

to the side of the doe when mating is completed. If the doe resists the buck, it may be necessary to hold her in position for the buck. It is essential that the doe's tail be kept out of the bucks' way during a forced breeding. The gestation period of a rabbit is 28-32 days, so be sure to write down the date the breeding took place. As mentioned above place the nest box in with the doe approximately 26 or 27 days after the breeding. At about 10 days of age the kits will begin to open their eyes and develop their fur. At about 3 weeks they will start coming out of the nest box to look around and start eating some solid food.

MAINTENANCE

Cage cleaning – Rabbits need clean homes to maintain a healthy state of being. Unfortunately they cannot clean up after themselves, and rely on us to do it. Hutches and cages should be cleaned AT LEAST once a week. If the rabbit is indoors, or in a cage that has a drop pan, it will be necessary to clean it more often to keep the ammonia odor from the urine down. Using wood shavings or peat moss under the pens or in the pans also helps.

Feed bowls – If you wouldn't eat out a dirty bowl, don't expect your rabbit either. Check the bowls daily for cleanliness, and always have extras on hand in case one gets broken. Feed should not be left in the feed bowls more than a day. It can become damp or moist and create a real mess.

Water bowls, bottles, systems – Remember to clean the water container frequently. A little household bleach in warm water will help disinfect the container, and it is not harmful to the rabbit if you don't get it rinsed out real well. In cleaning water bottles, remember to clean the nipple as well as the inside of the bottle. This can be done with a narrow brush or Q-tip.

Repair cages – Check your hutches or cages weekly to be sure there are no broken wires or splintered boards that your rabbit could get hurt on. If the materials start to deteriorate,

get them fixed as soon as possible before the rabbit suffers because of it.

OVERALL HEALTH

Check your rabbit daily for any signs of deteriorating health. Doing this on a regular basis will help expedite any treatments it may need.

Check to make sure the animal is drinking water, eating its feed, not showing signs of diarrhea, etc. Also check to be sure the rabbit's teeth are straight (with the top teeth overlapping the lower teeth), that it does not have mites or fleas, that the eyes are bright and clear, and that its ears do not have any crusty scabs that might be signs or ear mites.

Know what your rabbit should weigh and check it periodically.

Check the chin and stomach areas for unusual lumps that may be tumors or abscesses.

It is a good idea to keep some medications around to treat simple ailments like ear mites. Cooking or motor oil dropped into the ear to smother the mites can be a cure. Other medications should be used with caution under the direction of a veterinarian or knowledgeable breeder.

Feeding – Learn the nutritional values of your rabbit and feed it accordingly. Different breeds require different amounts of feed, usually depending on the size of the animal.

A fat rabbit is not healthy. Do not over-feed your rabbits, as this is as bad for them as being underfed.

Before you use supplements with the feed, understand the reason for using them. If you do not see the expected results, determine whether they are really necessary.

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General Care Of Rabbits

EQUIPMENT



MAINTENANCE



OVERALL HEALTH



Today, many people are investigating and becoming involved in the rabbit industry. There are several areas that an individual may wish to be informed of before undertaking this adventure, and this pamphlet is designed in order to afford you some tips on raising rabbits that may be beneficial.

PROPER EQUIPMENT

Housing – Decide which housing best suits your needs based on the number and size of animals you expect to raise, where you intend to place your housing, and your environment.

There are many styles of housing, ranging from all wire pens to wooden hutches. Wire pens work very well in enclosed area such as barns, basements, garages, etc. The wooden hutch is suitable and appropriate for outside housing.

As rabbits are natural gnawers, they will chew on wood or wire, so in purchasing or making your cages, be sure the material will hold up to the task.

Cage Size – The size of your cage or hutch should depend on the size of your rabbit. The giant breeds (over 12 pounds) require larger areas, and their cages should be at least 30" x 36". Most breeders prefer to house these giant breeds in cages at least 36" x 48". Medium breeds (7-12 pounds) should be allowed cages 24" x 30" to 30" x 36". The smaller breeds can be accommodated in cages 18" x 24". A general rule of thumb is $\frac{3}{4}$ of a square foot per pound of mature weight.

