

Sherborn Woods Rabbitry (Care Sheet)

Try not to handle your bunny too much the first 24-48 hours, just let her acclimate quietly to her new environment. Changes can be stressful to bunnies (especially to their digestive system). We will send you home with a bag of transition feed to keep the food the same as bunny acclimates. Also, we use bottled water, so please give your bunny bottled water for the first week, and then slowly wean him into tap if that is what you choose to use. Lots of fresh Timothy hay will be soothing during this transition.



COMING HOME

Your new bunny is just a baby, and it will need time to adjust to its new home. The first few days should consist of one handler and introduction to young children should be done with adult supervision. After bunny is used to its new owner and environment, you may sit the child down and put the bunny on their lap. This can prevent accidentally dropping the bunny. Too many people handling the bunny can make the difference between a friendly bunny and an unfriendly one, which may even become aggressive or bite. That goes for extremely loud screaming or noises as well. We recommend 5 to 20 minutes at a time with one handler followed by putting bunny back in its play area or cage. You can tell when a bunny has had enough, he or she will try to get away and do not want to be held anymore.

Be sure to pick up your bunny correctly so it will feel safe. The correct way to hold your bunny is to put it up against your chest with one hand supporting its rump and another holding its back as if you were patting it. Be careful when children hold the bunny, they tend to squeeze them and poke their eyes by mistake. Tell them not to squeeze them because they can damage their spine. If you are standing up and the bunny gets scared, it could jump out of your hands and fall, which could cause serious injuries. They are afraid of heights and do get a bit nervous when you walk with them so keep that in mind and make sure you have a firm hand on them. This is why we recommend you to sit down with them until they are older. Bunnies have very sharp nails and children should wear long sleeves and cotton gloves at first to prevent scratches. Children will not like it if they are scratched and may become scared of the bunny.

Never pick your rabbit up by the ears. When returning bunny back to the cage, put it in rump first; this feels safer for bunny and prevents bunny from flailing in fear and possibly scratching as they flail.

We use a barely damp warm cloth to clean their fur if they should get anything on them. Sometimes bunnies get little poops stuck to their bum area. We sometimes trim the fur to help bunny until they get the knack of self grooming. Just be very careful and NEVER trim fur close to the skin. If poops are stuck to them, the best thing to do is soak the area with a warm, damp cloth to loosen it. It is VERY dangerous to cut off the poops as they are likely melded to the skin.

You can brush bunny with a soft brush or when they are shedding/molting use a shave blade type brush, like you use for a dog to get the old fur off of them. A wire slicker brush will work too. They need to be brushed as they can die from hairballs. Their first molt should be at 3 months old. With the six month molt being the big one. After this one, the adult fur comes in. Then it should be a once a year

event, near their birthday, unless we have a dramatic change in the weather.

Nails should be cut at least once a month. Be careful not to cut past the immediate time, as this could hurt bunny and cause nerve damage. We use pet clippers with a guard to prevent clipping too far. In the case that you accidentally cut too far and cause bleeding, use Kwik Stop (available at Pet Stores).

FEEDING

Water

Keep clean water for your bunny at all times, rabbits drink a lot of water. Fresh water each day is a must. Just like the feeders, we keep the water bottles full, and they need to be switched out every few days or else your bunny will be drinking all sorts of bacteria. It gets funky fast! To make our lives easier, we keep duplicates of everything, so when it comes time to put in a fresh bottle, we don't have to worry if I have time at that moment to clean the existing one. We do the same for feeders, except since they are metal, we use ammonia. Bleach corrodes metal.

Food

We use Manna Pro for all of our rabbits. You can get Manna Pro at Tractor Supply. You can get a 25lb bag for about \$10 and its better than pet store food. You can also add Manna Sho supplement (\$8 for 3lb bag) to regular Manna Pro. If you plan to switch to another brand just do so very gradually, try to take a good 2 weeks. Do not get the food with the fake veggies in it. You want to find one that has 16% protein or higher. Basically, you want to buy food that is ugly and green... no funny or bright colors. Rabbits should be fed 1/8 cup per pound of body weight. Fresh veggies is a must. NO LETTUCE or celery.

