

Summaries are excerpts reprinted from the book:

# The Bunny Lover's Complete Guide To House Rabbits

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## *Why Rabbits Need to Live Indoors*

- **Rabbits must live indoors for their health and safety and for your enjoyment of them.**
- **Indoor bunnies live about twice as long as outdoor rabbits.**
- **If your rabbit cannot live indoors, then you probably should not have a rabbit for a pet.**
- **To be a true companion with and a good caregiver for your pet rabbit, he must be near you, indoors.**
- **Being close to and learning to communicate with your pet rabbit is a big part of enjoying your life together.**
- **By being near to your pet rabbit, you will be quick to notice signs your bun is not feeling well.**
- **Rabbit personalities blossom indoors and will provide you and your family with endless entertainment and joy.**
- **Your backyard is NOT a safe place for your rabbit to play.**
- **The safest place for your bunny to play is in a bunny-proofed area inside your home.**
- **A backyard bunny is a terribly lonely bunny.**
- **Dogs, owls, hawks, coyotes, snakes, and raccoons are just some of the predators that pose a threat to an outdoor rabbit.**
- **The predator does not even have to get inside the cage; your rabbit can die of fright.**
- **Domesticated rabbits have smaller, less-efficient hearts than wild rabbits; this is why fright can kill them.**
- **Outdoor buns are exposed to a lot more diseases and parasites (including fleas, ticks, raccoon roundworms, and myxomatosis) than indoor ones.**
- **Rabbits that go outdoors are more prone to a dangerous condition called “flystrike.”**

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## *How Much Does a Bunny & Bunny Care Cost?*

- Rabbits (“lagomorphs”) are not cheap or low-maintenance pets.
- Rabbits are not good children’s pets, and can be accidentally harmed or neglected by children.
- The adoption fee likely will be the least-expensive bill you will ever pay for your rabbit.
- Rabbits need regular veterinary checkups by a rabbit veterinary specialist, also called an “exotics” veterinarian.
- You will want to find an exotics veterinarian before you get your rabbit.
- Your rabbit is highly likely to need an exotics vet during his life, in addition to spay/neuter and his regular checkups.
- Veterinary medicine for rabbits has changed and improved dramatically in the past decade.
- Most procedures cost more at an exotics vet than at a dog/cat vet, because the exotics vet is specially trained to treat rabbits.
- To find good, reputable rabbit vets in your area, seek out your local chapter of the House Rabbit Society at <http://www.rabbit.org>.
- You should have your bunny spayed or neutered (also called “altered” or “fixed”) when she or he is old enough and hasn’t been altered already.
- It is often best to adopt a rabbit that has already been spayed or neutered.
- Schedule a wellness check with your exotics vet soon after bringing your new bunny home.
- Housing, supplies, and veterinary care usually cost more for rabbits than they do for dogs or cats.
- Shown below are typical costs for care (San Diego, CA, 10/2012). These costs vary by region, gender of pet, and veterinarian, so do call suppliers ahead of time for details.

| Item                        | Rabbit Costs | Dog or Cat Costs |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Adoption Fee                | \$30-75      | \$75-150 or more |
| Spay/Neuter                 | \$175-400    | \$90-180         |
| Housing & Supplies          | \$250.00     | \$100.00         |
| Monthly Food & Supplies     | \$50.00      | \$20.00          |
| Annual Vet Checkup          | \$75.00      | \$50.00          |
| Vet Bill if Sick or Injured | \$150.00     | \$100.00         |

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## *Is a Rabbit Really the Right Pet For You?*

