

# Caring for Foster Rabbits

## Setting Up for Your Foster Rabbit:

- Rabbits should be kept in large enclosures, 8 square feet or larger as a minimum. A traditional rabbit hutch is usually far too small. An exercise pen combined with a hutch or cage is far better- rabbits should also be allowed to free roam while supervised to allow for additional exercise.
- Avoid cages with wire floors, which can harm a rabbit's feet!
- Ensure that they have a hiding area for when they need quiet or rest. An enclosed, covered space should be provided where they won't be disturbed if scared or sleeping- tunnels, cardboard boxes, or specific bunny boxes are all great options.
- Rabbits should have access to toys and safe items to chew on. Simple cardboard boxes, paper bags, paper towel tubes, old phone books, plastic slinkies, hard plastic baby keys and other plastic baby toys are all great for their entertainment. It's important to have safe items to chew. You can find safe wooden chew toys at your local pet supply store – apple and willow woods are great choices, and can reach out to your foster coordinator if you need additional supplies!
- Despite offering your foster rabbit things to chew, she will still be prone to chewing other items in your home. During out of cage time, remove anything your rabbit might chew, especially dangerous electric wires and houseplants. Make sure to supervise your foster rabbit in a new space and beware of rugs and carpeting getting chewed and ingested.

## Rabbit Tidbits!

- Rabbits love outdoor time, but make sure that if you take your foster rabbit outside, it is only in an enclosed area (like an covered x-pen) while supervised, as rabbits have many natural predators like hawks!
- Rabbits with the proper care can live from 8-12 years!

## Grooming :

Some rabbit species like Angoras or Lionheads need frequent grooming to avoid mats, however most rabbits will only need a light brushing!

All house rabbits however will need their nails trimmed every 4-6 weeks to avoid curling- reach out to your foster coordinator for help with this!

## Getting to know your rabbit:

Rabbits are naturally a prey species, so they can be nervous in a new home or situation, and with sudden movement and noise. Give them time to settle in and hiding places to feel safe. Get down on your bunny's level and use a soft voice. Move slowly and predictably so you don't frighten them. Your rabbit may hide when you first approach, but by being patient you will give them the opportunity to approach when they are ready. Most rabbits prefer to be petted while sitting next to you, rather than on your lap. Typically, they feel more secure on the floor. They seem to prefer petting on the top of the head, around their eyes, on the top of their nose, near the base of their ears, and down their back. When first bringing home a new foster rabbit, let them come out of the carrier on their own into their new enclosure, and allow them some time to explore before attempting to pick up or engage with them.



## Diet

- Hay should make up for 8% of a rabbits diet. Timothy, oat, orchard, grass or meadow hay is all fine, but avoid Alfalfa hays as this is too high in calcium.
- Make sure your foster rabbit always has access to hay and water- either in a drip water bottle or bowl in their enclosure.
- Leafy greens are important for a rabbits diet- good options include: Dandelion, parsley, basil, mint, carrot leaves, broccoli, cabbage, brussels sprouts, cauliflower leaves, Romaine (avoid iceberg type lettuces), kale, celery leaves, blackberry leaves, clover, and chamomile.
- Fruit and Vegetables like apples, tomatoes, oranges, banana, grapes and carrots are very high in sugar and should only be given as small, occasional treats.
- Rabbit pelleted food is actually only a small portion of their diet!



## Litter Box Training :

- Rabbits can be housebroken. Most spayed or neutered rabbits will train themselves within a few days if you simply put a box in their cage and then place it or another box in a favorite corner every time you let your rabbit out to play. They are creatures of habit and will always return to the same place to "go". Use a standard cat litter pan or a high back corner pan. Make sure that it's big enough for your bunny to fit completely inside. We recommend filling the litter box with newspaper, and a large top layer of fresh hay. The hay will attract bunny to the litter box. Just make sure there's always fresh hay on top. You will need to change the box daily. Use white vinegar and water to clean the box. Other safe products for your rabbit include recycled newspaper litters or hardwood stove pellets. Regular clay cat litters are not good for rabbits as they are too dusty, and clumping litters can be very harmful to rabbits. Additionally, even though most pet stores sell them, cedar shavings should be avoided.

## Understanding your Foster Rabbit:

- **Chinning** — Their chin contains scent glands, so they rub their chin on items to indicate that they belong to them. Same as a cat rubbing its forehead on people and objects.
- **Binky** — (Dancing and hopping madly): A sign of pure joy & happiness!
- **Playing** — Rabbits like to push or toss objects around. They may also race madly around the house, jump on and off of the couch and act like a kid that's had too much sugar.
- **Thumping** — Rabbits often are displeased when you rearrange their stuff. They are creatures of habit and when they get things just right, they like them to remain that way, and may thump in anger.
- **Tooth grinding** — Indicates contentment, like a cats purr. Loud grinding can indicate pain.
- **Tooth chattering** — Loud grinding or chattering can indicate pain.
- **Flat on the ground, legs spread out to the side or behind** —Totally relaxed and comfortable!
- **Grunts** — Usually angry, watch out or you could get bit!
- **Feet circling** — Usually indicates amorous behavior. He/She's in love.

## Introducing to other Pets:

Rabbits can get along quite well with other types of animals, especially guinea pigs and cats, and even some dogs. Generally, guinea pigs and birds may be introduced out of the cage with all of them loose under careful supervision. Monitor for any signs of bullying guinea pigs (following, stealing food, aggression). Cats can be introduced with a barrier (eg. Through an exercise pen) at first and then under direct supervision. Monitor cats for any chasing or stalking behavior and intervene immediately. If the rabbit approaches the cat confidently and does not run away this is a good start. Dogs should be introduced on leash. Foster pets should never be left alone unattended with resident pets.

## Introducing to other rabbits:

Rabbits can be good friends with other rabbits. However, introducing your foster rabbit to another rabbit needs to be a carefully supervised process as injuries can happen.

Bonding is easiest when:

- Both rabbits are spayed or neutered and have had several weeks to allow their hormone levels to drop.
- The rabbits are of opposite sexes.
- Introductions occur in a neutral territory.
- You have both rabbits' favorite treats on hand to reward positive interactions.

Plan to start with two separate enclosures at home, keeping the enclosures several inches apart at first. Hold bonding sessions 1-2 times per day, starting at about 10 minutes each and slowly increasing as long as interactions are neutral or positive. After a few days of bonding, switch their litter boxes so they can continue to get used to each other's scent. After a few more days, switch their enclosures.



When to Intervene:

- The rabbits are circling each other
- Mounting has gone on for longer than about 15 seconds
- The rabbits begin fighting
- You notice things are getting tense – it's better to intervene before a fight ensues so you can end on a positive note!

The bonding process can take anywhere from a few weeks to several months. Never leave your foster pet with a resident pet unattended or unsupervised.