# Rabbit Care Guide

15-page illustrated guide | Housing, diet, bonding, health and lifetime planning



**Domestic rabbits are social, sensitive herbivores. Plan for a long-term indoor companion, generous daily exercise, unlimited grass hay and rabbit-savvy veterinary care.**

A practical, species-specific guide for responsible ownership in the United States. Use it alongside an experienced small-mammal veterinarian and current local rules.

# 1 | Is a rabbit right for your home?

A rabbit is not a low-maintenance cage pet. Most enjoy predictable routines, room to explore and calm company, but many dislike being lifted. They are crepuscular, often most active around dawn and evening. A well-cared-for house rabbit commonly lives about 8–12 years; prepare for that commitment, including moves, holidays and changing family schedules.

Rabbits are prey animals. A quiet hideaway, patient trust-building and space to retreat are essential. Personality varies by individual, age, past handling and health, so choose for temperament and fit rather than appearance alone.

– Daily hay, fresh water, feeding, observation and interaction.

– Routine care includes litter cleaning, nail checks, brushing and veterinary planning.

– A rabbit needs a rabbit-proofed exercise area and safe indoor housing, not a small hutch alone.

# 2 | Choosing a rabbit

Consider an adult rabbit from a shelter or rabbit rescue. Staff can often describe size, personality, litter habits and compatibility; many adopted rabbits are already spayed or neutered. If considering a breeder, ask to see clean housing, the mother when appropriate, veterinary records and the rabbit's age at separation.

Breed descriptions are broad tendencies, not guarantees. Small breeds may be energetic; giant breeds need more floor space and larger equipment; lop-eared rabbits may need extra ear and dental attention; long-coated types require frequent grooming. Meet the individual and ask about known health history.

– Check clear eyes and nose, clean coat, comfortable movement, normal eating and dry hindquarters.

– Ask whether the rabbit has been examined, spayed/neutered and vaccinated against RHDV2, if locally available.

– Do not buy a rabbit as a surprise gift or for a young child to carry.

# 3 | Housing and room to move

A roomy indoor pen or rabbit-proofed room is a better home base than a cramped cage. A 4 ft x 4 ft pen is a useful starting point for one medium rabbit, with several hours of daily exercise in a larger safe area; larger rabbits and bonded pairs need more space. The rabbit should be able to stand fully upright, stretch out, hop several times and reach food, water, litter and shelter without crowding.

Use solid, non-slip flooring. Provide a large litter box, hay station, heavy water bowl, hide with two exits, cardboard tunnels and chew-safe toys. Keep the area ventilated, dry and away from direct sun, drafts, loud appliances and wires.

– Avoid wire floors, tiny starter cages, cedar shavings and dusty litter.

– Use exercise pens, cord covers, baby gates and barriers to protect furniture and flooring.

– Outdoor time requires secure predator-proof fencing, shade, temperature monitoring and supervision. Indoor housing is generally safer.

# 4 | Everyday rabbit diet

Unlimited fresh grass hay (such as timothy, orchard or oat hay) should form most of an adult rabbit's diet. Hay supports gut movement and wears continuously growing teeth. Keep hay clean, dry and available at all times. Alfalfa hay is generally for growing rabbits, pregnant or nursing rabbits, or veterinarian-directed diets rather than routine adult feeding.

Offer a measured portion of plain, high-fiber rabbit pellets and a varied selection of rabbit-safe leafy greens. Introduce new greens one at a time and gradually. Fresh water should always be available in a sturdy bowl; clean it daily. Treats such as fruit and carrot are small extras, not staples.

– Avoid muesli mixes, sugary yogurt drops, bread, cereal, chocolate and sudden diet changes.

– Ask a rabbit-savvy veterinarian to tailor portions for age, weight, activity, dental health and medical needs.

– Monitor appetite and droppings daily; reduced intake can become urgent quickly.

# 5 | Litter habits and daily routine

Place a large litter tray where the rabbit already chooses to urinate. Use rabbit-safe paper or plant-based litter, with hay in or beside the tray to encourage natural eating and toileting. Start with a limited safe area, reward calm tray use and expand access gradually. Neutering often improves litter habits, but training still takes patience and some rabbits leave territorial droppings.

A practical daily routine includes refreshing hay and water, serving measured pellets and greens, removing soiled litter, checking droppings and spending calm time nearby. Weekly, wash bowls, rotate toys, inspect the enclosure and weigh the rabbit if your veterinarian recommends regular tracking.

