



Things to Consider Before Getting a Rabbit/Bunny

- **Bunnies are NOT low maintenance pets.** Their care needs fall somewhere between “more-than-a-cat, less-than-a-dog” in terms of what is required. That said, they are extremely affectionate, interactive, and make wonderful pets. However, they should not be seen as suitable for a child to take care of alone, nor be a pet that is given to a child to “teach” the child how to be a responsible pet owner – Close adult oversight is required at all times.
- **Rabbits live 10+ years.** It’s quite a commitment. Unfortunately, rabbits are very difficult to rehome. Rabbits do not have the survival instincts that their wild cousins have to be able to survive on their own in the wild. Releasing a domestic rabbit into the wild guarantees that the rabbit will suffer a cruel death due to a predator attack, slow starvation due to a poor diet, or parasitic infection. Practically all of our rescued rabbits come from abandonment cases. Please make sure you are ready for this commitment.
- **You will need to be able to spend time with your rabbit every day.** Rabbits are social animals and rely on daily social interaction to remain a healthy, happy bunny.
- **You will need an indoor space and bunny-proofed area.** A rabbit hutch (even indoors) is not appropriate housing for a rabbit (see our supplies list). Bunnies like to chew cords that are not protected. They can chew baseboards and furniture, can pull up carpet fibers.
- **Most rabbits do not like being picked up or held,** but they do like to be pet after they get to know you (with their feet on the floor). Never cradle a rabbit, hold it tummy-side up, or with its head lower than its heart. These positions cause a trance-like state that is dangerous to rabbits.
- **Many rabbits can get along with other family members and pets.** You will need to know your children and current pets very well to be able to ascertain, “Will this work?” Most require a lot of patience at first. Many dogs and cats can get along very well with rabbits; however, you must supervise introductions and interactions. We HIGHLY recommend that all animals within the household being spayed/neutered as this SIGNIFICANTLY increases the chances they will get along safely. NOTE: We do not recommend having a rabbit in a home with pet snakes as the scent can stress the rabbit.
- **Are you ready for a long-term commitment?** Are you okay with a 10+ year commitment? Do you have the time and income to appropriately support a rabbit? Would you be able to afford an exotic vet bill if your bunny gets very sick? Exotic vet costs are significantly higher than those of a regular vet. An honest evaluation of these questions before getting a rabbit will help ensure that you can provide a healthy, long-term home for a rabbit.
- **You will need a bunny savvy vet.** Many vets say they can “see” rabbits; however, few veterinarians truly have the training and experience to properly manage a rabbit’s care needs. There is a significant danger when using a non-exotic vet to treat a sick rabbit.
- **It is important know and educate yourself about GI Stasis.** If a bunny stops eating and pooping, it is an emergent situation in which they should be seen by a vet as soon as possible. While GI stasis is very rare (or possibly never occurring) in most rabbits, some rabbits are particularly prone to it. Experiencing it at least once in their lifetime is very common. Knowing warning signs of this painful condition can help prevent an emergency that often times leads to death if left untreated.
- **Knowing how to react and treat with an emergency kit is essential.**
- **You will need special supplies for your pet rabbit** (see supplies we recommend).
- **Rabbits are messy!** Expect to sweep often. On carpet, a carpet squeegee broom works well.



Feeding your rabbit

- **Hay** – Hay is the “backbone” of a rabbit’s diet, and rabbits should be offered an unlimited supply of hay at all times. While Timothy Hay is best, Orchard Grass with some Oat Hay is a perfect nutritional substitution. We have the best luck with hay stock from: Small Pet Select, Oxbow, Tractor Supply Company - the “Standlee” brand, and Rabbit Hole (though it’s pricey). Many of these are available at pet stores, Chewy.com, Amazon, and the Tractor Supply Co. store. Always add hay to the litterbox. Bunnies like to eat while using their bathroom. 😊
- **Veggies** – Rabbits can eat most leafy greens. Romaine, green leaf lettuce, red leaf lettuce, collards, all varieties of herbs (rabbits LOVE herbs!), butter lettuce, dandelion greens, mustard greens, arugula, endive, escarole, watercress, etc. are all wonderful for rabbits. It is recommended to feed 1 cup of veggies per 2lbs of weight per day. A few exceptions to acceptable leafy greens are iceberg lettuce (due to high water content and low nutritional values), and cabbage (due to promotion of gas in the GI tract). Kale can only be fed in moderation, and spinach should be avoided, except when in spring mixes (due to high calcium content). **Fruits and sweet vegetables** can be given as an occasional treat. Examples of these are a baby carrot, an inch of banana (given VERY rarely/sparingly), a slice of apple (but no apple seeds as they contain arsenic!), apple peels, strawberry, strawberry tops, blueberries, raspberries, a small amount of watermelon or pineapple. Bell pepper and tomato are safe in small amounts as long as the seeds are removed.
- **Pellets** – Amounts and brands are important here. The recommended amount of pellets is about 1/8th cup (2 tablespoons) for a ~5 lb. rabbit. This may seem like a surprisingly small amount, however 90-95% of a rabbit’s diet is made up of hay. Pellets help rabbits meet their nutritional needs and is fed as an important supplement, but can cause weight gain if fed in too high amounts. Some of the best brands of pellets include Oxbow, Science Selective, Small Pet Select, Sherwood, and Rabbit Hole. We strongly recommend staying away from Kaytee pellets, Hartz, and Small World pellets as they lack the necessary nutrients and often contain seeds, which can puncture a rabbit’s intestines.
- **Healthy Treats** – The best store-bought treats are by Oxbow (green bag probiotic ovals, timothy hay-based heart cookies), and Selective Naturals (Meadow Loops, Sticks, and other versions). Kaytee also makes timothy-based apple biscuits which are excellent. Tractor Supply Co “Standlee” brand treats are also very good choices.

