**Rabbits – Care Sheet**

**Rabbits:** *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Far from the cottontail rabbits that eat your garden and run at the slightest noise or movement, European rabbits can make for fun, entertaining pets. Rabbits are complex creatures who like to run around, explore their surroundings, and nibble on almost everything! Providing them with a safe environment is key.

**Basic info:**

* Age: 8-12 years
* Adult weight: 1-10 lbs. depending on breed
* Sexual maturity: 5-7 months for males; 4-6 months for females
* Gestation: 29-35 days
* Litter size: 4-10 babies

**Behavior**

If socialized when they are young, rabbits can make excellent companions for humans. Rabbits are also very inquisitive and fast. When they slip away, they can injure themselves by chewing on things they are not supposed to, like electrical cords. While it is important to give your rabbit time outside of its cage for exercise and play, it is doubly important that you “rabbit proof” the area so your pet can remain safe and healthy. It is very important when handling your rabbit to always support the back legs, as they can kick hard enough to injure their spine. Never scruff a rabbit or hold it by its ears.

**Diet**

Rabbits are hungry herbivores. As such, you should keep plenty of grass hay (usually timothy) around for them to munch on and get healthy levels of fiber. Hay is the most important part of their diet and should be available at all time. It is also important to make sure they have clean, fresh water daily. Most rabbits prefer a bowl to a bottle. For the rest of their diet, rabbits should have:

* ¼ cup alfafa-based pellets a day for rabbits younger than 6 months
* ¼ cup of timothy hay-based pellets per day for rabbits old than 6 months
* Healthy greens such as mustard, collard, or dandelion greens every day; many rabbits also enjoy various lettuces (avoid iceberg or cabbage) and herbs like parsley or cilantro
* Vegetables such as zucchini, squash, or bell peppers can be provided in small amounts
* Very small amounts of treats like bananas, apples, carrots, or other fruit. Too much of these treats can cause gastrointestinal problems and lead to weight gain.
* Avoid food made from dried fruits, vegetables, grain or seeds.

**Environment & Caging**

Since rabbits are so active, it is important that they have plenty of

space to move around while they are in their cage. We recommend solid bottom cage that is kept indoors, in a quiet location, in an area where the temperature is between 50°F to 75°F. Rabbits are very prone to heat stroke, so they do much better indoors. Some people opt for open-top exercise pens instead of cages for their rabbits.

No matter what type of enclosure you keep your rabbit in, it is important that it:

* Has a litter box (that you clean daily) containing aspen shavings, hay or pellets made from recycled paper products. Avoid clumping cat litter.
* Is rabbit proofed, meaning chewing hazards are covered, lead paint and toxic plants are removed and is escape proof
* Has a well-ventilated hide box made from untreated cardboard or baskets, that it can hide in. The box should be filled with hay or another type of safe bedding.
* Safe toys made from untreated wood, woven timothy hay, cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls or other safe materials the rabbit can safely chew on and play with. We can advise you on what is safe.
* Has appropriate flooring – avoid wire bottoms as they can damage feet, and avoid shavings made from cedar or pine as they can irritate the eyes and respiratory tract.

**Veterinary Care**

We recommend that you bring in your rabbit for a physical examination every 6-12 months or at any time if your rabbit is showing signs of distress. We can perform fecal examinations, dental examinations, and do blood work to check for common issues like:

* Respiratory disease
* Abscesses
* Bacterial or viral infections
* Dental problems
* Gastrointestinal stasis
* Head tilt
* Heat-induced trauma
* Parasites

We recommend vaccination against Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV2). This disease has become endemic in various areas of the US since 2020. It is extremely contagious and rapidly fatal. Vaccination is now available routinely and is recommended once a year.

For more information please visit [https://rabbit.org/resources/rhdv/](https://na01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Frabbit.org%2Fresources%2Frhdv%2F&data=05%7C01%7C%7Cc91600c751ff4b647fc208db20208503%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C638139096256517673%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=iJEvM9b5LBg4ifH3D7u6MzGtbrSRrB9nJGOShkWjg5w%3D&reserved=0).

We recommend all rabbits are spayed or neutered as that reduces

some undesirable behaviors such as urine marking and territorial

issues. In addition, uterine cancer is extremely common in female rabbits, and spaying will eliminate that risk. It also reduces the risk of mammary cancer.