

## **Rabbit Care**

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Dwarf breeds (4 pounds and under) can live comfortably in a cage 18" x 24" x 14" high. Breeding does will do better with a cage that is 24" x 24" and of course you can always get a larger cage, the rabbit won't mind! The easiest kinds of cages to keep clean are the type with a wire bottom that allows droppings to fall through to a tray below. If you get a wooled breed, this setup is highly preferred as well so pine shavings and such don't get caught in the rabbit's wool. A cage should not be placed in direct sunlight or in drafts, nor near a TV or other electronic equipment as their hearing is very sensitive.

Fresh water and hay (grass hays and timothy hays are the best) should be available at all times. You can get hay racks to minimize the mess and keep it off the floor of the cage. A waterbottle (32 oz is a good size) is the easiest as the water will not get dirty or splashed around, but water dishes are acceptable as well. Does nursing and rabbits in the summertime consume more water. Does with kits and kits should be able to free-feed, meaning eat as much as they want, as long as they aren't getting fat. As they get older, 1/3 to 1/2 cup of food per day is a good amount for dwarfs. Some need more than others, so if your rabbit seems to get fat, cut back a bit. If they are losing weight or feeling scrawny, they may need more. Feed comes in pelleted form and one thing I often see at the pet stores is that their feed has really low protein content. Try and find one with 14-15% protein and stay away from the 10-12% protein range. The breeder you buy from should give you some food to help change over to whatever you will be feeding. Mix it in with the new feed in 1/4 increments...day 1: all old feed. Day 2: 1/4 new feed, 3/4 old. Day 3: half and half. Day 4: 1/4 old feed and 3/4 new feed. Day 5 and on: all new feed. Use this formula whenever you change feed types.

Treats such as carrots and from a pet store should be feed sparingly. Fresh food should never be feed to any rabbit under the age of five months as their digestive system may not be fully developed to handle it well. Never feed iceberg lettuce – it can kill your rabbit. Romaine is okay in tiny amounts.

The cage should never have a bad odor. If it does, it needs to be cleaned. The cage should never get to that point though, as rabbits are normally quite clean animals. Cleaning a cage once a week with a mid-week sprucing should be plenty. Both bucks and does make equally good pets contrary to various beliefs held, it just depends on the rabbit's particular personality.

Adult bucks who aren't neutered might start to spray urine and try and mount random things including owner's hands to breed, and does who aren't spayed can become territorial when in their cage. But, it just depends on the individual rabbit. Typically if they are not around the opposite sex they don't really develop these habits. I do not

recommend spaying or neutering pet rabbits, their size and anatomy/physiology does not handle general anesthesia well, and as they are typically kept indoors, there is no benefit but there is much risk to the procedure.

Rabbits are easy to care for, they do not require any shots like a dog or cat nor do they need regular veterinarian visits. Should one ever be needed, it is best to find a vet who deals with “exotics” as usually they are the ones who know rabbits. Rabbits can be easily left for a 3-day weekend without worrying about a “pet-sitter” as long as the cage is clean and they have ample food and water. Overall, rabbits are a very low-maintenance pet that do not need a lot of space making them an ideal first pet for a child and an excellent choice for people in small homes or apartments. A lot of apartments that aren’t even pet-friendly will be okay with a rabbit, as they are a caged animal that are clean and don’t ruin a carpet or such as a dog or cat may.

### **Shopping List for a Pet Rabbit**

- Cage, at least about three square feet in size. Pull-out trays are easiest to clean.
- Bedding, for under the cage. Pine or aspen shavings are fine. Carefresh and Yesterday’s News are other alternative options if you wish.
- Water Bottle, 32 oz is a good size
- Feed Dish, make sure it is a heavy crock that is not easily tipped, or clips to the side of the cage to hold it in place
- Hay Rack, if desired
- If you are going to littertrain, a little rabbit-sized litterbox
- Toys are an option if you wish, although the best toys are empty plain cardboard boxes, a toiletpaper tube stuffed with hay, or a little plastic wheelbarrow looking cat toy with a bell inside (usually in the \$1 or \$1.50 buckets in cat department).