

The McPet Shop

RABBIT

General Information

Rabbits are quite different to many pets, they are not rodents like hamsters, rats or mice they are lagomorphs a quite separate group. They do not make good pets for very young children as they tend to pick them up too much and drop them. However, they make wonderful pets for older children with adult supervision. There are many different varieties to choose from; small dwarf lops to the large French lops. Rabbits are community animals, and should be kept in pairs or indoors as a house rabbit with human company. It is best to buy one, get it neutered and then find it a companion, which you have neutered at 4 months of age for males and 6 months for females. Guinea pigs make good companions for rabbits, but introduce them to each other slowly. In many situations guinea pigs make good companions but introduce them slowly and male rabbits should be neutered.

Housing

A hutch is important so that your rabbit can have privacy when it needs it. The size of hutch will depend on the size of your rabbit. A Netherland dwarf will require a hutch 120 by 60cm, while a Dutch cross will require a hutch 150 by 60cm, but the bigger the hutch the better. If you keep two rabbits, they need separate hutches with a communal area or a larger hutch.

Exercise

The hutch is only your pet's living space. Rabbits need lots of exercise, like most of our pets. Please let your rabbit have access to a wide space such as a large, secure pen or supervised access to the garden or even the house or garage in winter. Be careful of electrical cables though, rabbits will chew anything!

Handling

Rabbits enjoy being handled and soon become part of a family. When lifted or carried they must be held close to you with one arm under its chest and the other on its outer side. It is important that handling is supervised by an adult as over keen young children can upset rabbits. When upset or frightened, a rabbit will scratch and bite. If they are dropped it may result in damage to the spine. Because rabbits are a prey species it is possible to hypnotise them when they are laid on their back. While interesting and useful to allow grooming it is not good to do more than once a day.

Feeding

Diet is important and fibre levels must be kept high to help food move through the bowel properly. Therefore, hay should be available at all times. A good quality commercially prepared rabbit food will provide all the high fibre, calcium, other minerals and vitamins that your rabbit needs, but only if it eats all the ingredients. Feed the recommended amounts each day and ensure that it is all eaten. A hopper feeding system will help prevent selective feeding. When you put your rabbit on to grass, do it slowly, increasing the amount available over 7 to 10 days. Grass is a good nutrient but will cause diarrhoea if introduced too quickly. Other greens and vegetables (not beans or rhubarb) can be fed but have care not to feed too much.

House Rabbits

Rabbits can be kept indoors as part of the family like dogs and cats. They are clean, and will use a litter tray when trained and live in a hutch as they do outside. Both males and females make better house rabbits when they have been neutered. If you do not neuter a house rabbit, a male will urine mark and both sexes can be aggressive. Training is essential and supervision important in the early stages. All electrical cables and objects that may be chewed should be moved out of reach. This is a highly recommended way to keep rabbits but it is important that you do your research.

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Rabbit Health

Provided your rabbit is cared for it should live a long and healthy life. It is important to check their teeth and nails every week. Rabbit's teeth grow throughout life and dental problems are very common, especially if they have not received the correct diet. If your rabbit is not eating, or drooling saliva, have its teeth checked by a vet. Diarrhoea is a serious condition, which is best avoided by keeping the diet the same and introducing new food slowly over 7 to 10 days. Skin mites can be a problem but are easily treated provided you notice it early. If your rabbit loses their appetite, some body weight, has runny eyes or nose, develops diarrhoea or has a poor coat or skin; seek veterinary advice. Rabbits can be vaccinated against more serious diseases such as Myxomatosis and VHD.

Your Health and Hygiene

Rabbits are clean animals, but it is important to wash your hands before (so you do not frighten your pet with unusual smells) and after handling your rabbit (to prevent the spread of infection). Clean the living area daily and the sleeping area once a week. Disinfect with a rabbit friendly product.

Key Rabbit Facts

Weaning	4-8 weeks	Breeding	16-24 weeks
Gestation	30-33 days	Litter Size	Average of 7 (smaller breeds 3 to 4)
Adult Weight	1-8kg	Life expectancy	8 to 12 years

This Care leaflet is a basic guide only. More information is available from pet care books or the The McPet Shop guide available in the store.

Guarantee

The McPet Shop does not guarantee the age or sex of any animal, bird or fish sold. All livestock is guaranteed for 48 hours from the time of sale. The McPet Shop aims to supply completely healthy pets. If a problem occurs within this period, then please contact the store.

CHECK - Tick the box as you complete your task

Housing

- A large **hutch**, consider the breed size and the number of rabbits
- **Bedding** material for the living floor (shavings).
- A **pen** for the garden
- **Bedding** for the sleeping box (hay)
- **Disinfectant**

Exercise

- A large enclosed **run** to allow unsupervised exercise.
- Wooden tunnels for hiding and play.

Feeding

- **Food** – For continuity ask the staff what we have been feeding
- Food **bowl or hopper** and water **bottle**.
- **Hay Rack**.
- **Disinfectant** for feeding dishes and water bottles.
- **Chews** to maintain dental health.

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Knowledge

- Books to improve your pet knowledge.