

RABBIT CARE 101

BUILDING BLOCKS
FOR SUCCESSFUL
RABBIT CARE

HOUSE RABBIT
SOCIETY





Agenda

- Introduction to HRS
- Rabbit Characteristics
- Housing
- Enrichment
- Health
- The Right Rabbit For You
- Q&A



House Rabbit Society

House Rabbit Society is an international, nonprofit animal welfare organization with headquarters in Richmond, California with 2 primary goals:

- To rescue abandoned rabbits and find permanent homes for them and
- Through education, we seek to reduce the number of unwanted rabbits and improve their lives by helping people better understand these often misunderstood animals.

Founded in 1988, HRS started out as a foster-based organization set to pull rabbits from the local municipal shelters to buy them more time for life. Currently we help 35 separate municipal shelters in CA.

There are 25 local chapters across the US and 3 world wide.

The HRS headquarters services include adoption, volunteering, fostering, shopping, community health programs, and educational programs.





Characteristics

"Learning to appreciate bunny 'nature' will enable you to respond to your bunny's actions, reactions, positions and postures."

- The House Rabbit Handbook



The Joys of Rabbit Family Members

Rabbits make fabulous companions

Rabbits are full of personality

Rabbits are easy to clean up after

Rabbits are environmental friendly

Rabbits are sweet and quiet

Rabbits are rewarding to connect with



Rabbits Are Unique...

Rabbits aren't like cats and dogs...

Their specialized veterinary care, nuanced communication and broad range of personality types make them better companions for adults than for children.

Rabbits are prey animals...

Because of this, they DO NOT like to be picked up and cuddled. For most rabbits, picking them up instinctually causes a fear response.

Rabbit misconceptions:

- Rabbit's personalities vary just like humans
- Rabbits should not eat whole carrots
- It is healthiest for rabbits to live indoors





Fast Rabbit Facts

Rabbit Domestication

European rabbit domestication occurred in the 11th Century and bred out survival traits causing rabbits to heavily rely on human care and upkeep.

Rabbit's Sleep Cycle

Rabbits are crepuscular meaning they are most active at dusk and at dawn. Rabbits nap during the day while their families are at work, school or play.

Lifespan

The typical domestic rabbit lives between 8-12 years with regular care, upkeep and veterinary visits.

Spay and Neuter

Rabbits should be spayed/neutered to increase their lifespan, decrease unwanted behaviors and prevent certain cancers.



Housing

"Your arrangement of space should allow for harmonious integration of your bunny's lifestyle with yours."

- The House Rabbit Handbook

Living Space Essentials

Though all rabbit homes are set up different, there are some supplies that all setups require!

When setting up a space it is important to note that the ideal temperature range for a rabbit is 60 - 75 degrees.



- A pen or living space
- 1 or more letterboxes
- Floor covers - such as washable rugs, plushy blankets or seagrass mats
- Food and water bowls
- A place to hide
- Litter pellets
- Hay
- Rabbit safe toys
- Ice packs and ceramic tiles in the summer and heating disks in the winter if no central heating/cooling

Bunny Proofing

Rabbits have a natural need to dig, chew, nudge and nibble. Be sure to thoroughly bunnyproof a space using the following items:

- Wooden Bumpers
- Chair Mats
- Vinyl tubing
- Plexiglass
- Plastic Paneling
- Furniture rearrangement

A bored bunny can be a destructive bunny so be sure to lift all cables, cords, plants, and books up off the ground and out of their reach





Enrichment

"Play space and playthings are important extensions of a bunny's basic necessities of food and water and a place to sleep."

- The House Rabbit Handbook



Natural Instincts

Rabbits play by embracing natural instincts. What follows is a list of rabbit play activities and why it is healthy to promote them:

- Running and zooming promotes strong, healthy cardiovascular, respiratory and muscular health.
- Digging keeps nails shorted, builds muscle and strengthens problem solving
- Rabbits NEED to chew in order to keep their consistently growing teeth short and healthy.
- Hiding creates a sense of safety and support for prey animals

Toys Are Tools For Success

Support and nurture healthy natural instincts like digging, chewing, running, pushing, throwing, and hiding in ways that benefit both the rabbit and the human. Look for rabbit toys that encourage your rabbit's favorite type of play.

- Clean, open space to zoom around
- Seagrass or timothy mats for digging
- Willow, cardboard, timothy, balsa, wood, and seagrass toys for chewing
- Plastic baby toys and rattle for throwing
- Cardboard boxes, tunnels, and tents for hiding.
- Plushies for snuggling and grooming



Rabbit Diet

The typical adult rabbit diet is made of:

- Unlimited Hay: Timothy, Orchard Grass, Meadow, Oat, Botanical and many more!
- Leafy Greens and Veggies: Provide lots of variety, 2 - 4 cups per day depending on weight. A mix of dark greens and herbs is best.
- Pellets: Hay based, the simpler the better, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup for an average 5 lbs rabbit. Avoid pellets with added treats, nuts and seeds.
- No more than 2oz fruits, starches or treats. That is 1 baby carrots worth!

