ok for rabbits under 1 year old but in adults can cause calcium buildup resulting in painful bladder sludge, kidney and/or bladder stones, kidney calcification, and even dental problems.

**USE ORGANIC VEGGIES WHEN POSSIBLE** - rabbits are as susceptible to pesticide poisoning as babies because of their small size. However, **even organic vegetables must be washed** (see below) as they can carry bacteria and fungi.

**WASHING VEGGIES:** Using a special veggie wash to loosen germs and pesticides causes them to slip off the food. This is recommended practice by the EPA<sup>1</sup>. Rinse well. Do not wash veggies until ready to serve as this will promote bacterial growth. Discard bruised or browning areas as these most likely contain bacteria.



Some may say this is too much veggies for a rabbit, but if they are shedding, it's crucial to get this extra hydration from dark, leafy green lettuces and not from gas-causing (and thus, possibly fatal), cheap veggies like cabbage or bok choy.

## PELLETS

Rabbits should receive high quality pellets made from **timothy hay**. Only babies under 1 year old should receive alfalfa-based pellets. Recommended brands are [Oxbow](#) and [American Pet Diner](#) but [Kaytee Timothy Complete](#) is also acceptable. Check the expiration date and store similarly to hay; let it breathe (see hay storage, above).

Don't switch brands of pellets all at once. This can cause GI upset. Mix previous brand with new brand and switch gradually.

**NEVER SERVE PELLETS THAT CONTAIN FILLER OR BIRD SEED!** These are high in fat and put your rabbit at risk of heart attack.

## WATER

**Algae and bacteria** can build up **very quickly** within water bowls and bottles. Provide both bowl and water bottle and change both daily. Having two water sources, even though it may seem unnecessary will prevent dehydration which can come on suddenly.

Wash bowl daily and **wipe dry with paper towel to remove algae** (slime) buildup which is usually clear and builds up quickly. Rinse bottle with very hot water and shake then fill with fresh water. You should wash bottle with bottle brush once a week.

**Beware of BPA and do not use clear plastic bottles.** The more opaque (frosted look) plastic bottles don't contain the carcinogenic chemical BPA. If possible, use a glass bottle that hangs outside the cage which is safer in case of breakage. Chemicals will not leech into the water as any plastic bottle will and it tastes better.

**Use filtered water when possible** and be aware if your city or water system uses very old piping which may cause high kidney failure rates in your region. **Never give your rabbit spring**

**water or distilled water.** Spring water is high in minerals and can cause stomach problems (for you, too) and distilled water may bind with beneficial compounds in the body and flush these needed compounds out.

## **TREATS**

Never offer treats containing refined (processed) sugar or sulfites. Natural sugar treats such as a single slice of banana, a section of carrot, a strawberry, or other small bit of fruit are appreciated but high amounts of sugar will cause imbalance in the gut flora. That means an imbalance of beneficial bacteria in the hind gut. The gut contains good and bad bacteria and they must be in balance with each other. High amounts of sugar upset this balance and it can and will be fatal. Treats should be treats and not a staple of the diet! Never offer the "yogurt" drops often sold for rabbits as these are basically junk food and may sound beneficial but is the opposite.

A brand of treats made just for rabbits are [Oxbow treats](#).

## **HOUSING**

### **CAGES**

Wire floors can cause sore hocks or bald spots to develop on rabbit feet. Rabbits are digitigrade meaning they don't have feet like we do, they run and hop on their fingertips. Their feet have no padding or means to absorb pressure while hopping or running. When at rest, they lie on their elbows. Wire floors were designed for people raising rabbits not as pets and too lazy to litter box train them which they take to more naturally than cats. See our article on [Successfully Litter Box Training Your Rabbit](#).

Why even cage a rabbit who is a pet? They deserve a habitat, not a cage. See our [HOUSING](#) section for more information.

