

# Rabbit Nest Boxes 101

## NEST BOX SIZE CHART

- **Extra Small Nest Box:** POLISH
- **Dwarf Nest Box:** NETHERLAND DWARF, DWARF HOTOT, BRITANNIA PETITE
- **Small Nest Box:** HOLLAND LOP, DUTCH, HIMALAYAN, LION HEAD, MINI REX, MINI SATIN, JERSEY WOOLY, AMERICAN FUZZY LOP, TAN
- **Standard Nest Box:** NEW ZEALAND, AMERICAN, BEVERN, BELGIAN HARE, CALIFORNIAN, CHAMPAGNE D ARGENT, ENGLISH SPOT, HAVANA, HARLEQUIN, LILAC, RHINELANDER, SATIN, SILVER, SILVER MARTEN, ENGLISH ANGORA, FRENCH ANGORA, REX, THRIANTA, MINI LOP
- **Giant Nest Box:** CHECKERED GIANT, FRENCH LOP, FLEMISH GIANT, ENGLISH LOP, GIANT CHINCHILLA, GIANT ANGORA

## THE NEST BOX REPLICATES THE NATURAL BURROW

The domestic rabbit's wild European ancestors made shallow burrows in the ground in which to give birth. These were often barely larger than the rabbit's body, allowing just enough room for her to turn around. The expectant mother would find grasses and line the nest, then make it soft and insulated with a final layer of her own fur pulled from her body. In a similar way, you will prepare a nest for your expecting rabbit.

## SELECTING THE PROPER SIZE RABBIT NEST BOX

The KW Cages nest box is designed with the proper geometry and size to replicate the natural burrow. All cages manufactured by KW Cages are designed with a door opening that will accommodate the appropriate size nest for the size of rabbit the cage was designed for. If the nest won't fit, the cage is too small.

Select the proper size nest box using the chart at the left. When in doubt, go smaller. Keep in mind that the nest box needn't be much larger than what the rabbit can comfortably turn around in. When nursing her kits, which usually takes place for only 5 to 10 minutes in a 24-hour period, the doe will jump into the nest box and place one foot in each corner of the nest box, straddling over the kits. This allows the kits to nurse, typically while laying on their backs.

## **PREPARING THE NEST**

To prepare the nest, be sure it is disinfected with a mild bleach solution or other germicide. Allow the box to dry thoroughly in the sunlight. Start pre-building the nest by placing a pad of clean corrugated cardboard on the bottom which has been cut to match the size of the floor. Then place a half inch to one inch layer of kiln-dried white pine shavings or [Carefresh™](#) in the bottom of the box. Next, fill the nest with loose hay. Bermuda grass is the preferred hay if you can get it. Otherwise, any type of soft grass hay, such as [Orchard Grass](#), will work. Alfalfa hay and common straw tend to be more pokey and increase the possibility of eye injury to young kits. Do not use towels or other fabric which can unravel and strangle the kits. Once filled sufficiently with hay, use your fist to indent the start of a burrow in the back center of the box. Ahh—nice and cozy! Now the nest box is ready.

## **WHEN TO PLACE THE NEST**

Place the nest in the doe's cage 1 to 2 days before she is scheduled to kindle, usually at the 28th day of gestation. Care should be taken to not place the nest box in too early, as the doe's instinct will not have kicked in yet and she will not only eat the hay from the nest box, but also use it as a bathroom. The doe will know to start nest building and will instinctively carry around mouthfuls of hay, and scratch in the bottom of her nest. This busy and entertaining activity is your assurance that she is nearly due. The final step is that the doe will pull her own fur from her chest, abdomen, and/or the insides of her back legs. The doe will use this fur to make a down-like lining to insulate the inside of her nest. She will actually use her breath to fluff the fur into a cotton-like lining. In cases of cold climates or when a new doe fails to pull any fur, a product such as [Littersaver™](#) can be used to amend the nest. In extreme outdoor temperatures, [Nest Box Warmers](#) can make a big difference.

## **THE NURSING DOE**

Many who are new to rabbit husbandry experience nail-biting anxiety after the babies are born when they do not see the mother caring for them. The best thing that can happen is to simply leave the newborn rabbits alone for 24 hours. The mother's nursing of her kits is a nocturnal activity taking usually not more than five or ten minutes in the wee hours of the morning. Most folks are accustomed to seeing a cat sit and immediately nurse her kittens for hours after giving birth. Not so for rabbits. They are unique with their turbo charged milk supply that provides the nutritional needs of the kits for a 24-hour period. In fact, the mother instinctively knows that she needs to stay away from the kits. This is a survival adaptation dating back to before domestication. It decreases the chances of the mother drawing the attention of a predator to the nest site.

### **NEST BOX CLEANING**

The nest box collects a lot of moisture within the first few days after the kits are born. It can become a breeding ground for bacteria. It is important to change out all of the nesting material in the box with clean, dry material within the first 3-7 days. Larger breeds and older kits will require more frequent changes of bedding. The doe's pulled fur can be retained and used to line the newly changed nest.

### **REMOVING THE NEST**

Nest boxes should be taken out of the cage as soon as the kits are old enough to regularly jump out on their own and start eating a transition food such as rolled oats or grass hay. This is usually at 2-3 weeks, with the higher range of time being for the slower growing, large breeds, or; those in cold weather. Water acidifiers with a probiotic such as AcidPak are usually added during this period for up to 10 weeks. These prevent the incidence of enterotoxemia, which is an overloading of the young rabbit's digestive system. A nest allowed to set in the cage too long will become an unsanitary bathroom, and a possible source of disease for young rabbits.

### **DON'T FORGET EXTRA WATER**

A word to wise for beginning rabbit keepers: a doe giving birth can drink astonishing amounts of water. It is a wise practice to have a large stoneware crock along with a back-up bottle or bottles, or an automatic watering system, to satisfy her thirst needs during this period.

*Rabbit Nest Boxes 101. Rabbit Cages - Rabbit Cage - KW  
Cages - Everything for Rabbits. (n.d.). [https://  
www.kwcages.com/rabbit-nest-boxes-101](https://www.kwcages.com/rabbit-nest-boxes-101)*