– Do not punish accidents; clean urine spots and return stray droppings to the tray.

– A sudden change in urination, litter habits or droppings warrants a health check.

– Keep litter and cleaning products away from food preparation areas; wash hands afterward.

# 6 | Handling and building trust

Let the rabbit approach at floor level. Sit quietly, offer a small leafy treat and use short, positive sessions. Many rabbits prefer petting on the forehead and cheeks once they trust you. Never lift by the ears, scruff or limbs. If lifting is necessary, support the chest and hindquarters securely against your body, then set the rabbit down close to the floor.

Rabbits can kick powerfully when frightened and injure their spine if they twist or fall. Children should sit on the floor and interact under adult supervision; an adult should handle necessary lifting. A carrier with a familiar towel is often safer for transport than carrying the rabbit loose.

– Approach from the side where possible and give a gentle voice cue before touching.

– Stop if the rabbit freezes, struggles, grunts, thumps repeatedly or tries to escape.

– Reward voluntary entry into the carrier so vet trips become less stressful.

# 7 | Companionship, behavior and enrichment

Rabbits are social and often thrive with a compatible rabbit companion. Bonding is not simply placing two unfamiliar rabbits together: have both assessed and spayed/neutered, use neutral territory, supervise carefully and seek rescue or veterinary guidance. Provide duplicate food, water, litter and hiding resources during introductions.

With cats or dogs, use barriers and close supervision. A calm animal can still trigger prey-animal fear or cause a serious injury. Never leave a rabbit alone with a predator species. Do not house rabbits with guinea pigs; their diets and communication differ, and disease or injury can pass between them.

– Offer digging boxes, cardboard, tunnels, safe chew branches, forage scatter and daily choice-based exploration.

– Thumping, hiding or freezing can signal fear; tooth grinding, hunched posture or reduced appetite can signal pain.

– Protect electrical cords, toxic plants, foam, carpet fibers and narrow gaps.

# 8 | Grooming, nails and bathing

Brush regularly, with extra sessions during heavy molts and for long-haired rabbits. Check the skin for mats, dandruff, parasites or sore areas. Trim nails as needed, commonly every 4–8 weeks, taking care to avoid the quick; ask a veterinarian or groomer to demonstrate if unsure. Teeth grow continuously, so hay and a dental check at routine visits matter.

Routine bathing is not recommended. A wet bath can cause severe stress, chilling and injury. For a dirty patch, ask a rabbit-savvy veterinarian whether gentle spot-cleaning is appropriate and how to dry the area. A persistently dirty hind end may indicate obesity, arthritis, dental, urinary or digestive problems and deserves an exam.

– Never use dog or cat flea products, shampoos or medications unless a rabbit veterinarian specifically approves them.

– Do not flip a rabbit onto its back to groom; trance-like stillness is a stress response.

– Check ears, eyes, feet, coat and rear end during calm, brief handling.

# 9 | Preventive veterinary care

Arrange a first exam soon after adoption and plan at least annual wellness visits with a veterinarian experienced in rabbits. Older rabbits or animals with ongoing health conditions may need more frequent checks. Bring diet details, a fresh stool sample if requested, weight history and photos of the enclosure.

Discuss spaying or neutering, dental health, parasite prevention, safe pain management and RHDV2 protection. USDA APHIS reports an authorized RHDV2 vaccine, but distribution and availability can vary; ask your veterinarian or state animal-health officials what is currently available locally. Rabbits do not follow the routine dog/cat vaccine schedule.

– Confirm in advance which nearby clinic can treat rabbit emergencies after hours.

– Ask about anesthesia monitoring and rabbit-specific recovery instructions before surgery.

– Never fast a rabbit before surgery unless the rabbit veterinarian gives a specific instruction.

# 10 | Warning signs and emergencies

Rabbits hide illness. Call a rabbit-experienced veterinarian promptly if your rabbit eats less, stops eating, produces fewer or no droppings, develops diarrhea, drools, loses weight, sits hunched, grinds teeth loudly, has nasal discharge, limps or seems unusually withdrawn. Difficulty breathing, collapse, seizures, severe bleeding, a bloated painful abdomen or heatstroke signs require emergency help.

Do not wait overnight to see whether an appetite or stool problem resolves. Do not give human painkillers, leftover antibiotics, flea treatments or force-feeding unless a veterinarian has assessed the rabbit and directed you. Keep emergency transport calm and warm, and call the clinic while traveling.