### **RABBIT PROOFING**

Rabbits love to chew. It is fun to them. This is why HAY is the best rabbit toy. It is also why electrical wires are irresistible, they vibrate while you chew them! But then you get electrocuted. Rabbits are smart and may get to wires regardless of what you do. You can try the electrical tubing meant to protect automobile wires and can be found in your home improvement store's electrical department. However, some rabbits find these ribbed plastic tubes to be more fun to chew! Scented plastic tubing that looks like airline tubing for aquariums seems to work well. But plastic tubing is not a guarantee either. We had one foster who chewed the plastic tube feeding water in the toilet and flooded his entire house! Look around and think, 'what is dangerous for my rabbit to chew and what don't I want him to chew?' **Rabbit proofing is an artform that constantly evolves.**

Some rabbits are smarter than others and will never chew wires, furniture, or baseboards. Females will sometimes chew more than males but the opposite can be true as well. Consult with your adoption counselor for your specific situation as this is what the house check is all about - safeguarding your rabbit from some of the crazy things he might do when he gets into your house. It is much like childproofing so plan your rabbit proofing like you would for a toddler crawling everywhere who is also constantly teething. **Some rabbits even try to**

**sabotage your electronics because they are jealous of the attention the device gets which could be showered upon your rabbit!** So give your rabbit plenty of safe things to chew like good hay and untreated willow toys.



Rabbits can and do get into everything, especially when they're young. Check our [Rabbit Proofing](#) section for detailed info.

## **RABBITS & THE OUTDOORS**

**The world has changed.** Taking a house rabbit outside is not necessary for their health and, in fact, **provides so many dangers** as to make it not worth the risk. ]

Not only are there **aerial predators** (raptors like hawks, kestrels, etc.) which can strike in the blink of an eye; **insect predators** like flies which burrow into the rabbit's skin to lay eggs which hatch into maggots and feast off the flesh of the rabbit; **ground predators** (raccoons, cats, dogs, etc.) just at the sight of which can cause heart failure from fear; but now most prevalently there are **microbial predators**. Never before has it been more dangerous for a house rabbit to run in the grass where it can pick up various strains of bacteria like **pasteurella**, **salmonella**, and more. Rabbits are, as a species, very susceptible to these **pathogens** (microbes) to which they have no immunity because they have never been exposed to them.

A herpetologist from this area told us that we have more amphibians in this area than anywhere on Earth. You may not believe it but that's because they are small and you usually don't see them. But they all carry **salmonella**. Mice and other rodents are ubiquitous (everywhere) and carry **pasteurella**. Never before in our country's history have we had more '**emerging diseases**' spreading up into this hemisphere from the tropics, probably from global warming (climate change, whatever your preferred euphemism) and population migration, and thus never before have there been more **microbial predators** for house rabbits to deal with. Only wild hares born in the wild who at birth received a healthy dose of colostrum laden with antibodies to these pathogens are prepared for this. But even this does not protect them from insect predators such as fleas, ticks, and mites. Is it really worth the risk of a gambol in the grass where your rabbit could contract a **superbug** or couldn't they have just as much fun safely dancing on the area rug in your living room?

## **TOYS**

Rabbit toys such as the ones sold at [Busy Bunny](#) and [Binky Bunny](#) are wonderful but can be

expensive if you have a power chewer who can digest a large willow ball in an evening. Again, we maintain **the best rabbit toy is high quality hay** presented fluffed up into a **hay stack**. Rabbits find this irresistible to burrow in, play hide and seek, as well as toss and chew.

To safely simulate their natural environment, put fluffed up hay in square box made of those metal grids from which popular DIY rabbit condos are made. Just take six grids and use cable ties (zip ties) to fasten them together, while leaving a top-opening door, and fill with hay. Have fun watching your rabbit push or throw it around. For smaller rabbits, those **metal hay balls** are a great source of entertainment but make sure you keep it filled!