Treats that we strongly recommend staying away from: Anything containing seeds, nuts, corn, popcorn, and yogurt drops. These are often marketed towards rabbits, but are all very dangerous for them. As previously stated above, anything with seeds can puncture a rabbit’s intestines. Yogurt drops contain a high amount of sugar (and rabbits are lactose intolerant anyway), which can cause GI Stasis, which is an emergency situation.



Supplies We Recommend

- **Exercise pen, not a cage!** Rabbits need a LOT of exercise and enough space to run and play. We recommend an exercise pen (also marketed as an X-Pen). Many companies offer these, some of our favorites are Midwest, Kaytee (blue portal pen), VibrantLife, and many others. Amazon has a great version of the Midwest. Cages and store-bought “rabbit hutches” do not provide rabbits the space and surfaces rabbit need and are NOT AT ALL ACCEPTABLE. Wire bottomed cages and hutches cause permanent damage to the protective fur pads on rabbits’ hocks and cause painful deformations of the bones of their feet, causing life-long pain and problems.
- **Litterbox** - (plastic, usually marketed to cat owners) - this does not have to be fancy or expensive. We do not recommend the kind with the grate on the top. The best success comes with the open pans. (Always make hay available within or accessible from the litterbox.)
- **Litter** - most rescues recommend Tractor Supply Company kiln-dried pine pellets. They are ~\$6 per 40 lb. bag (per the Madison TSC and TSC will price match within the state). Although pine bedding is not usually safe for rabbits, the kiln-drying process of the pellets removes the toxic oils to a safe level. This litter is also very easy to dump out, absorbs odors well, and is compostable. Adding chopped straw (found at Tractor Supply \$15 for a baled bag) or paper litter on top of the pine pellets adds a softer surface for the rabbit, which is particularly beneficial to soft-furred breeds like rex, mini-rex, or overweight rabbits. Other safe litter options include: paper bedding (fragrance-free), paper pellets, newspaper, and aspen flakes - only recommended as a softening topper. **Never use cedar shavings or pellets, pine shavings, the oils are toxic to rabbits.** **Scoopable cat litter is also unsafe.**
- **Heavy ceramic, stainless steel, or double-lipped water dish** – A bowl is much easier to clean and is more natural for a rabbit to drink from (they drink like a cat or dog!). We recommend changing the water often and checking that the dish is full. Dehydration can cause stasis. **Water bottles do not provide enough water in which a rabbit needs to stay well-hydrated.** Water bottles also accumulate bacteria quickly.
- **A hideaway** – We usually use a cardboard box with a few entry holes cut in the sides. (heavily inked/painted/plasticized boxes are not recommended). All plastic and paper tapes should be removed to prevent ingestion of glues and plastics. A safe hiding spot gives the bunny a place to go when they feel nervous or threatened. (They are prey animals.)
- **Toys** – There are many you can DIY out of cardboard. (As long as the cardboard is free of staples, tape, and excessive ink, it is safe and rabbits can even eat it.) Rabbits love wicker balls, tunnels of any kind, stacking cups, plastic keys, plastic slinkies, and various hard-plastic baby toys, toilet and paper towel tubes (that are free from TP and glues)
- **Chewables** – A rabbit’s teeth grow continually, so this is very important. Apple sticks (unlimited), sweet bamboo (limit 1-2 per week), and cardboard provide lots of material to chew



Vets We Recommend

Recommended vets for Huntsville are listed on our Supplies Sheet and also on our website at:

www.huntsvillehouserabbits.com/vets

If you need a vet for a different part of AL or the USA, please contact us as we have friend rescues across the USA.

Bunny Emergency Info/Kit

We have a write-up on our recommended emergency kit. Half of it regards scrapes and scuffles, and half is oriented towards GI Stasis treatment. Our writeup is on our website here:

<https://huntsvillehouserabbits.com/bunny-basics-topics/f/bunny-emergency-kit>

Always take a rabbit's temperature prior to administering oral medications. A rabbit's temperature should be between 100 and 102.5 F, but 103 F is safe if the rabbit is anxious. Any higher temperature than this is a fever and the rabbit should go to the vet ASAP. A fever is an emergency.