- **Some families are not a good match for rabbits as pets.**
- **Rabbits are crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk), not nocturnal as many people believe.**
- **Regardless of age, a child is not capable of being the person primarily responsible for a pet bunny.**
- **Your rabbit needs at least one hour of hands-on socializing and about three hours of daily exercise.**
- **Rabbits do not always do what we expect, especially when we are just learning about them.**
- **Rabbits require patience, gentleness, and understanding, so they are not good pets for everyone.**
- **A new rabbit needs some time to become completely accustomed to a new home and to accept you as part of his family.**
- **Impulse-acquired rabbits are almost always a bad idea for the humans and the rabbits.**
- **You must prepare in advance for bringing home a bunny.**
- **Rabbits can be high-maintenance and expensive pets.**
- **Rabbits become “mean” only because they have not been treated correctly.**
- **You must ask yourself several important questions before you decide to adopt a companion rabbit:**
  - **Can you truly provide care for your new rabbit for eight to twelve or more years?**
  - **Are you willing to take the time and energy to learn how to properly house and care for a companion rabbit?**
  - **Do you now have—and will you have in the future—the space and the financial and emotional resources to keep and care for a bunny?**
  - **Will anyone in your household be allergic to a bunny or his hay?**
  - **Is everyone in your home happy about adopting a pet rabbit?**
  - **If you rent your home or apartment, will your landlord allow rabbits (and how many)?**
  - **Do you travel for work or frequently go away for days at a time?**
  - **Will you have several hours every day to supervise your rabbit during exercise?**

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- **Other Pets and Rabbits**
  - **It is not fair to make the defenseless rabbit endure punishment and possible injury from other pets.**
  - **Jealousy is a big problem when bringing any kind of new pet into the home.**
  - **If your animals are fighting, you must break it up and stop all aggression immediately.**
  - **Diseases generally cannot be transferred from dogs or cats to bunnies, except ringworm.**
  
- **Dogs and Rabbits**
  - **If your dog likes to chase cats, squirrels, or other small animals; likes to play fetch or chase games; or is overly playful, excitable, and/or jumps on people, he may not be suitable to live with a pet rabbit.**
  - **Often, a dog is not trying to kill or hurt a pet bunny when he injures one.**
  - **There must be 100 percent, constant supervision during the first six months the bunny and the dog are together.**
  - **Good candidates for dog-rabbit relationships are older, relaxed dogs who are not hyperactive and who already get along well with cats.**
  
- **Cats and Rabbits**
  - **Cats are a lot like rabbits in that they are always bathing themselves and are very clean.**
  - **When rabbits and cats have a tiff, a scratch from the cat can cause terrible eye damage to your bunny.**

## How to Pick Up Your Rabbit



1. To pick up your bunny, first make a "V" with your hand.



2. Slip your hand under the rabbit behind his front legs and find the balance point.



3. Lift your rabbit using your other hand to steady the hind end.

After lifting, bring the rabbit up close to your body, because rabbits don't like being held "out in space," where they feel as though they can fall or be dropped.



One way to hold your rabbit is by balancing his body behind his front legs and pinching his hind end with the rest of your forearm.



This gives you a free hand to control the rabbit's head or feet (shown above), should you need to.



If your rabbit kicks, firmly support his feet; or if he tries to nip you, put your hand on his head (shown above).

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## *Spaying and Neutering Your Rabbit*

- **Part of being a good rabbit owner is providing good medical care whenever your rabbit needs it.**
- **If you are unable to use rabbit specialists because they are more expensive than dog or cat vets, then a rabbit probably is not the right pet for you.**
- **Unspayed female rabbits have an 85 percent chance of developing breast or uterine cancers by the time they are four years old.**
- **Unspayed female rabbits will be more prone to cage protectiveness, chewing, and digging.**
- **Intact males can be more aggressive to humans and rabbits, and are more susceptible to testicular cancer.**
- **Intact males are known for marking their territory with their urine, just like male cats do.**
- **Spayed and neutered (altered) buns are a lot easier to litter-box train.**
- **Your bunny usually will be more friendly and docile after being altered.**
- **Many rabbits are impulse buys, and people do not plan for the cost or need to spay/neuter.**
- **Spay/neuter surgery by a rabbit-experienced vet can cost between \$175 to over \$300. Prices vary by the rabbit's gender, by region of the country, and by vet, so call around for pricing.**
- **Many rabbits are never spayed or neutered because their owners do not know how important the procedure is or cannot afford it.**
- **A big problem within many communities is that unspayed females and intact males are released by their owners who no longer want them, creating huge feral populations.**
- **The best way to avoid the expense of a spay/neuter is to adopt a bunny that is already altered.**
- **If you are planning on bonding two rabbits, both must be spayed and/or neutered several weeks prior to the introduction.**
- **It is best to have an exotics veterinarian with a lot of experience treating rabbits perform a spay or neuter.**
- **Complications can occur during or after surgery; there are no guarantees.**
- **You should feed your rabbit hay and water right up until the surgery.**