**NEVER USE PAPER TOWEL OR TOILET PAPER TUBES WITH GLUE ON THEM.** Glue is not food and not safe for pets, the paper towel manufacturers have acknowledged this, the tube is not meant to be a toy for pets. The cardboard from which the tubes are made are even full of glue (come on, it is **GLUE** and possibly also formaldehyde, a known carcinogen) holding the recycled components together just as are the cheapest types of particle board. **Toilet paper tubes are covered with germs which become airborne in the vapor every time the toilet is flushed.** Some brands of paper towels use no glue so try some various brands for your own use to determine which and then use that brand. Stuff these with hay and observe if your rabbit even reacts to it as a toy or, rather, an odd way to compress hay. We don't find that rabbits are drawn to these homemade cardboard toys.

## **RABBITS LIKE TO MAKE NOISE WITH THINGS AND ALSO TOSSING THINGS.**

It's safe to use a **brown paper bag** and stuff with hay with a few leaves of grass poking out to make it more fun for them to play with this noisy toy. **Large paper grocery bags** (a rarity these days) are a fun toy in which rabbits enjoy hiding. In the past it has been recommended to rabbits **shred old paperbacks or yellow pages.** **Neither of these is a great idea.** In olden days these materials were printed with **oil-based inks** and unless you're sure the printing company is **certified as using soy-based inks** now, skip it. Oil-based ink is less expensive and used more often than realized even when use of soy-based ink is claimed.

Other safe **noise-producing toys** are **hard acrylic bird toys** which rabbits find difficult to chew, and thus ingest, but will toss and rattle. **Grass balls with bells** in them are a favorite as long as the grass hasn't been treated and once the ball is chewed through to the bell, the bell is removed since many parts of it may contain toxic heavy metals.

## **RABBITS LIKE TO PULL THINGS**

Rabbits love a **stationery chew**, that means something they can chew on that won't move while they're chewing it; like your baseboards or table legs! Try buying a natural, hard wood bird perch and affixing it vertically (rather than horizontally) to the side of their pen or cage and they will not only enjoy gnawing on it, it will be a long lasting toy. They are little sculptors and love to pull on wood while they chew it, they can't hold it in their paws like a dog with a bone, so they like to pull on wood that won't move while they sculpt it!

In the wild environment, rabbits, which are a different species than our country's hares with different behaviors, enjoy **pulling grass up out of the ground** or, while underground in their burrows, **pulling and chewing on roots** to clear their burrows. That's why so many rabbits seem to enjoy destroying pile carpeting because they can pull each carpet strand up out of the

carpet and it is much like pulling on grass. So **pulling hay down from above** can be fun for them, like the aforementioned **metal hay balls**, or **pulling hay up from below** such as through an **untreated natural grass rug with a wide weave** (such as Oxbow's Timothy mats) can simulate this fun activity. Try sticking a few hay ends through the gaps and place it down over a bunch of hay and hopefully your rabbit will enjoy this pulling activity!



A big, brown paper bag is fun and provides privacy. Inside, it must echo and be fascinating to those big ears.

## **BEHAVIOR**

### **POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT**

Positive and negative reinforcement have their place in nature. However, they are interpreted by species according to their social behavior. **Never physically punish a rabbit.** They are prey animals and will interpret this as predatory behavior and never trust you again. Depending on the rabbit's personality, they may react with **aggression** or **learned helplessness**. In this case, their aggressive behavior is warranted as **YOU STARTED IT.**

We usually recommend to people that rabbits do very with the old dog training credo, **NILIF. Nothing In Life is free.** That means all good things come from you including freedom. Freedom is a reward for good behavior. Undesirable behavior means decreased freedom. Good behavior elicits treats (natural, healthy ones only, please see **TREATS** section above). Furthermore, it has been documented (see *Private Life of the Rabbit* by R.M. Lockley) that this passive negative reinforcement is used by rabbits in their own society. Rabbits who don't behave in a socially acceptable way are chased and confined to their burrows or expelled from the warren.