In addition to the supplies listed online, styptic powder for nail break bleeding may be useful, and a towel should be available in which to secure the rabbit (burrito-style) during treatment. A towel can be placed in the dryer for warming the rabbit if needed.

Our parent rescue has an excellent overall emergency writeup here:

<https://www.alabamahrs.org/rabbit-emergency-101>

Please be aware of the following precautions:

- Neosporin used on a rabbit must be "original" - no pain relief and/or lidocaine as it is toxic to them!
- Fluids used for contact lens care cannot be used to flush a rabbit's eyes, you must use straight saline.
- Hydrogen peroxide and alcohol cannot be used on rabbit's skin. Use diluted betadine
 - (povidone iodine) in swab or liquid with a cotton ball.
- Never flip a rabbit up-side down, cradle a rabbit, or hold a rabbit with its head lower than its heart. This position elicits a tranced-state called "tonic immobility" which can be dangerous to the rabbit.



FAQs

Our Facebook page has many helpful write-ups under the tag “Tail Flip Tuesday” that answer additional questions to these.

Q: How do I litter train a bunny?

A: There are ways to encourage litter box usage. We recommend watching where the bunny uses the bathroom, then placing the litterbox there. Stray poops can be placed in the litterbox to encourage using it.

Q: How often should I change the litterbox?

A: At least twice a week for a single bunny with a single box. Every 2 days is very common.

Q: How long do bunnies live?

A: 10+ years, though this is breed dependent. Larger rabbits (such as continental giants) tend to have a shorter lifespan than medium and small rabbits.

Q: Do they bite?

A: It's possible, but only in cases where the rabbit feels threatened and is terrified. Spaying/neutering helps with “aggressive” behavior, but rabbits are really never truly aggressive. Fighting is a last resort for a prey animal.

Q: How do I trim the nails? How often?

A: It's recommended to use a scissor-type nail clipper (not a guillotine type), and cut about every 8-10 weeks. It is easiest with two people (one to hold, one to clip). Some people have best luck bundling a bunny in a towel or blanket.

Q: Do I need to give them wood to chew?

A: Yes, they should always have a safe wood to chew; their teeth grow continuously. Chewing wood helps prevent dental issues. Apple wood is our first choice. We have a writeup on safe woods here: <https://huntsvillehouserabbits.com/bunny-basics-topics/f/safe-wood-to-chew>

Q: How often do they need to go to the vet?

A: Usually bunnies should get an annual or semi-annual checkup. Every 6 months or every year is up to you. Checking the teeth, heart, lungs, ears, eyes, and heels especially are essential. If behavior ever changes or if your bunny stops eating, see the vet immediately.

Q: I'm concerned about GI Stasis. How do I detect that?

A: The main signs are a bunny refusing a treat, not eating, and not pooping. We have a writeup about this as well! <https://huntsvillehouserabbits.com/bunny-basics-topics/f/signs-of-gi-stasis>

Q: Do I need to brush my bunny?

A: Yes, particularly during shedding season. The type of bunny you have (type of fur) will change the frequency and technique you use. Overall, the Small Pet Select purple comb is one of the best. Angora fur requires special techniques, and de-matting is essential.



Q: What do I do if I need to travel?

A: If you have a trusted family member or friend who understands general bunny care and knows the importance of watching out for GI Stasis (and what to do), this is a good option as it may allow the bunny too stay in their home environment to minimize stress. Otherwise, bunny boarding services are available. We have references for services, our vet boards, and we also board as long as we have space to do so (dependent on space availability).

Q: Does my bunny need a friend? How would I choose one?

A: We love it when bunnies get a friend as rabbits are social animals. We highly recommend letting your bunny choose the friend. “Speed dating” is an excellent option, please ask us about our adoptable rabbits, your rabbit can help choose his/her next best friend!

Q: How do I bond bunnies?

A: We recommend taking it very slow. There are many excellent write-ups about this, but please reach out if you need help or support.

We have a wonderful bunny community in Huntsville and the surrounding North AL Areas. We’ve seen it all and have been through it all! We are happy to help you and answer any questions you have!

Find us:

Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/huntsvillehouserabbits

Facebook Community Group: www.facebook.com/groups/huntsvillehouserabbits

Instagram: @huntsvillehouserabbits

We’re also on TikTok and Youtube under **HuntsvilleHouseRabbits!**

Events:

*We are at Three Tails ReSale thrift store every month on the 3rd Saturday, 1pm – 3pm with opportunities to:

- meet our adoptable rabbits
- ask questions about rabbit fostering, adoption, and ownership
- get a bunny nail trim (appointments recommended)
- speed date your bunny with an adoptable bunny (prior arrangements are required)

We accept donations (material or monetary, tax-deductible through our 501C3).

We really need foster families! Please ask us how you can get involved by either fostering or supporting our efforts in another way!