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- **Once you have returned home with your rabbit after the surgery, he may still be a little groggy from the anesthesia.**
- **Any continued bleeding of more than a few drops of blood means your rabbit needs to revisit the vet immediately.**
- **The safest, cleanest place for your rabbit to spend the first couple days after surgery is inside his X-pen (exercise pen) or condo.**
- **It's important to pay attention to whether he is eating and pooping properly in the days after surgery.**
- **Watch your rabbit's surgical incision closely for a couple of weeks post-op for redness and signs of infection such as pus or crusty areas.**

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# *Your Rabbit's Diet*

## 85% Of Your Rabbit's Diet Should Be Grass Hay



My rabbits get no more than one eighth cup (2 Tbsp.) of pellets per day, but some vets believe rabbits do not need pellets at all.



Examples of some healthy treats include whole dried herbs, hay cubes, and healthy vegetable "crackers."



Provide a salad consisting of four or five different leafy greens NO MORE than twice the size of your rabbit's head.

You CAN feed your rabbit too much salad, so do not give him too much. Gas (bloat) or soft stools can result.

- **It is very important that you learn how to feed and care for your pet rabbit properly if you want him to live a long and healthy life.**
- **Many rabbits that fail to live at least eight years are victims of being overfed.**
- **Rabbits require a very high-fiber diet that is low in protein, fat, and carbohydrates.**
- **For a truly happy, healthy rabbit, you must feed him unlimited amounts of grass hays every day. These include timothy, orchard grass, and oat hay (not alfalfa, which is for baby rabbits only).**
- **Rabbits that live solely on pellets tend to live only half as long as rabbits that are fed properly balanced diets of grass hays and a variety of fresh greens daily.**

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- **Pellets are extremely dense nutrition and were designed for farmers to fatten up a baby rabbit for market quickly. Adult rabbits should get high quality all-timothy (not alfalfa) pellets.**
- **Given a choice between hay and a bowl of pellets, most rabbits will shun the hay and eat only the pellets. (Think of pellets as chocolate cake with vitamins and minerals added.)**
- **You must watch your rabbit for signs of weight gain and adjust your bunny's diet accordingly. Invest in a scale and weigh your rabbit regularly.**
- **Rabbits store most of their extra fat in their livers, which reduces liver function and can cause a fatal condition called "fatty liver disease."**
- **When rabbits have too much nutrition, the speed, or motility, of their intestines is reduced. Reduced motility makes rabbits more susceptible to intestinal blockage after ingesting fur (rabbits ingest fur while grooming; hay helps to push fur through the system of a healthy rabbit).**
- **A common sign that you are giving your rabbit too much nutrition is finding his cecotropes lying around uneaten or smashed under his tail area.**
- **In addition to grass hay and limited pellets, a daily green salad of several different leafy greens provides all the vitamins and other nutrients that your rabbit will need to be healthy.**
- **A good rule of thumb is to feed your bunny a fresh green salad equal to no more than twice the size of his head daily. Consult your vet for recommendations, as greens can cause gas or soft stools.**
- **You can make your rabbit sick by giving him too much green salad every day.**
- **Avoid cabbage-family veggies; these can cause gas, which is painful and can cause bloating.**
- **When introducing any new food into your rabbit's diet, always proceed slowly and cautiously.**
- **Many rabbits are very reluctant to try new veggies at first.**
- **Always be concerned if a rabbit is showing signs of pain or discomfort, and take him to the rabbit-experienced vet promptly if these signs appear.**
- **Not eating and pooping is a very common and deadly problem, and the rabbit needs to see a vet immediately.**
- **You may need to do some work to find the best treats for your bun.**
- **Most rabbit treats sold in pet stores are bad for rabbits.**
- **Most rabbits will do anything for a treat.**