**Animal behavior** is a dynamic field constantly changing and growing to include new philosophies and recognize more and more that each species has not only culture but language and morals. While there are as many **schools of thought on behavior** of various species, there are just as many new perspectives being realized every day by science and many are just a matter of having not been able to see the forest for the trees. **Don't get stuck on a school of thought.** Be open-minded and try to understand your rabbit's perspective and your whole world will open up to appreciation of other species' behavior as well.

Rabbits are notoriously intelligent. If your rabbit has an **unwanted behavior** you can't seem to **correct**, it's probably because you haven't put your mind to it, the rabbit has won. You allegedly have the bigger, more complex brain (so they say), so the problem can be solved. You can [ask us](#) about a specific behavior and we'll do our best to help you.

## BINKY

A bunny hop or dance much like a leprechaun leaping for joy. It means just that. There are also 'half-binkies' or 'head binkies' which is when a rabbit tosses its head in a joyful way. However, repeated shaking of the head can be a symptom of ear infection or other problem.

## CHINNING

Rubbing their chins on things, including you, is a way of marking territory. They have scent glands on their chins and being marked with their chin is a calling card, 'hey, this is mine!' We cannot smell the scent but they can.

## THUMPING

This is an emphatic type of communication that can mean either fear, warning, anger, and even some types of pain such as a bite from a fur mite.

## PURRING

Yes, they purr like cats. When very content and receiving welcome attention such a cuddling or soft pets, they lightly rub their teeth together to make an almost inaudible purr. This is a high compliment! You are being rewarded, this is positive reinforcement from the rabbit to you!

## TOOTH GRINDING/DROOLING

Markedly different than purring, this is a loud grinding of the teeth, often accompanied by drooling, meaning pain. The pain's source may be anything from dental pain to stomach pain, but it is a serious sign of pain and must be immediately addressed. Ignoring this will no doubt signal the demise and eventual death of your rabbit not to mention the dehydration he will suffer as a result of the drooling.

## CIRCLING

This is an indication of several things. The rabbit may be trying to trip you as a means of **negative reinforcement** because **you are late** delivering his salad or treat. He may also be trying to **communicate affection** in a sexual way even if altered.

## RACING

These little racers love to run. They do it better than anything else and it is wonderful exercise. Some may even run sideways up against walls or furniture that provide traction for this or bounce, hop, or leap off of the same much like cats do when they have the frenzies. The longer a race track (hallway or other large space), the longer the sprint and healthier the jaunt.

## SNORTING

Many people will know immediately when they have offended their rabbit when they are snorted at with a pig-like sound. It has been referred to as barking, grunting, and oinking. Regardless, it means 'back off!'

Female rabbits may do this when their litter box is changed too often as they become attached to how things are there. Some females will spend hours carefully arranging and sorting hay in



their litter box only to be insulted with your coming to discard all of it and replace it with a 'raw' new box. It may be hard for humans to fathom this attitude but we are alerted that this is not appreciated with a very expressive snort!

Rabbits don't like change. Some will toss their litter box and everything else in their area around for fun. You must secure their litter box either with cable ties (drill holes along the lip) or Velcro to the floor. They always prefer their litter boxes in a corner. When unable to toss their box around, they usually won't toss much else around either. And neither should you (in their mind) by moving things or furniture in their area. This is highly offensive to them and you'll get a snort, a lunge, boxed, or even bitten if you don't pay heed to the signals you're receiving.

## SPRAYING

Unaltered males can spray their urine a long distance and with the precision of a skunk! Like tom cats, this obnoxious behavior is almost always remedied with a few snips of the scalpel. Get your male rabbit neutered! Unaltered females will also spray on occasion but in a very different way, it's more of a 'sprinkle' but it is still undesirable and females will also contract uterine cancer unless spayed.