**A rabbit that stops eating or passing droppings needs urgent veterinary advice. Early treatment can be critical.**

# 11 | Approximate U.S. costs

Prices vary by region, rabbit size, enclosure choice and health. Current published estimates for rabbit care vary widely; use local rescue and clinic quotes before adopting. A low adoption fee does not reflect the cost of a proper enclosure or emergency care.

| Budget item | Planning range (USD) |
|---|---|
| Adoption fee | About $50–$450; varies by rescue |
| Indoor pen, litter, carrier, bowls, hides | About $200–$600+ initial setup |
| Hay, greens, pellets, litter and enrichment | About $80–$200/month |
| Routine exam | Often $75–$200+ per visit |
| Annual total including routine care | Plan roughly $1,500–$3,500+ |
| Emergency reserve | Several hundred to several thousand dollars |

**Budget for the habitat, regular veterinary care and urgent treatment before bringing a rabbit home.**

# 12 | Children, other pets and household fit

Rabbits may be rewarding family companions, but adults remain responsible for daily care. They are fragile and often do not enjoy being picked up. Teach children to sit on the floor, let the rabbit choose contact and leave the rabbit undisturbed while eating, sleeping or hiding.

Cats and dogs can share a home only with secure separation and calm, supervised introductions; instinctive chasing can injure a rabbit. Keep the rabbit's enclosure in a quiet area where dogs and cats cannot paw at it. Do not leave any unsupervised contact. Other small pets also need species-specific homes.

– Use a family care schedule for feeding, cleaning, exercise and health checks.

– Keep houseplants, medicines, nicotine, cleaners and electrical cords inaccessible.

– Provide a quiet retreat where children and visitors do not reach in.

# 13 | Adoption, travel and the first month

Before bringing a rabbit home, set up the enclosure and locate a rabbit-savvy vet and emergency clinic. Ask the rescue for familiar food, litter habits, medical history, preferred greens and bonding status. Keep the rabbit's diet consistent during the first week; any transition should be gradual.

For car travel, use a secure ventilated carrier with a non-slip towel and hay. Avoid heat, direct sun and unattended cars. For longer trips, ask the vet about feeding, hydration, documentation, boarding and destination rules. Most rabbits are safer staying at home with a knowledgeable sitter than traveling frequently.

– Days 1–3: quiet room, familiar food, water, hideouts and minimal handling.

– Week 1: observe eating, drinking, droppings and litter preferences; book the wellness exam.

– Weeks 2–4: gradually add enrichment and space; discuss a companion only after health and spay/neuter planning.

# 14 | Quick owner checklist

Use this page to turn the guide into a repeatable routine. Small changes in appetite, droppings, movement or behavior are often more useful than a single snapshot. Keep the emergency number and carrier accessible.

| Frequency | Care task |
|---|---|
| Every day | Unlimited hay; fresh water; measured food; clean toilet area; observe eating and droppings |
| Several times daily | Allow safe movement, exploration and calm social time |
| Weekly | Refresh litter, wash bowls, inspect feet/coat, rotate toys; brush as needed |
| Every 4–8 weeks | Check and trim nails if needed; update weight/health notes |
| At least yearly | Rabbit-savvy wellness exam; review teeth, weight, diet and RHDV2 protection |
| Immediately | Call a vet for appetite loss, fewer droppings, breathing trouble, collapse or pain |

**Prepared ownership means a safe space, appropriate food, daily attention and a veterinarian before an emergency.**

# Sources and further reading

This guide is an original educational summary, not a reproduction of the book or its chapters. The supplied eBay item number was used as the requested book reference, but listing title, author and edition could not be independently confirmed. Verify the book details directly on the listing.

Veterinary and welfare recommendations can vary with age, health and local disease risk. Confirm decisions with a rabbit-experienced veterinarian; current costs and vaccine access vary by location.


– User-supplied eBay listing
– Merck Veterinary Manual: Providing a Home for a Rabbit
– Merck Veterinary Manual: Illness of Rabbits
– House Rabbit Society: Diet
– House Rabbit Society: Spay and Neuter Surgery
– NC State Veterinary Hospital: Caring for Your Pet Rabbit
– USDA APHIS: Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease
– University of Illinois Veterinary Medicine: Healthy Habits for Pet Rabbits
– Chewy: Rabbit cost estimates (accessed 2026)