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- Don't fall into the "treat trap."
- Sugars have no part in a bunny's diet. (Avoid carrots, fruits, corn, nuts, seeds and carbs such as bread, crackers, cereal, and oatmeal.)
- Your rabbit will be just as happy to get a big sprig of his favorite green or herb or a few healthy pellets as he would be to get fruit or other sweets.
- Some rabbit lovers make special treats for their buns with a food dehydrator.
- Remember portion control when feeding your rabbit, except when it comes to hay. Feed unlimited grass hay (timothy, oat, orchard grass). Alfalfa is appropriate only for baby rabbits.
- Rabbits naturally eat and eliminate at the same time, so feed your rabbit hay in his litterbox and clean the litterbox often (at least several times per week, but preferably every day).
- Pine or cedar shavings and clay-based kitty litter can kill your rabbit over time. Avoid them!
- Rabbit-safe litters include paper-based litters (e.g., Carefresh, Yesterday's News), hay, and non-aromatic wood stove pellets (e.g., Bear Mountain Dry Den).

## How to Set Up Your Rabbit's Litterbox and Hay



To make a litter box for your rabbit, start with a large cat box. Bigger is better, because rabbits like to forage. You can reduce the amount of absorbent material that you use by employing a grate between it and the hay.

Do not skimp on the hay and fill the litter box almost to overflowing. For adult rabbits, use Timothy Hay, Oat Hay, or Orchard Grass, but not Alfalfa.

- A large, plastic cat litter box obtained from a pet store works just fine for most rabbits.
- Use fresh grass hay on top (not alfalfa) and an absorbent bedding on the bottom of the litter box.
- Do not use cat litter or pine or cedar shavings in the litter box because they can harm your rabbit.
- Hay should be as fresh as possible, because many rabbits will not eat dried, old hay.
- A rabbit will eat where he poops and pees, and this is normal.

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## *How to House Your Rabbit*



A two story rabbit condo made specifically for house rabbits with a ramp to access the second floor.



Many people use a metal exercise pen (X-pen) like this to contain their rabbits indoors, instead of a rabbit condo. Be sure the X-pen is tall enough so bunny cannot jump out.

- **All pet rabbits should live indoors.**
- **Do not tuck your bunny away in a part of the house that no one in the family frequents.**
- **Avoid wire-bottomed cages because rabbits tend to get their toenails caught in them.**
- **Small, plastic-and-wire cages sold in pet stores are not large enough for a rabbit.**
- **For comfort and safety, do not place your rabbit's abode in front of any sunny window, radiator, heater, vent, or drafty spot.**
- **Three ways to have your rabbit live indoors with you include: X-pens (exercise pens); large cages or bunny condos; and bunny-proofed rooms.**
- **Many house rabbits live in an X-pen environment, which is easy to clean, easy to move, easy to connect to other X-pens, provides lots of space, and is chew-proof.**
- **X-pens come in a variety of heights and you will need to make sure your rabbit cannot hop out of the X-pen you buy.**
- **Cover the flooring in your bunny's X-pen area, even if it's carpeted, to protect your good carpets and rugs from bunny's digging and chewing.**

