

CARE OF DOMESTIC RABBITS

HOUSING: Hutch or cage designed specifically for rabbits. Rabbits can also be housed in rabbit-proofed rooms, but because of their propensity to chew on just about anything, we do not recommend allowing them free run of the house without supervision. Outdoor housing secure from predators is ok, they need enclosed shelters for shade and warmth and fresh water available at all times. Rabbits are fairly cold-tolerant, but are very sensitive to high temperatures and we will see several cases of heat stroke in the summer. Angora rabbits should never be housed outdoors.

SUBSTRATE: Cedar and pine shavings have been found to cause liver damage and irritation to the respiratory tract of rabbits. Aspen shavings, grass hays, recycled paper products, or shredded paper bedding is best. Lining the litterbox with grass hay will encourage the rabbit to defecate in the box.

FEEDING: Rabbits are obligate (strict) herbivores. This means the gut of a rabbit requires food to be present at all times for it to work. When a rabbit does not eat, it will become seriously ill very quickly, and the gut may actually shut down, leading to the death of the rabbit. Fiber is the most important aspect of the diet. Feed a formulated pellet (no seeds)-alfalfa based for youngsters, timothy based for adults-limit the amount to about 1/4 cup per 5 lb rabbit per 24 hours. A handful of fresh greens daily may be given. Timothy or other grass hay (whole hay, not cubes or blocks) should be available at all times. Fruit should not be a regular part of the diet, small amounts may be offered as a treat. An appropriate diet will make a tremendous difference in the overall health of a pet rabbit.

VETERINARY CARE: We recommend a wellness exam at the time of purchase/adoption, then exams every six months. The back teeth of rabbits need to be checked regularly for overgrowth. Bloodwork should be done sometime in the first two to three years of age to obtain a normal database, then annually from the age of four to screen for the development of age-related diseases. Rabbits should be spayed or neutered at 4-6 months of age to prevent aggression and odor in males and aggression and uterine cancer in females. Children under 6 should not be allowed unsupervised handling of rabbits, and we have found that a 3-year old is strong enough to pull the tail off a rabbit! Always contact your rabbit's veterinarian with questions and concerns-this is a better source for information than pet stores or the internet.