Rabbits can be a great addition to any family. They are fun to watch, active, curious, outgoing, and of course, soft and fuzzy. This handout will give you a brief overview of what to expect when you bring a rabbit, or two, into your family. Even though rabbits are small creatures they require a significant amount of time and work. Keep in mind that rabbits kept indoors can live to be 10-12 years of age. That is quite a commitment for any family to make, but well worth it!

Did you know that...

- Rabbits are prey animals and prefer to be on the ground
- Most rabbits do not like to be picked-up or held
- Rabbits use a litter box (some are neat, some are not)
- Rabbits need yearly vet visits and routine nail trims
- A rabbit’s diet is very specific and their digestive system is very delicate
- Rabbits require lots of room to run and explore safely indoors and need at least two to three hours a day outside of their enclosure to run (this is critical for their digestion)
- Rabbits can get along with cats and dogs if introduced carefully
- Rabbits enjoy playing with toys and need a hiding box or two
- Picking up or holding a rabbit must be done properly or injuries can occur
- Rabbits are most active during the early morning and late afternoon/early evening
- Most of them enjoy having a buddy, but some do not
- Rabbits scare easily and can easily stress
- Carrots should only be given once in a while as a treat
- Most of their exploring is done with their teeth so your home should be “bunny proofed”
- Vet bills can be just as high for a rabbit as they are for dogs and cats
- If ill, rabbits must be taken to an experienced rabbit vet as soon as possible. Being prey animals they hide their illness as long as they can and so waiting too long for a vet exam can lead to their demise.
- Children and rabbits can be great friends, but parents should supervise any interaction

Housing requirements

Marin Humane strongly recommends an x-pen (or two) set-up for a rabbit. If that is not possible then a large cage with a flat (not wire) bottom should be purchased. Some people will convert rooms or large closets into a living space for their rabbit (a baby gate is used to keep them in). A rabbit can never have enough room to stretch out.

While it used to be the norm to keep rabbits in outdoor hutches, over the years we’ve seen more and more rabbits kept as indoor house pets, likely due to their ability to connect with people. Rabbits kept strictly outside, and especially in a hutch, have a considerably shorter life span (one to three years). Their lives are filled with boredom and fright. They tend to have stomach issues due to the fact that they cannot move their food around by running and stretching. They also develop severe foot problems from living on wire. And, many have died from heart attacks inside a hutch because a predator was trying to get at them. Once you watch a rabbit run around, seek attention, and play with toys you’ll quickly see why a hutch life for a rabbit is not adequate.

Diet

Adult rabbits should be provided the following diet on a daily basis:

- Fresh water from a bottle or bowl
- Unlimited amounts of hay, one kind or combined: Timothy, Orchard Grass, Oat, 3-Way Hay (Note: Do not purchase the compressed hay blocks at pet stores. Rabbits need long/loose hay to chew so their molars will stay short)
- Pellets – 2-3 tablespoons per rabbit (no dried fruit or nut mixes)
Caring for Your Rabbit

- Veggies – 2-3 types per day; include one Vitamin A vegetable daily. Add one vegetable (an amount about the size of their head) to the diet at a time. Eliminate if diarrhea or soft stools occur.
  - Alfalfa, radish & clover sprouts
  - Basil
  - Beet greens (tops)*
  - Bok Choy
  - Broccoli (mostly leaves/stems)*
  - Brussels sprouts
  - Carrot tops*
  - Celery
  - Cilantro
  - Clover
  - Collard greens*
  - Dandelion greens and flowers (no pesticides)*
  - Endive*
  - Escarole
  - Green peppers
  - Kale*(!)
  - Mint
  - Mustard greens*
  - Parsley*
  - Pea pods (the flat edible kind: snow pea or sugar snap pea)*
  - Peppermint leaves
  - Radicchio
  - Radish tops
  - Raspberry leaves
  - Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light colored leaf)*
  - Spinach*(!)
  - Watercress*
  - Wheat grass
  - * = Contains Vitamin A (!)=Use sparingly. High in either oxalates or goitrogens and may be toxic in accumulated quantities over a period of time.

- Fruit
  - Apple (remove stem and seeds)
  - Blueberries
  - Melon
  - Orange (without the peel)
  - Papaya
  - Peach
  - Pear
  - Pineapple
  - Plums
  - Raspberries
  - Strawberries

Sugary fruits such as bananas and grapes should be used sparingly as occasional treats. Bunnies have a sweet tooth and if left to their own devices will devour sugary foods to the exclusion of healthful ones.

Other supplies (and what they don’t need)

Litter box and litter
One litter box per rabbit. We have found the square ones to be the best as opposed to the triangular ones that fit in the corner (those tend to be too small). We recommend Critter Country litter but you can also find other options at Rabbit.org. Litter boxes should be changed at least every three days for one rabbit.

Toys, toys and more toys
There are many toys that can be purchased online that will provide hours of fun and safe chewing for your bunny. Many higher end/specialty pet stores carry a variety of rabbit safe toys. You can also find potential toys (keys, rattles, plastic cups, hard bird toys that can be hung, cat toys that can be pushed around or picked up and tossed) at thrift stores and garage sales. Your rabbit will also need wicker toys/houses to chew on. Rabbits are constantly chewing and need to have something safe to do that, too.

Bedding
Bedding needs will vary depending upon your set-up. Towels, Sea Grass mats, sheets and carpet squares are good for providing comfort and traction. If you are using an x-pen set-up you can also place an office chair mat, large piece of linoleum or a carpet remnant to protect your floor.

Comb or brush
Rabbits are unable to vomit and can get fur blockages. It’s very important to brush or comb your rabbit several times a week. Several times a year your rabbit will shed massive amounts of fur. This is normal and sometimes you’ll even see patches on their body where shorter fur is growing back.

Annual vet check-up
It is very important to find a rabbit savvy vet. Marin Humane can provide you with a list of veterinarians that work with rabbits. A yearly (or twice yearly) visit allows your vet to look at your rabbit’s back teeth to make sure they are growing properly, check the ears for mites or buildup, help you monitor their weight, and do an overall exam. Keep in mind that not all vets work with rabbits so it’s best to find someone as soon as you bring your rabbit home.
Caring for Your Rabbit

What your rabbit does NOT need
• Salt licks
• Vitamin blocks or vitamin supplements
• Harness or leash (most rabbits do not like them and it’s very dangerous to walk your rabbit outside)
• Yogurt drops, treat bars, etc. (high in sugar and little nutrition)
• Run-Around or Running Ball (very dangerous and scary for a rabbit)

Additional Information
Please visit the House Rabbit Society website at Rabbit.org or SaveABunny at SaveABunny.org for everything you need to know about rabbits, including additional diet recommendations, litter box suggestions and links to other helpful sites.