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- **Another, sometimes more expensive, way to house your rabbit is in a very large cage or “bunny condo.”**
- **The main benefit of a condo is that, when you are absent, your rabbit is controlled inside a safe place that other pets cannot enter.**
- **If you are a do-it-yourselfer, consider making your own bunny condo.**
- **The size of a cage/condo should depend on the size and activity level of your bunny.**
- **Your rabbit’s condo must be large enough to hold his litter box, water crock or bottle, and toys, and still have enough room for him to move around and stretch out.**
- **The cage/condo entrance should be low enough to the floor so that your rabbit can hop in and out easily.**
- **A big, wide door or lid on the top that lifts will make condo cleaning dramatically easier.**
- **Another method of housing a rabbit is to completely bunny-proof a room and shut your bunny inside that room when you are away.**

## *Making Your Home Safe for Your Bunny (AKA Bunny-Proofing)*

- **“Bunny-proofing” is the act of making your home safe for your rabbit.**
- **The areas where your bunny stays, plays, and runs must be fully and carefully bunny-proofed.**
- **The simplest places to bunny-proof are bathrooms, kitchens, and hallways.**
- **Many rabbit lovers opt to give their rabbit the run of the house, but it takes a real rabbit expert to completely bunny-proof an entire home.**
- **Bunny-proofing takes time and it can be an ongoing process of trial and error.**
- **Part of having a rabbit is understanding—and accepting—that rabbits can be very destructive at times.**
- **Lagomorphs can, and will, find all kinds of things to get into.**
- **The safest way to protect anything from your rabbit is to simply remove it from his area.**
- **You will always want to be near your rabbit when he is running around a bunny-proofed area of your house.**
- **Even though your rabbit has never explored a part of the house, rest assured that someday he may suddenly decide to do so.**
- **Rabbits explore the world with their mouths.**
- **Rabbits are prolific chewers by nature and necessity.**
- **Chewing habits also change with the seasons. Extra bunny-proofing is necessary during holidays.**
- **There are only three ways to prevent chewing: remove it, cover it, or create a barrier.**
- **Toxic substances and items should not be left within reach of your bun.**
- **Do not allow your bun to run in an area with poisonous household cleaners and supplies in low cabinets.**
- **Most common houseplants are extremely toxic.**
- **You must visually and actively supervise your bunny very closely during his time out to play.**
- **Think of rabbits as two- or three-year-old children and always supervise them that way.**

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- **Do not make the mistake of thinking that you can watch your bunny closely enough to keep him from chewing your television cord, computer cables, or other items when he is out for playtime.**
- **Electrical cords are the most important things to protect in your home, because bunnies can be electrocuted or start a house fire if they chew cords.**
- **Never have cords of any kind—even protected ones—in your rabbit’s living area.**
- **The only way to protect your cords is to either remove them or put cord protectors over them.**
- **Homemade or store-bought cord protectors are the best way to protect cords; while not chew-proof, they usually can give you enough time to save the cord if your bunny gets hold of it.**
- **If your bunny is tearing up carpet, cover the areas with some carpet-sample squares or remnants.**
- **If your rabbit refuses to keep his teeth off something, simply remove it from his area rather than have an ongoing battle of wills.**
- **Never discipline your rabbit; it will only make him mistrust you.**
- **If your bunny chews, digs, or otherwise destroys something dear to you, it is not his fault; it is your fault for failing to properly bunny-proof.**
- **Avoid the “squirt bottle method” of spraying water at your rabbit to make him stop misbehaving. Positive reinforcement and distracting your bunny from mischief are the best approaches.**



**One of the most important parts of bunny-proofing is protecting your cords. Rabbits instinctively chew roots in their burrows and cords appear to be roots.**



**You can use homemade protectors as shown here, or store-bought versions made for managing computer cords.**

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## *Rabbit Health and Wellness: Issues from Common to Critical*