Seniors, young rabbits and those with special needs may have modified diets. You primary veterinarian can go over a diet that fits your rabbit's individual needs

BASIC HOUSE RABBIT DIET



Rabbit Digestion



Rabbits are herbivores - their diet is exclusively plant based foods.

Their gastrointestinal tracts are different from dogs and cat. They have an organ called the cecum which ferments the fiber! This is called hind-gut fermentation.

Because of this, type have 2 poop:

- Uniform, round try droppings
- Shiny, wet, cluster droppings called Cecatrophs.

Cecatrophs are packed with healthy gut bacteria that rabbits reingest!

****A rabbit's GI Tract is continuously in motion. If your rabbit stops eating, this is an emergency and can result in death. Be sure to find a rabbit-savvy veterinarian ASAP. A rabbit that stops eating can pass away in as little as 12 hours. ****

RHD (RHDV2)

Rabbit Hemmoredgic Disease Virus (RHD or RHDV) is a fatal, high infectious, endemic rabbit disease. This disease only effects wild and domestic rabbit.

There are several ways to stay safe:

- Vaccination
- No outside playtime
- Keep away mosquitoes and flies
- Avoid feeding foraged plants
- Wash greens thoroughly
- Take shoes off before entering home

At this time, vaccination is recommended annually
Ask your primary care veterinarian for access to the vaccine.

****For more information on symptoms, vaccination, regulations by state and outbreak reports, visit rabbit.org/RHDV****



Grooming

Grooming is a great way to check on the health of your rabbit, bond and tidy up. Grooming needs include:

- Nail trims every 2-4 months
- Brushing once a week or once every other week depending on shed
- Anal gland cleaning 1-2 times per year
- General trimming for long haired rabbits
- Flea treatment 1 - 3 times per year as directed by your veterinarian

During your grooming time, check your rabbit for lumps, bumps, mats, dirty bottoms and discharge.



Signs of Illness

Prey animals are good at hiding signs of illness. Changes in a rabbit's routine are often the first indication that something is wrong.

Rabbit illness can happen quickly and can be fatal. Have a rabbit-savvy veterinarian before you have an emergency.

Check your local HRS Chapter website for a list of rabbit-savvy veterinarians near you!

Don't live near a chapter? Contact your closest municipal shelter or small animal rescue for recommendations



- Appetite Changes
- Abnormal or Absent droppings
- Abnormal Behavior
- Changes in Gait and/or Posture
- Dull or Missing Fur
- Difficulty Eating, Drooling, and Facial Swelling
- Upper Respiratory Signs
- Discharge



The Right One

"Rabbits are comprised of paradoxes that make them highly entertaining - inquisitive yet cautious, skittish yet confident, energetic yet lazy, timid yet bold."

- The House Rabbit Handbook





The Right Fit for Your Lifestyle

Every rabbit is as unique as every human, cat and dog. Finding the right personality for your household and lifestyle is the key to success.

- Away all day? Consider a bonded pair.
- Have a high energy household? Consider a large, outgoing rabbit.
- Need quiet, low energy at night? Try a lower energy or shy bunny.
- Have other pets in the household? Try a confident, easy going rabbit.
- Have little extra time or bandwidth? Consider a bunny that needs some trust building.
- Want somebunny to dote on? Consider a special needs rabbit.



Children and Rabbits

Rabbits make great additions to most families. Finding the right rabbit and understanding the shared responsibility is important.

- Children can be excellent helpers in caring for the family rabbit. Ultimately the adult is the one in charge of care, upkeep and health.
- Children can have a harder time reading a rabbit's unique body language and understanding boundaries.
- Rabbits enjoy nice, quiet spaces. Keeping the a child's excitement level low will help build trust.
- Teach children that rabbits prefer to interact one on one on the ground at rabbit eye level.
- Encourage slow, light head pets and ear rubs.



What To Expect

Meet the rabbit where they are at and having realistic expectations will strengthen your bond. Here is what to expect in the first 3 days, 3 weeks, and 3 months.

First 3 days

- Some droppings outside litter box
- Some shyness and/or hiding
- Waiting until night to eat

First 3 weeks

- Starting to explore the space
- Tidier litter box habits
- Curious or nose-y about humans

First 3 months

- Confident within their space
- Seeks human affection and treats



Resources

The information for this class was found in the **House Rabbit Handbook 5th Edition by Marinell Harriman**. The following are other excellent rabbit resources for health and wellness information:

- House Rabbit Handbook 5th Edition: How To Live With An Urban Rabbit by Marinell Harriman
- Rabbit.org for articles and information
- Rabbitcenter.org for SF Bay Area resources
- A House Rabbit Primer: Understanding and Caring For Your Companion Rabbit by Lucile Moore
- The Way of the Rabbit by Mark Hawthorne





THANK YOU