

# CARING FOR YOUR RABBIT



FURLOCK HOLMES  
REGISTERED CHARITY 1179572

## FEEDING YOUR RABBIT

### Importance of hay

Rabbits' teeth never stop growing. The chewing action when a rabbit eats hay or grass naturally wears down their teeth. If this doesn't happen, they develop 'spurs' on their teeth which cut into their tongue and gums, meaning they can't eat properly.

Hay also provides lots of long-strand fibre which keeps rabbits' guts moving as they should. Wild rabbits naturally graze all day - pet rabbits are healthiest if they do the same.

### Commercial rabbit pellets

Giving rabbits too many pellets will result in them not eating enough hay - they will always opt for the unhealthy (pellet) option! Rabbit muesli and mixed feeds cause a similar problem as rabbits will pick out the tastier, yet less healthy, parts and not the bits they need.

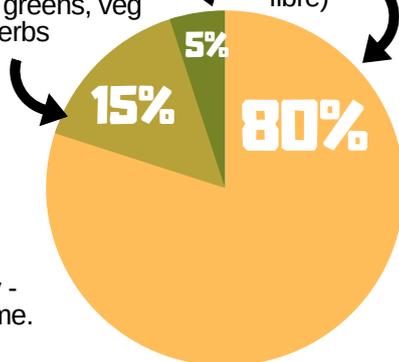
### Leafy greens, vegetables and herbs

Like wild rabbits, domestic rabbits love most things green! Whether from the shop or the nearest hedgerow, rabbits love a large variety of vegetables, herbs and weeds. They even love branches from some types of tree! This also gives them something to gnaw on to keep their teeth down. Some herbs can be quite rich and, if a rabbit is new to something, it is always best to give very small amounts at first and check the rabbits' droppings are still healthy (big and golden). Fruit contains a lot of sugar, so even safe fruits should only be given occasionally.

Leafy greens, veg and herbs

Pelleted food (nuggets)

Grass/hay (long fibre)



## WATER

Water is vital to rabbits and they must have constant access to fresh water. Rabbits that eat a lot of grass probably won't drink as much as rabbits on a mostly-hay diet. Rabbits can drink from a bottle or a bowl, but the best option is to give them both as the spout of a bottle easily gets clogged and can freeze in winter, but bowls can be knocked over.

*If your rabbit suddenly starts drinking a lot more than normal, this can be a sign that they are stressed or unwell so it is best to consult a rabbit-savvy vet.*

## VACCINATIONS

Rabbits need vaccinating against Myxomatosis, RVHD-1 and RVHD-2. This is done by giving 2 different vaccines, 2 weeks apart:

**Nobivac** covers Myxomatosis and RVHD-1. It is given once per year.

**Filavac** covers RVHD-1 and RVHD-2. It is given every 6 months to 1 year depending on the level of risk in your area.

Another vaccine, Eravac, is sometimes given to cover RVHD-2 instead of Filavac.

It is important that all rabbits are vaccinated. Even if they live indoors, RVHD-2 can travel on your shoes into your house and infect your rabbits.

## HOUSING

### Minimum requirements

As stated by the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund, rabbits need a hutch/cage of minimum 6ft in length, 2ft in depth and 2ft in height. They also expect rabbits to have access to an area of minimum 8ft by 4ft to exercise daily.

### Indoor rabbits

House rabbits are becoming increasingly common, but there are certain considerations that need to be made. It must be remembered that rabbits are naturally chewers and diggers. They will quickly dig up your carpet and chew any electrical wires, so it is important to have a bunny-proof area for your rabbits to live.

### Outdoor rabbits

Keeping rabbits outdoors doesn't mean they have to be kept in a tiny hutch. Other options (often cheaper) include converting a children's wendy-house or a garden shed. You can then attach a run using "runaround" tunnels found online. The bigger your accommodation, the more space the rabbits have to run and binky so the happier they will be! You can add areas for them to dig, jump, hide, forage and sleep.

## NEUTERING

Neutering rabbits is very important to not only prevent unwanted pregnancies, but also for health and behaviour reasons. Every year, thousands of rabbits are handed into rescue centres for reasons that could have been prevented if they had been neutered. **But why is it important to neuter rabbits?**

Firstly, un-neutered rabbits can be very tricky to bond as they are often territorial. Neutering **reduces the territorial behaviour** which in turn often makes the rabbits **friendlier and easier to handle**. Neutering female rabbits is particularly important as they are at very high risk (80%) of developing **uterine cancer** if not neutered. They also experience **phantom pregnancies** which are very distressing for the rabbit and can easily be prevented by neutering. Male rabbits may not have the same health benefits from being neutered, but they certainly have behaviour benefits! Un-neutered male rabbits may **spray** to mark their territory and are difficult to **litter train**. They may also spend a lot of time **mounting** female rabbits as their instinct to breed is so strong! Neutering will result in a much **calmer, more relaxed** rabbit. Finally, if you have bought two rabbits of the same sex thinking they then won't need to be neutered, this is very much not the case - despite what some pet shops and breeders will tell you! Same-sex pairs will need neutering as soon as they are old enough to **prevent fighting**.

## ENRICHMENT + BEHAVIOUR

### Preventing boredom



The majority of behaviour problems rabbits display are caused by boredom. Rabbits are intelligent, active, inquisitive animals and should not be confined to a small, empty space. Rabbits particularly love tunnels, platforms, hideouts, toys they can throw and hidden treats. This doesn't have to be expensive though! Rabbits are perfectly happy with a cardboard creation made by you, so get creative!

### Typical rabbit behaviours

**Digging** - just like wild rabbits, domestic rabbits love to dig! Even if you don't have any grass, you can make a "digging pit" out of a large litter tray/sandpit filled with earth.

**Foraging** - rather than putting food in a bowl, encourage your rabbits to forage for their food by hiding it around their enclosure. Make them hop onto platforms, move objects and exercise while searching for food! You can even stuff a paper bag/tube with hay and dried herbs.

**"Flopping"** - when very happy and relaxed, rabbits will do a dramatic "flop" to one side and roll over. Occasionally they do this with a bit too much enthusiasm and roll over completely!

**Stamping** - rabbits stamp their feet as a warning to others if they have seen or heard something dangerous. Some rabbits also stamp to get your attention or alert you to their empty food bowl!

**Chin rubbing** - rabbits have a scent gland under their chin, so they rub this on things to mark their territory and let others know what is theirs.

**Binkying** - this is when rabbits hop, skip and jump in pure happiness!