## CALLING CARDS

Some rabbits will be meticulous with their litter box habits and yet insist on leaving a single poop in a special corner. This shouldn't be viewed as unwanted behavior, in fact, it is endearing. Just a single calling card in a certain spot. But leaving a number of poops here, there, and everywhere indicate territorial insecurity. Reduce the rabbit's free range territory until he places these where they belong, in the litter box. Gradually increase freedom, perhaps with an exercise pen to open or close up his ranging area until this is corrected. Pick up the misplaced poop and place it where you do want it, in his litter box.

## SCREAMING

Rabbits do have a voice very much like humans and can mumble, moan, groan, cry and even scream. Usually, you will never hear these sounds as they do this very softly amongst themselves in private. However if they feel terror or intense pain, they will scream and sound very human while doing it for the same reasons. You don't ever want to hear this.

## FALSE PREGNANCY

Pulling hair from the chest is something female rabbits do to prepare for giving birth. If there is no possibility that a rabbit may be pregnant, **she may have a uterine tumor** and need to be spayed, may not want to be spayed (you may be planning to get her spayed when she suddenly displays this behavior, this has also been observed in feral cats), or may simply want the companionship of other rabbits. Regardless, get her spayed and then after 30 days, get her to a bunny match!

In males, the pulling of the chest hair may also be observed and is a type of **self-mutilation**. This is a sign there is underlying illness which must be addressed as soon as possible.

## BITES and NIPS

A **bite** breaks the skin and makes you bleed. You should cry out in dismay and stop whatever

behavior you did to evoke the bite. If you don't understand what you did, ask for advice. It could be that you caused pain because of an undiagnosed illness or condition ranging or incorrectly attempting to pick up the rabbit.

A **nip** does not break the skin but may hurt. Mostly, it may hurt your feelings. It is an urgent communication that can mean 'let me down, I have to pee!' or 'you're doing something I don't like!' Just evaluate what you were doing because it wasn't welcomed by the rabbit and stop doing it. If the rabbit was simply sitting in your lap or by your side, it probably just means they have to go to their litter box and need to go now! If you're grooming them, petting them, or playing with them, you've done it the wrong way and they don't like it. It's not open for discussion, just find a better way to do it or choose a better time.

## INTERSPECIES RELATIONSHIPS

Dogs are all individual and must be carefully observed to determine their prey drive. Never leave a dog along with a rabbit unless you are positive they are a rabbit-friendly dog. Usually, this means they are a **collie**, **sheltie**, mix of the same, or other type of **gentle herding dog**. Know your dog so you can avoid tragedies. We've known various breeds of dogs you would never think would be safe to have around a rabbit and everything was fine. **It depends on the individual dog and how well the owner understands their dog!** How does your dog act around wildlife like squirrels or chipmunks? Do they chase them or even kill them? A rabbit-friendly dog would never do either of these things. Nevertheless, a dog that has done those things in the past can mature into one who will never do them again once he understands it is not acceptable.

**Rabbits usually dominate over cats.** A large, semi-feral or feral **cat may attack** the rabbit and even a mild bite or scratch from a cat will kill your rabbit because of the bacteria exchange (pasteurella) and the rabbit must receive a strong, broad-spectrum antibiotic immediately or he will perish. Most of the time, cats and rabbits will get along famously. There are plenty of non-predatory cats who safely cohabitate with rabbits. The rabbit may be the one who attacks the cat though and this must not be allowed. Carefully observe the cat's reaction and do not leave them unsupervised. The same goes for any other type of pet and the rabbit.



Sheep May Safely Graze...and rabbits may safely nuzzle with a big, mature, well-disciplined herding dog such as the incomparable collie.

## OTHER RABBITS

In nature, rabbits live in large underground groups called warrens. They are a matriarchal society and they do mate for life. The alpha male of the warren will fight to the death for the

right to be the 'king' rabbit to the 'queen.' Other males in the warren will remain loyal to their chosen females. When altered, domesticated rabbits are happiest with a companion of their choosing. We provide bunny matches for this and we like adopters who want to let their rabbit choose his mate just as you chose yours. We have policies on rabbit introductions and we will gladly talk with you about arranging a bunny match for your rabbit once you're an approved adoption applicant.