Hay and Oats

Timothy Hay is the most important part of their diet for proper digestion, and they should have a constant supply. Make sure it is free of mold and looks fresh, and keep their hay in a hay rack off the floor. We get ours in bulk at a local farm stand. There, the hay costs anywhere from \$13 for 9lbs to \$24 for 35lbs. At pet stores, you would pay about \$8 for 3lbs when the hay at the feed store is much fresher.

We also give my bunnies/rabbits oats on a regular basis. The oats can be given every day and is good for the bunnies. You can buy the store brand of oats that you would make oatmeal with. Sprinkle about a tablespoon on top of the pellets, do not mix it in the pellets, as the bunny will look for the oats and dump the pellets out. I do not feed them much oats in the summer or when they are full grown, as they can become overweight.

Treats

Do not give your bunny fruits and vegetables before 6 months of age as it can hurt their digestive system. Rabbits can eat a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables in moderation. Sometimes, when they eat vegetables, their urine can change color to orange or red. This is normal and self-corrects, as long as it is not blood, but usually the orangey-red is from carotene.

Good treats : Good treats include basil, spinach, beet greens, pineapple, carrots, carrot tops, cilantro, clover, collard greens, dandelion greens and flowers, endive, escarole, kale, mint, mustard greens, parsley, peppermint leaves, radish tops, raspberry, strawberry, and blackberry leaves, strawberries,

apples, melons, peaches, plums, blueberries, banana, cheerios and shredded wheat. Our rabbits look forward to a small bit of banana each day... they love it.

Bad treats : Alfalfa, lettuce, cabbage, candy, celery, broccoli, corn, nuts, sugar, and dried fruits (other than papaya)

HOUSING

Rabbits need space to hop and get exercise. The larger the cage the better. We recommended a minimum cage size of 18x48. Also, we recommend litter training your rabbit so it can enjoy hopping freely around parts of the house. See the sheet on litter training. Some families will gate in an area for the rabbit and use litter boxes. Remember, your rabbit has no way of telling you she is stressed and feeling confined. Please, please, do not put a puppy pad in with your bunny. He or she will eat it and get very, very sick.

In the summer, if possible, keep their outdoor hutch in the shade, rabbits can die from the heat. During the really hot summer weather, it is best to keep bunny indoors. If they are outside, you need to wet their ears with cool water and give them an ice block, either fill an empty water or juice bottle and freeze or some ice in a heavy bowl they will lay right next to it to keep cool. They can die from heat stroke quickly! This is very important, please do not forget about your rabbit, they have fur coats and it is mean to not give them the extra care they need for those hot, humid days we get. If you are hot they are twice as hot. Rabbits can die of heat stroke when temperatures exceed 80 degrees. During the bad winter months it would be better if you could bring the rabbit indoors. It will be easier for you, and the rabbit will enjoy it as well. They do not need to be kept in an overly hot area they do have a winter coat.

HEALTH

Stools

Rabbit health lies mainly in their digestive system. Diarrhea is the number one cause of death in rabbits. If you see your bunny's stools getting loose, stop feeding pellets and just feed hay. If the loose stools continue you can offer bunny some Old-fashioned oats or toast. When the stools look normal (hard little balls) you can add the pellets. If bunny's poops get much smaller than normal this is not good either. Offer plenty of fresh leafy vegetables and if the poops don't return to normal size or bunny isn't eating, take him to the vet. Fresh pineapple juice works well for wool block and papaya tablets are also good for the long haired breed. Probiotics are a great thing to give your bunny if their stools seem a little irregular. You can find it at the pet store or online in powder or paste form. There is a certain type of poop that bunnies eat. It is called cecotropes and looks like soft grapelike clusters. This is an important part of their diet, you may see it once in a while and that is normal.

Urine

Rabbits' urine can come in a **rainbow** of colors. Don't be alarmed. I cannot count all the times new bunny owners have contacted me in a panic to say their bunny is urinating blood. This can be pretty scary, but it is not blood, it can be caused by a variety of factors, such as oxidation of plant pigments (from feed, vegetables, etc.), stress (change in environment), and seasonal changes. Here are a couple great articles on the subject:

<http://thebunnyguy.com/wordpress/dont-freak-out-its-normal/>

<https://smallpetselect.com/rabbits-urine-red-emergency/?fbclid=IwAR3oOLVqbGLA1FAuA1NwWqg4pYJWsW8jhgNxpKTurULIbns1Hx8Gof8aG2Q>

Grooming

Short haired bunnies don't need much grooming, just check to make sure they don't get anything stuck to their underside. They become better groomers as they mature. They will molt a couple times a year and need more brushing then. The Furminator Brush is great for the long haired breeds. Be very careful not to hit the vein when trimming nails.

