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ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE OF IOWA, INC.

Rabbits in the home

Housing

Provide a roomy cage, six times the size of an adult rabbit. An average size rabbit (5-6 lbs) should have a cage at least 2 feet by 3 feet. A front opening door is preferable for rabbit to come in and out on his/her own; top opening cages are nice too in that they allow humans to reach in and out. Both top and front opening door is ideal. The door must be large enough for litter box. Provide toys in cage.

A cage with solid floors should be used, but if using a wire or slatted floor provide a resting board to cover part of cage floor (piece of cardboard, wood, or carpet) for rabbit's comfort. Slatted floors are more comfortable than wire floors. Litter box fastened inside cage to re-enforce litter box training. If using a litter box, avoid putting bedding in the rest of the cage as this may be confusing to the rabbit. Provide a heavy pellet bowl or clip-on feeder for food and a water bottle or crock for water. If rabbit tends to get wet chin from a water bowl, switch to a bottle.

Running Space

Indoors: gradually increase freedom. Bunny-proof electric cords. Place second litter box outside cage. Let rabbit have access to cage (leave door open with water and food inside). Clean small litter box once a day – clean cage tray and floor covering once a week or as needed.

Outdoors: fenced patio, porch or wire playpen (with floor), daytime only, with supervision.

Housetraining

Rabbits may have free run of the home. However, it's best for most - and necessary for some – to start with a cage. To make cage time learning time, fasten a litter box in the corner of the cage that your rabbit chooses for a "bathroom." As soon as he uses the box consistently, you can give him some freedom. Place one or more large litter boxes in corners of the running area outside the cage.

Use only positive reinforcement (treats and praise) – never punishment.

Bunny-proofing

Bunny-proofing your home is part of living with a house rabbit. It is natural for rabbits to chew on furniture, rugs, drapes, and, most deadly of all, electrical cords. Cords must be concealed so that the rabbit cannot reach them. Exposed cords can be encased in vinyl tubing (found

at hardware stores). By splitting the tubing lengthwise with a utility knife the cord can be pushed inside it.

Give your rabbit enough attention, safe chewables, and toys, so that she is distracted from chewing furniture and rugs. A cardboard box stuffed with hay makes an inexpensive play box. Young rabbits (under a year) are more inclined to mischief and require more confinement and/or bunny proofing than mature rabbits.

House Rabbits and Other Animals

House rabbits and indoor cats can get along fine, as do rabbits and well-mannered dogs. Dogs should be trained to respond to commands before being trusted with a free-running rabbit, and supervision is needed to control a dog's playful impulses (this is especially true for puppies). Adding a second rabbit is easiest if the rabbits are neutered adults of opposite sexes, and they are introduced for short periods in an area unfamiliar to both rabbits.



Handling and Socializing

If rabbit struggles violently, either restrain him against your body or squat down and release him. Fighting him may injure him. Prevent him from jumping from heights. Encourage a routine where he returns to his cage willingly. Demonstrate to the rabbit that you are the source of affection, treats, freedom, and anything else he likes. Pet him on the broad area of his nose. Try short sessions several times a day. Avoid situations in which have to chase him. Never punish a rabbit. Distract or remove him from chewing or digging destructively. Give him something he can play with. Rabbits readily develop habits – good or bad – and can be influenced by humans.