Cage Placement – Preferably, rabbits should be placed outdoors where they do extremely well and can tolerate sub-zero temperatures. They do need to be kept out of drafts and kept dry. Rabbits always need proper ventilation, whether outside or inside. During the summer months, the housing should be kept in the shade as rabbits do not tolerate heat very well. In the winter you can put plastic around the outside of the hutch and leave the bottom open for ventilation. The plastic will stop the wetness from getting in and protect the animal from the wind.

Cages or hutches can also be placed in garages, basements, barns, sheds, etc. Remember, however, there must always be good ventilation and it should be easy for you to access the cage for taking care of the rabbit.

Water – Rabbits require clean, fresh water daily. There are several ways to water your rabbit – bowls, crocks, bottles, watering system, etc. For the hobbyist, bowls or crocks should be sufficient. They should be large enough to hold at least 16 ounces of water, and heavy enough that your rabbit cannot tip them over. Water bottles are more sanitary, however, they are more trouble in the winter, as sometimes they freeze or crack. Another option for larger rabbitries is the automatic watering system. This is not suggested for the novice, as it is hard to determine whether your rabbit is drinking enough water with this method. As water is essential in keeping rabbits healthy, you must be certain that they are drinking water daily. If your rabbit quits drinking, it may be a sign your animal is not feeling well.

Be sure to clean the drinking equipment regularly in order to insure your rabbits' good health. Simply wash the equipment with warm water and bleach, then allow it to dry in the sun (if possible).

Food Containers – There are many different materials and shapes that can be used. Metal containers are available that can be attached to the cage. These are helpful as the rabbit sometimes find it difficult to scratch the feed out, thus not wasting as much. Plastic, ceramic, or metal bowls can also be used, however the animals can easily scratch (or spill) the feed out of them. They are, however, easier to keep clean as they can be readily removed with no effort. The size of the bowl depends upon how much feed you are going to have to put in it. Many of the modern feed crocks have a lip on them that is helpful in saving feed.

Food storage – Your rabbits' feed should be kept in a dry, pest free container. Plastic garbage cans work very well for this, as they have a top that can be tightly sealed. The food container should always be cleaned regularly to keep bacteria from

building up. Feed should not be stored for more than a month without being used. Do not buy a quantity of feed that you will have setting around for more than a month, as the ingredients will start to lose their nutritional value. Be sure the feed is not moldy before you give it to your rabbit.

Supplements – Although supplements should not be necessary, many rabbit owners that show their rabbits like to condition them using various techniques. Some of the more common feed supplements are oats, barley, wheat germ oil, vitamin and mineral supplements for the drinking water, and sunflower seeds. Other supplements such as sulfaquinoxaline, terramycin, boric acid, preparation H (for sore hocks), etc. are used to combat disease. Consult your local breeder, ARBA District Director, or local veterinarian for advice.

Scale – It is advisable to have a good scale on hand in the rabbitry. Know the proper weights for your breed and try to maintain them.

Nail Clippers – Judges and Registrars cannot image why rabbit owners let their rabbits' toenails grow so long that they start to curl up into the pads of the rabbits' feet. Most scratches come from toenails that are too long and need to be clipped. Long toenails can also cause injuries to the rabbit. Do not clip the toenail back into the quick, but try to keep them trimmed down.

Nest Boxes – If you plan on breeding your animals, you will need a nest box for the doe. They can be made of wood, metal, or wire with cardboard inserts. The latter is conceived as more sanitary, as the lining can be disposed of after each use. Do not make the nest box too large. It only needs to be big enough for the doe to get in and out of comfortably. The nest box should be put in with the doe approximately 26 or 27 days after breeding. Put an ample supply of straw in the box, and the doe will build her own nest. Wood shavings can also be used in the bottom of the nest box as an absorbent.

Breeding – The doe should always be taken to the buck's cage for breeding, unless you prefer the use of the table. The doe should be presented to the buck, then they will perform the act of mating. The buck may squeal slightly and fall off