Exercise

Exercise is very important to keep your bunny healthy. It's also a lot of fun watching their true personalities come out in play and see them do their happy little jump spins! A small area in your house works well for playtime, or there are also small animal playpens that work well too. Just make sure there are no wires around that they can chew on (they will find them!). Add a fun little wooden house to hop on and a tunnel to explore and your bunny will be in paradise!

Temperature

In the summer, don't let your bunny stay outside if the temperature is above 80 degrees. Try putting a frozen water bottle in their hutch to keep them cool. Bunnies can die from heat stroke very quickly. In the winter make sure they have a house with plenty of hay and keep them dry.

Safety

Do not ever let your rabbit go in the wild, if you do not want it anymore. This is cruel and it will not survive. Call us and we will try to help. We would prefer to bring your bunny back, and we will try to find an adoptive home. This is not a practice we want to see happen, as we hope our bunnies go to responsible owners who can care for them for their entire life.

SUPPLIES AND ACCESSORIES

Feeders

We use Pet Lodge galvanized steel feeders with a sifter. They can be placed inside the cage but we prefer to use wire cutters and cut out a small section so that we can attach it from the outside of the cage with the food bowl portion sticking in. This makes refilling the feeder much easier.

Water Bottles

We use a combination of water bottles, both the Lixit top fill and the Pet Lodge regular bottle with a wider opening. Pros and Cons for each. With Lixit, you have to train your rabbit to pull the lever to get water, but it is really nice to be able to just open the top and refill the water. However, you still have to take it down to clean, so for that matter, taking a bottle off the cage to open it and refill it isn't that much more work. Also, we find the Lixit bottles leak a lot, so we place a small bowl under it to catch the water.

Litter Boxes

Many of our rabbits are litter trained. We make our own litter pans, usually out of plastic sterile

containers. We buy either the 6qt (.99) or 16qt (2.99) at Target, and cut them to suit our needs. Really cheap and easy to use. Again, we have doubles of everything, so when can just easily switch things out and worry about cleaning after. Then, we don't have to worry about where the rabbit will "make" while we are cleaning the containers. This also gives us time to just soak things. If you have a bunny or rabbit that nibbles at plastics, please remove all plastic and use wooden or stainless steel boxes.

Litter

As for filling the litter, we usually use a mix of UNSCENTED paper cat litter (like Yesterday's News) and pine shavings, purchased in bulk at Tractor Supply. This is MUCH more economical than going strictly with the paper litter, which we think is overpriced. Remember, rabbits might eat the litter, so traditional cat litter or scented litter can be very harmful. They do make paper litter for rabbits, but I think it is just the same as the unscented little, but sold in a smaller bag for the same price... i.e., costs more.

If you have a Jersey Woolly, stay away from the pine shavings as it sticks to their fur. This is not a problem with regular Netherland Dwarfs. Also, sometimes, the pine pellets dissolve into sawdust..

If using a waste tray that sits under the cage wire floor, we usually go ahead scented paper litter mixed with pine shavings and pellets, but since the rabbits can't access it and eat the scented paper litter. We also line the pans with old newspaper. This makes cleaning it much easier.

Toys

Bunnies love and need to chew as their teeth are always growing and this is the way they file them. Pet stores sell bunny toys or you can use non-treated wood blocks. Wooden hay racks are great because they can hold hay and be used as a chew toy.

We have purchased a variety of rabbit toys in the past... maybe its just our rabbits, but they tend to ignore them. My rabbits' favorite toy is a towel thrown on the kitchen floor. Some of my rabbits love to scoot it backwards and hop along with it. Joy.

Other Items

Items you will want to have on hand Kwik Stop, Cat nail clippers, can get at Walmart. The brushes I mention above for shedding time, terramycin eye cream, should they have an eye problem, I had a doe hurt her eye on something in her cage and I was out of it, have some on hand for these kinds of emergencies. I since got mine in, online, is where to get it. NFZ powder is another great product for eyes. I used that first before my shipment of terramycin came in and it worked great, actually better because the cream can attract more dust and dirt. Grain stores may have it or online.