Like you did, rabbits should be able to select their own mates. You may review our [Rabbit Introduction policies](#) to see if one of our bunny matches is right for you and your rabbit.

## GROOMING

### SHEDDING

**The number one cause of death in rabbits is probably GI stasis due to a buildup of fur in the digestive tract.** Too much fur is ingested due to lack of grooming by the owner and not enough hay is consumed to pull it through their system. This is a painful and meaningless way to die.

Brush your rabbit weekly. **He may be shedding even when you don't realize it** because he is carefully grooming himself and **ingesting much fur**. He may seem fine to you while he gets closer and closer to the breaking point when his internal engine will stop running. Then he will stop eating, his body temperature will drop, he will go into shock, and **die**. Afterward, you will notice **'oh, his poops were 1/4 the size of what they normally were'** and hindsight will inform you that you missed the chance to prevent this.

Brush often and make it a pleasurable experience for you both. We recommend the [Furminator](#). Used correctly, this de-shedding tool can work wonders and reduce the amount of overall brushing you need to do. Use it with a light touch as it can scrape the skin. It may cause bald spots but this type of uneven shedding is natural and not a problem. You don't need to apply pressure when using the **Furminator** because its teeth will pull up the undercoat and remove it if it is ready to come out. If its not ready to come out, it will **stimulate the hair follicles** and at some later point, the fur will be ready to come out. When used correctly, it also can be a reinforcing influence and **help change your rabbit's attitude** from a poor one to an amiable one.



Emily, left, and Camille, right, were both just Furminated.  
Emily required 3 Furminations a week until the majority of her heavy coat was out.  
Camille requires the shown amount of Furmination every 6 weeks.  
Know your bunny's coat. See our [Grooming](#) section for more information.

**Some rabbits have such thick coats**, it may take **Furminating** once a week for three or four weeks in a row to remove the old coat.

Be aware also that these **heavy-coated rabbits may pose a health threat to their mates** who may try to thoroughly groom them and have a build-up of their mate's fur in their GI tract. This puts the mate of the heavy-coated rabbit in extreme danger if you aren't vigilant with their grooming. The [Hair Buster](#) may also be used along with the **Furminator** for heavy-coated rabbits to get things started as it can be difficult to use the Furminator when the fur is so overwhelmingly thick. House rabbit or not, the rabbit's body knows when it is a heavy winter outside and may develop coats accordingly.

For **Rex or Mini-rex** breeds, you **cannot use the Furminator**. For these breeds, **we recommend the Hair Buster**.

While shedding, keeping the rabbit **well hydrated is essential** and this means providing wet, leafy greens. Serve greens wet from washing so they get this **extra hydration**. Serve an extra amount of greens at this time. You will read various recommendations on how much greens a rabbit should get daily but when in a heavy shed, be sure to give about 1/2 cup per pound of greens per day.

## **PLUCKING**

Sometimes the rabbit will suddenly present with a Chia pet type of appearance and these tufts of fur may be gently plucked out with your hands as tolerated by the rabbit. The **Hair Buster** may be used instead as it works wonderfully for this. See the [Grooming](#) section for photo examples.

## **BATHING**

**Rabbits should never be bathed** except for the case of the geriatric rabbit who has persistent 'Opopy butt.' Even then, only the rabbit's bottom needs to be bathed and this is best done with a baby bathtub in the sink and the temperature of the water should be carefully monitored. The cause of the 'Opopy butt' should be determined and addressed. For old rabbits with limited mobility, **use of a newborn diaper** to help keep them and their living area clean is recommended.

