

PURCHASING A RABBIT

By Debra Olon-West

Are you planning to buy one for your youngster as a holiday or other gift? Do you want one just because they are cute or on impulse? Are you fostering one or taking one in out of the goodness of your heart?

RABBITS AND SMALL CHILDREN

I do not advise buying a rabbit for a child under the age of 10. Chances are you will end up being responsible for the animal and if you do not take care of the rabbit, he will suffer the consequences of neglect. There are always exceptions to the rule, but usually children and pets do not mix.

Another point I'd like to make is that if you do bring a rabbit into the household where there are small children, you might wish to consider a larger one instead of a dwarf or other small rabbit. Larger animals are better able to tolerate the sometimes rough handling small children can provide. From my experience, larger rabbits are usually friendlier than smaller ones as well.

Remember that if you purchase a bunny for your child, you also need to take the responsibility of teaching your child to care for the rabbit properly.

BUNNIES ARE CUTE,

But this is a poor reason for buying one. In the case of purchasing a baby bunny, the cuteness eventually wears off when they get older and many 'owners' neglect or abandon them. In my opinion, they simply go from being cute to beautiful, and deserve the care and attention of any beloved pet.

Please do not buy a rabbit on impulse. Too many people have done so, having no idea how to care for one properly, and the bunny suffers for it. Just because you may know how to care for a dog or cat that you own, does not mean you know as much about rabbits. The unfortunate thing about this type of situation is that usually the dog or cat takes precedent over the rabbit. The rabbit loses again. All pets require proper treatment and care.

FOSTERING A BUNNY

It is admirable if you choose to do so, but make certain that you know what you are getting into or you may unintentionally lose the rabbit to one of the many possible maladies or malnutrition. There is a big difference in caring for a bunny by putting him into a cage and feeding pellets from a pet store and taking the extra step to learn everything you can

concerning bunny care and using it. The education is a lifetime process (for the rabbit at least), but well worth it.

What should I do before bringing a rabbit home as a new caretaker?

- Educational Resources such as Books and Websites.
- Food and Equipment Sources.
- Get to know your local veterinarian.
- Bunny proof your home.
- Consideration for current pets.

BOOKS

What you would be looking for are books by authors with House Rabbit experience. Those by 'experts' who have never had a rabbit before may be helpful, but I would prefer to read those by people who know their way around the bunnies first hand.

Selected Titles can be found on our book page at:

<http://www.double-d-ranch.net/departments/storefront/books.shtml>

WEBSITES

The House Rabbit Society is dedicated to the proper care of domestic rabbits and has plenty of useful and practical information. Explore their large site at:

<http://www.rabbit.org/index.html>

Rabbits Only magazine has plenty to see and do concerning bunnies. Entertaining and informative for all ages at:

<http://www.rabbits.com/>

Rabbit Web is a huge site that has tons of information for new and experienced rabbit caretakers. Find out more at:

<http://www.rabbitweb.net/>

FEED

There are varying opinions as to how you should feed your bunny. We use an alfalfa-based pellet fed once a day, fresh water, unlimited timothy hay, and supplements of vegetables, fruit, and other grains. Recommended amounts of pellets are:

¼ to ½ cup for small rabbits, depending on weight.

½ cup for medium sized rabbits

¾ to 1 cup for large rabbits

Vegetables: Alfalfa, Basil, Beet greens (tops)*, Broccoli (mostly leaves/stems)*, Brussels sprouts, Carrot & carrot tops*, Celery, Clover, Green peppers, Mint, Mustard greens*, Parsley*, Peppermint leaves, Radish tops, Raspberry leaves, Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light colored leaf)*Spinach (!)*, Wheat grass

One each day that contains Vitamin A, indicated by an *. Add one vegetable to the diet at a time. Eliminate if it causes soft stools or diarrhea.

(!)=Use sparingly. High in either oxalates or goitrogens and may be toxic in accumulated quantities over a period of time.

Fruit: Apple (remove stem and seeds), Blueberries, Melon, Orange (including peel), Papaya, Peach, Pear, Pineapple, Plums, Raspberries, Strawberries. Sugary fruits such as bananas and grapes should be used only sparingly, as occasional treats. Bunnies have a sweet tooth and if left to their own devices will devour sugary foods to the exclusion of healthful ones.

The key thing to watch for is the rabbit putting on excess weight. If this happens, you may need to cut down on the amount of pellets and treats.

Where to shop for food: at a local feed mill for the pellets and hay. We have access to two in our area. We also shop for vegetables and fruit at local farm markets. You are better off shopping in this way than at grocery or pet stores. We get lower prices and better quality feed. If you can grow your own vegetables, hay, and so on, even better for yourself and your bunny!

EQUIPMENT

Cage or Hutch: This should allow at least one square foot per pound of bunny. Even if your rabbit will have relative freedom, he still needs a 'home' base where he feels secure and where he can be if you are away from home. Outdoor hutches should be protected from the elements and predators.

Water and Feed containers: You will need something that will allow the rabbit to eat, drink, and make a minimal mess. Many caretakers will use crocks, but we use hopper feeders and water bottles, which need to be kept clean.

Toys: Cat or baby toys that make noise and can be safely chewed and tossed to keep bunny happy and occupied. Non-toxic chew sticks or apple branches will help to deter them from chewing on your household items.

Litter boxes: if you choose to train your rabbit.

To purchase items described above:

Wal-Mart - for crocks, toys, litter boxes for cages with small openings and water bottles.

Dollar General - litter boxes, especially large ones, litter, and toys.

Family Dollar - litter boxes, litter, and toys.

Klubertanz - cages, crocks, water bottles, feeders, and most rabbit supplies. Web site:

<http://www.klubertanz.com/>

NOTE: We also can build a custom hutch for you. Go to:

<http://www.double-d-ranch.net/departments/storefront/products/hutch.shtml>

VETERINARIAN

If you are going to have a bunny living with you, you will need to keep in contact with a vet who specializes in small animals, sometimes called 'exotic', especially for rabbits. Bunnies can develop conditions that other animals don't, so you will need a doctor who is familiar with them, as well as their needs. It would also be wise to keep his number handy in the case of emergencies.

BUNNY PROOFING

Conceal or protect your wires with plastic tubing, keep areas in which your rabbit will have access to clean, block off areas that you don't want the rabbit, and put any breakable where the rabbit can't get to them. All it takes is common sense and the mind of a two year old. Where he can go or get into, so can your rabbit, though the rabbit is smaller.

CURRENT PETS

It may not be a good option to get a rabbit if you already have a hunting dog, nasty cat, or any animal that is carnivorous and would potentially harm a bunny. It is possible to integrate cats, dogs, and bunnies slowly or if they are brought up together. However, if there is a conflict, usually the rabbit gets hurt, so you may wish to consider this.

With time and preparation, you could adopt and do well with a rabbit in a beneficial home that is harmonious to all who live in it.