CLEANING

As er mentioned, bleach corrodes metal, but ammonia doesn't. So, anything plastic or ceramic gets soaked in a water/bleach solution, and all metals get cleaned with a water/ammonia mixture. This is important as ammonia and bleach kill the #1 fatalistic rabbit bacteria, pasteurella (snuffles). It is crucial that the rabbits themselves do NOT come into contact with these chemicals. I take the rabbits out of the cages for cleaning, and then thoroughly rinse them off and let them dry in the sun... sunshine also kills a variety of bacteria.

Clean water bottles/ bowls weekly use bleach or vinegar mixed with hot water and let soak. Vinegar is better when children help out. I keep extras so while one bottle/bowl is soaking it can be replaced with a clean one.

Keep you bunny's cage clean; this is very important for your rabbits health. Do not have any part be made of all wood or the rabbit will use it as a litter box and get sick. You can have an enclosed part but make sure the floor is wire and use a removable board for them to rest their feet. Whenever possible take rabbit out of cage, spray cage with an ammonia/water mixture (as bleach and vinegar corrode metal) then rinse with fresh water. Use a wire brush to get droppings or fur stuck on floor of cage. Let the cage dry completely before putting bunny back.

VERY IMPORTANT: When working with bleach and ammonia, remember, mixing the two can be lethal to both rabbits and humans. Clean things that need bleach separately from those that are cleaned with ammonia, and rinse all items thoroughly.

Any questions please don't hesitate to ask!

Developing Trust with your New Bunny.

We get asked a lot about developing trust with your new bunny. This is a draft of my initial thoughts. Its not well organized, but when I have time (Ha!), I'll work on organizing it. In the meantime, I hope you get something from this.



When you first get your bunny, you will be new to him or her. Even when a bunny is well socialized, trust with a new person can take a little time. So many things will be new to them; your voice, scent, mannerisms, etc. They are aware and need to learn that you are safe.

A few things to consider when developing your relationship with your new bunny:

Height

Height can be very scary for bunnies. So, picking them up when you are standing is not a great way to establish trust. At first, only pick them up if you are sitting on the floor. Let them freely hop away. Having a treat close to you that they can nibble, without being grabbed, is a great way to establish trust. Once your bunny trusts you, they will more likely tolerate being lifted as they are in trusted arms. Go slowly.

Associations

You don't want your bunny to associate you with being grabbed, lifted up high, or being put back in the cage. Be aware of this. Sitting close and just being near and letting them come close and learning that approaching you doesn't mean being grabbed and lifted is a great start.

A Terrible Idea

Holding your bunny against their will (e.g., in your hands, in a towel, etc.) with the hopes it will become accustomed to you is a terrible idea. Instantly, you will be the being that holds them captive and thwarts their movement. This is a great way to turn a perfectly docile bunny into a biter.

A Good Idea

This is what we do with our bunnies. Every once in a while, give them a small treat. We use a tiny spot of banana, although I recommend checking with your vet for bunny-approved treats.

Once they associate me with the treat, I sit on the floor and put a little bit of the treat on a small plate as close to me as they are willing to come. Each day, I put the treat a little closer, until finally, I place the small plate on my leg, so the bunny has to climb on me to get it. All the while, during this "snack time," I never touch the bunny. I may say soothing things while he or she eats the treat... associating my voice to good things.

As the bunny starts to climb on me to eat the treat, I then do the same thing with my hand... each "snack time" session, I have my hand closer and closer to the bunny, until eventually, I am petting the bunny, from behind, gently, and NEVER using this as an opportunity to grab and lift the bunny.

If done properly, you can have your bunny hopping near or on you in under a week.

Once touch trust (bunny lets me touch and pet it) is established, I start to put the treat plate a little further away, and then, while close to the ground, I may pick up the bunny and place it at the plate. NOW, the bunny associate being picked up with his treat. This "picking up" should be quick and the bunny should never be lifted more than 12" from the floor.

Once the bunny tolerates that, you can start seeing if you your bunny is comfortable being held while you are up higher, like when you are standing.