Additionally, they will need a natural diaper-rash to prevent **urine scald**. See our article on [Caring for Disabled Rabbits](#). Be sure and save the old rabbit's cecals from the soiled diaper and hold it up to them and feed it the cecals to them as this is their main source of nutrition!!!  
Silflay hraka!

## NAIL TRIMS

Become familiar with what the '**quick**' in your rabbit's nail looks like. This is easy to see in clear-colored nails but harder to see in darker-colored nails. There seems to be a nerve ending just beyond the tip of the quick so always cut just above the tip of the quick.

We prefer cat nail trimmers and not the guillotine-style trimmers. Past the quick begins a layer of **white keratin** which becomes thicker as it approaches the tip of the nail. Once you've clipped a little off the nail tip, you will see this white keratin layer. It is very pure white and has a slight powdery look to it. Clip a little more nail off and you will see the **keratin layer has become more narrow**. As the keratin layer becomes more narrow, you are getting closer to the quick. You will learn to gauge when you should stop trimming. For this reason, we do recommend a series of trims on one nail like this so you can become familiar with the normal diameter of your rabbit's keratin layer.

If you do hit the quick and the rabbit starts bleeding from the nail, we simply grab a tissue and apply pressure to the nail for several minutes while the blood clots. If you haven't been careful about how close you are to the quick and you have cut through a wide part of the quick, you will need either styptic powder or flour to put on the nail tip to stem the bleeding.

To see our technique, please view our [No Stress Rabbit Nail Trim](#) video on our [YouTube channel](#).

## ANAL SCENT GLANDS

While you're doing other types of grooming on your rabbit, you should check your rabbit's anal scent glands for plugs of waxy buildup. The scent glands are located on both sides of the anus. See our article on [Scent Glands](#) for more information.



A badly plugged-up rabbit scent gland can abscess.

## LONG HAIRED BREEDS

For these breeds, it is essential to develop a good grooming regimen (see above), or, as we like

to do with 'hippie' rabbits, trim off their skirt, facial beards and let them see! Sure they may look like a sheep after shearing but they'll be much more comfortable and happy. And you'll be able to see their expression better so you'll know better how they feel and whether they're in pain, angry, or happy.

## A FEW NOTES ON HEALTH TOPICS

For more detail on health topics, please see our [Medical](#) gallery.

### RED URINE

If a rabbit pees on linoleum tile and it comes out a nice, pale yellow and you don't wipe it up but come back an hour or so later, it will have turned orange. This is because it has oxidized. If your rabbit eats lots of red leaf lettuce or a bunch of carrots, his pee might come out orange. If you are worried about blood in the urine, realize that if blood is in the urine, it is **blood red**, **NOT ORANGE**.

If your rabbit did have blood in their urine, it would be accompanied by other symptoms such as **straining to pee** which can often be observed by the rabbit **lifting his butt higher** as he tries to pee or a **disinterest in drinking** and therefore reducing the amount he will need to pee as this is painful to him. If your color perception isn't very good, as in distinguishing red from orange, take him to the vet and discuss a **urinalysis**. Just realize that often when an owner thinks there is blood in the urine, it is diet-related or oxidized pee.

An **unspayed female rabbit** who appears to have **blood in her urine**, however, probably does and **probably also has uterine cancer**. She needs to be spayed immediately by an experienced exotics vet. We have had **10 year old female rabbits spayed with no problem** or further spread of cancer. We have had **female rabbits with pneumonia and concurrent pyometra spayed with no complications and complete recovery**. It can be done if the vet is experienced. Get it done! It's not too late!

### DENTAL

Rabbit teeth, especially in dwarves, must be kept healthy and their **chewing motion, which is side to side** and not up and down, **should be encouraged** with lots of high quality hay.