### Rabbit Experienced Vets are Your Bunny's Lifeline

- **For many common bunny health problems, the only appropriate action is to take your bun to a rabbit-experienced vet.**
- **Because rabbits are prey animals that hide illness, it can be difficult to know when your rabbit is sick or not feeling well.**
- **Part of having a companion pet is making sure that, if he needs medical attention, he gets it immediately.**
- **Do your homework beforehand to see which exotics veterinarian is best for you and your bunny.**
- **You can check out your local vets by asking other rabbit people or consulting your nearest rabbit rescue organization or House Rabbit Society chapter (<http://rabbit.org>).**
- **The more experience a vet has with bunnies, the better off your bunny will be.**
- **Good rabbit veterinary specialists will suggest a wellness check while your rabbit is healthy.**
- **Maintain a good, trusting relationship with your rabbit's vet.**
- **Rabbit-savvy vets are lifesavers for many common conditions.**
- **Always have the staff at your bunny's vet demonstrate how to give every medicine prescribed before you leave the office.**
- **Never skip or forget medications and treatments that have been prescribed.**
- **Never give your bunny any medicine—especially antibiotics—unless prescribed by your rabbit's doctor.**
- **Senior buns probably will end up seeing their vets more often than younger ones do.**
- **Senior buns should start seeing their vets at least once a year.**
- **Having a pet-health insurance policy can help give you peace of mind during a stressful time.**
- **Pet-care lines of credit are available from several companies.**

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## Common Rabbit Health Issues

- **A common rabbit issue is obesity or being overweight, which can shorten his life by half.**
- **You must check that your rabbit poops and eats every day to make sure he is healthy and normal.**
- **Any sudden change in eating habits, weight, poops in their litter boxes, and/or general well-being must always be given immediate attention.**
- **If your rabbit suddenly stops eating for even twelve hours, that qualifies as an emergency.**
- **Two of the most common rabbit ailments are gastrointestinal (GI) stasis (also known as “ileus”) and bloat (gas).**
- **Finding no poops in your bunny's litter box is likely to be your first indication of GI stasis.**
- **If you suspect GI stasis or think your rabbit is in pain, contact his vet immediately and take him in. This is a life-threatening emergency.**
- **Bloat (gas buildup) can kill as quickly as GI stasis. Gas is often caused by improper diet or excess greens.**
- **One of the first signs of a dental problem is weepy eyes or a runny nose.**
- **Dental issues also can cause your rabbit's eating habits to change suddenly.**
- **Bladder sludge or stones are another common malady.**
- **Head tilt, thought to be caused by a parasitic protozoan called *Encephalitozoon cuniculi*—*E. cuniculi* for short—usually is preceded by a stressful event.**
- ***E. cuniculi* can be fatal if immediate veterinary treatment is not administered.**
- **Rabbits have hollow bones like birds, which makes them very vulnerable to fractures.**
- **Rabbits' skin is quite fragile and can be easily torn, sometimes in large pieces.**
- **Your bunny chewing and swallowing something harmful is an emergency that often goes unnoticed until it is too late. (Extra bunny-proofing is needed during holidays.)**
- **Many household and landscaping plants and flowers are toxic to humans, rabbits, and other pets.**
- **A domestic rabbit will readily eat a very poisonous plant in your house or yard simply because he does not know any better.**
- **Literally thousands of products, plants, and substances are harmful to your rabbit.**

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- **Never use pine or cedar shavings in your rabbit's litter box. These can damage a rabbit's liver.**
- **Rabbits have very sensitive respiratory systems.**
- **Cat litter can kill your rabbit due to prolonged inhalation of the small particles in the litter.**
- **Do not apply bug killers or any kind of poison near your rabbit.**
- **Mousetraps or commercial products for pest control should never be allowed near your rabbit.**
- **Many medicines meant for cats or dogs cannot be given to rabbits without fatal consequences.**
- **Frontline® is highly toxic to your rabbit, causing fatal seizures. FRONTLINE = FATAL.**
- **Theobromine, a compound found in chocolate, is toxic to rabbits.**
- **Excessive heat can be fatal for a rabbit. Keep your rabbit's abode away from intense heat sources, and be sure to keep him cool on hot summer days.**

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