Think of it this way, when you want to play with your bunny, why do you need to be standing? Play at his or her level.. Sit and be with your bunny.

Bunnies are not LAP DOGS. You can get your bunny to be comfortable sitting on your lap, but that doesn't mean your bunny WANTS to sit on your lap. Some bunnies will gladly sit on their owner's lap, especially if they like being brushed, pet, etc. Others, are more inquisitive and want to hop around. If sitting on your lap means being contained and movement being restricted, like you are holding the bunny down or have it wrapped in a blanket, you are then thinking about yourself and not how that makes the bunny feel. Would you like someone to hold you down and restrict your movement, even if they make sweet (or annoying) sounds the whole time?

If you want your bunny to stay on your lap, all you can do is first establish trust. Remember, the same that goes for humans goes for bunnies... "Trust before Friendship." "Respect before Friendship." Once you establish trust, you can try things that make the bunny want to stay on your lap (e.g, brushing it, giving it a snack, etc.). The first few times bunny lands on your lap, give it an immediate treat. Then, after a while, wait 2 seconds after it lands on you to give the treat, while never holding bunny down. Just like mice can learn to push a lever x number of times to get a treat, a bunny can learn that it gets a snack after a few seconds of sitting on you. I wouldn't make it wait too long, though, and you have to progress slowly.

Litter Training Your Pet Rabbit

adapted from: <https://myhouserabbit.com/rabbit-care/litter-training-your-pet-rabbit/>

Here are some suggested instructions for litter training your bunny.

Provide a small cat litter box (or a few) with low sides and no top. You can also use a shallow storage tub. Cut a doorway in one of the sides if it's too tall.



For litter, we use unscented recycled paper litter such as Yesterday's News. You can get the larger bags made for cats, but choose the unscented version. This litter will neutralize any unpleasant urine odors. Do not use clay-based or clumping litter as this is harmful to rabbits' respiratory systems.

Put a thin layer of litter at the bottom of the litter box; just enough to absorb wetness. There's no need to fill it too high since rabbits don't bury their droppings like cats. Plus, when you clean the litter box, you dump the entire contents out each time.

Rabbits like to eat hay and poop at the same time. To promote good litter box habits, place hay either directly in the box over the litter or place it in a hay box next to the litter box. If you use a hay box, position it so the rabbit must hop into the litter box in order to reach the hay.

It's easiest to develop good litter box habits in rabbits by limiting their space at first. Use a puppy pen to confine your rabbit to one area, even if you intend to eventually give him/her free reign of your home. This allows your bunny to get acclimated to the area in the beginning. Once your bunny consistently uses the litter box, you can gradually expand the area. If your rabbit starts "forgetting" to use the litter box, then limit the space again until good habits resume.

Here are a few other tips for those stubborn, "outside-the-box" bunnies:

- If accidents occur, mop up urine with a paper towel and pick up stray poop and place both in the litter box. This helps get the message across that the litter box is the place that they should do their business. Keep in mind that rabbits are generally not 100% perfect with their litter box. Sometimes they leave a few droppings next to the box, or they urinate over the edge of their box. This is normal, so placing a plastic mat under their litter box or putting the litter box on a tile floor makes it easier to clean up these little mistakes.
- Be patient and persistent. Litter training takes time, especially if your rabbit has learned bad habits. It takes a while to retrain them. If you can see they're about to go outside their litter box (they may lift their tail or sometimes they sort of shimmy down in a seated position right before they go), try to pick them up and put them in the litter box or corral them in.
- If your bunny is insistent on going in one corner of the room, sometimes it's easier to give in to their stubbornness, and place a litter box in that corner. Sometimes when rabbits consistently choose another place to go, they are trying to tell you that that's where they want to go.
- If your rabbit is pooping/spraying pee everywhere, this is probably due to your rabbit marking

his territory. It's a good idea to get your rabbit spayed/neutered in order to ease territorial feelings. Very few of our rabbits do this, and usually, it is only because they are in close proximity to a doe.

Litter training your pet rabbit takes patience and persistence. But in the end, you'll have a wonderful companion to share your home with.

Photo Credit: <http://blog.allcreaturesrescue.org/2008/06/03/rabbit-litter-box-recommendations/>