**Dwarves and lops**, however, have trouble their teeth regardless of the quality of their hay. **This is due to genetics** and the shape of their mouths. Dwarves mouths are tiny and their heads may be an odd shape without enough room for all their teeth. Lops are notorious for dental and ear problems. **There is debate now about the role sunlight, or lack thereof, plays in these dental problems.**

Our experience has been that sunlight filtered through untreated (i.e., old-style, non-UV filtered) glass, **contrary to the needs of other mammals and birds** who require direct sunlight, provides enough UV radiation bands from the sun to allow rabbits to synthesize Vitamin D and thus affect the growth and health of their teeth. No doubt there will be continued discovery in this field not only for rabbits but for humans as well. For more information, see our article on the [Truth About Vitamin D](#).



Genetics are not the only cause of dental disease.  
See our article on dental issues.

## **SOFTWOOD SHAVINGS**

**The only wood shavings safe to use as litter for rabbits are from aspen. Pine and cedar emit deadly phenols** which cause organ damaged and failure as documented by many sources. It escapes us why pine and cedar shavings are still sold to the uninformed, unsuspecting pet owner. Never use clumping cat litter. Only kitten-safe cat litters are safe to use for rabbits and these are expensive. We recommend **Carefresh** litter or other similar types made from recycled wood chips. Any phenols have been removed during processing.

It is safe to use **compressed sawdust** or 'stall' pellets which is sold for use in horse stalls because while they still have a pine smell, the heat processing used to compress them has removed the deadly phenol fumes from them. This along with **Yesterday's News**, **Oxbow's Eco Straw** and other types of pelleted litter are cumbersome to use and not reinforcing to the rabbit. That means they are more for your benefit than the rabbit. **Reinforcing litter** means that it is something pleasurable to the rabbit which **they enjoy using** and digging in. Why would you want to use anything else? Frankly, they enjoy the **SHREDDED ASPEN** the most as bedding but we have trouble finding it anymore in the quantities we require.

## **SNEEZING**

An occasional sneeze is not necessarily indicative of a problem. **Check the paws for signs of mucus accumulation** since rabbits will wipe their noses with their paws, especially the inside of their front paws. Rabbits can have a respiratory infection **without any outward symptoms** though so always take your rabbit in for wellness checkups. You should have cultures done and nip this in the bud or it might never go away. Don't take any respiratory problem lightly, they can be highly resistant. **Eye discharge** may be an early sign of one or it may be unrelated. **Nasal discharge** may be white or clear. Clear is usually allergies while a very opaque, white discharge is more serious and needs immediate diagnosis.

## **PARASITES**

Several parasites strike fear in the heart of the rabbit lover. **Coccidia** and **e. cuniculi**.

**Coccidia** is a **protozoan parasite** which usually attacks the GI tract and can cause **smelly poop** or it may not. It can also **strike the liver** (hepatic coccidia) and this form is very hard to diagnose. There is an absolute cure now (**Ponazuril**) but it expensive and not carried by a lot of vets yet - it is specifically made for horses. The typical approach is to prescribe **Albon**. **Coccidia**

is **highly contagious** and makes the rabbit miserable.

**E. cuniculi** is the most dreaded of all. This is a **blood parasite** believed to be carried by most rabbits not all of whom are symptomatic. It can cause **hind-end paralysis**, **head tilt**, and other **neurological symptoms**. If caught early enough and treated, full recovery is possible. Fenbendazole (Panacur) is an inexpensive medicine used daily for 28 days as the main approach. We have had rabbits with hind-end paralysis make a complete recovery and go on to hop on the bed! See our article on [Caring for Disabled Rabbits](#). We have also had rabbits with severe **head tilt** fully recover and many years later no sign of the previous infection is evident. It should be noted that the bacterium *pasteurella* can also cause sudden onset of neurological symptoms that mimic those of *e. cuniculi*. Both are treatable and recovery is possible. However, some rabbits for whatever reason, never recover.

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#### References

[1](#) FSIS Fact Sheet: Washing Food: Does It Promote Food Safety?

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ROCKVILLE, MD 20850  
[info@brighteyessanctuary.org](mailto:info@brighteyessanctuary.org)

