



BUNNY BASICS TO MAKE YOUR PET'S LIFE SUNNY



Rabbits can make excellent pets, provided they are given the correct care they need. It is important, therefore, to keep your rabbit as naturally as possible to keep him healthy and happy. A healthy and contented rabbit will be inquisitive, playful and fun to watch.

Before acquiring a rabbit, it is worth remembering that they can live for approximately 10 years. Also, they are not low maintenance pets – they require as much attention as other companion animals.

Rabbits are intelligent animals who enjoy playing and exploring. They are also sensitive, so they are not suitable pets for very young children.

We hope the following advice will help you to give the best care for your bunny.

COMPANIONSHIP

Rabbits are social animals. It is important to keep your rabbit with at least one other rabbit for company. Rabbits, who live alone, can become depressed and suffer with behavioural problems as a result. In the wild, rabbits live in groups of 8-15. This helps to keep them safe as there are more eyes and ears to look and listen for danger from predators like foxes.

FEEDING & WATER

In addition to manufactured dry rabbit food, your rabbit will need to have fresh vegetables to eat, spring greens and carrots, as well as pieces of twigs to nibble – eg from apples trees. Rabbits also like to eat short grass and other wild plants such as clover and dandelions. Rabbits kept in hutches can have problems with their teeth growing too long. A rabbit's teeth can grow at a rate of 1-2 mm per week! Access to grass, twigs or crunchy vegetables will help to keep this growth in check, otherwise the result can be very painful. So providing a natural diet for your rabbit will help to keep his teeth healthy. Rabbits also need access to fresh, clean water every day.

HOUSING & BEDDING

Your rabbit needs to be kept in a comfortable, weather-protected and safe environment where he has plenty of space. Clean bedding is very important for your rabbit. One of the main causes of ill-health and suffering in pet rabbits is caused by living in unhygienic hutch conditions. A rabbit is at risk of mites, fly-strike* (*see under Health Check) and urine scald, as well as maggot infestation if his housing environment is not kept clean. Although hay and wood shavings are often used as bedding, rabbits can find this itchy and may become allergic to it. Rabbits in the wild live on earth, so the most natural bedding to use is peat which can be purchased from garden centres.

ACTIVITY TIME

Rabbits in the wild are active at dawn and dusk. During the day, rabbits will stay in their warrens in complete darkness, only coming out for short periods. This is because as a prey animal it's safer to live underground during the daytime. Your rabbit will, therefore, naturally prefer to stay inside during the day. The rabbits at the Natural Animal Shelter live in a man-made warren, which is kept covered all day – they have free access to the outside but they choose to remain in the warren during the day. Rabbits can suffer from heat stroke, so your rabbit needs to be kept protected from excess heat, or cold.

The closer your rabbit is to eating and living like a natural rabbit, the happier and healthier he will be and more rewarding for you.

HEALTH CHECK

- **Fur:** Fur should be clean and shiny. As rabbits moult several times a year, it is important to keep your pet regularly groomed to help keep his fur in good condition.
- **Ears:** These should be clean and dry. See your vet if your rabbit shakes his head frequently and is constantly scratching his ears.
- **Eyes:** Eyes should be clean and bright.
- **Nose:** The nose should be clean and dry. If your rabbit frequently sneezes, or has a runny nose, take him to the vet.

- **Teeth:** A rabbit's teeth never stop growing, so ensure your rabbit has twigs and crunchy vegetables to chew to help control this. If your rabbit's teeth grow too long, or you suspect a dental problem, then take him to a vet.
- **Nails:** These should be kept in trim and living in a natural environment where your rabbit has access to digging, will help to control growth. However, if the nails become too long, seek your vet's advice.
- **Tail & Bottom:** It is very important that your rabbit's bottom is kept clean, to avoid "flystrike". If you find fly eggs or maggots on your rabbit, take him to the vet immediately.

EXERCISE & SAFETY

Your rabbit needs to be able to exercise daily in a safe, enclosed space with grass to eat. This will also help to keep his nails in trim. Your rabbit will need a place to escape – a number of large pipes (from builders' merchants) are ideal. Rabbits in the wild have unlimited access to open spaces to exercise and run around. They live in warrens and spend most of the day underground in almost complete darkness. The warren has many holes leading into it where the rabbits can escape when they feel threatened.



VACCINATION & HEALTH CARE

To protect your rabbit against killer diseases, such as Viral Haemorrhagic Disease and myxomatosis, it is important to get your pet vaccinated.

NEUTERING

Neutering rabbits will mean that they can live with another rabbit without fighting or breeding. It is important to have your rabbit neutered at 4-6 months.

INSURANCE

You may wish to consider pet insurance for your rabbit.

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY:

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