



Living with a Companion Rabbit

What's it like to have a pet rabbit?

Rabbits are very loving, social animals, which means they not only love to spend time with their humans – they require it. Without human interaction, rabbits can get bored, even to the point of becoming lonely and depressed. While toys can alleviate some of their boredom, they still need human attention and interaction. Many rabbits also enjoy having another rabbit as a friend.

Some people wonder if rabbits are more like cats or dogs. They're like rabbits! Yours might use a litterbox like a cat and get excited to see you like a dog, but really, rabbits are not quite like either of these animals. Do they "make good pets"? They make wonderful, intelligent companions for wonderful, intelligent people! Each bunny has a different personality just like each person does. A new rabbit owner should be willing to learn a new language when she brings home a bunny as a companion. A rabbit will teach you a new way of looking at the world! Although they can be ornery at times, rabbits are wonderful, fun, and loving companions.

Are you the right kind of person to live with a rabbit? Rabbits make wonderful companions for the right people.

- Are you patient?
- Do you have a sense of humor?
- Do you enjoy watching the movements and learning the language of another species?
- Does your schedule include plenty of time at home?
- Are you comfortable spending a lot of time on the floor?
- Are you not overly fussy with your furniture?

Why doesn't my rabbit like to cuddle in my arms?

It's important to remember that rabbits are prey animals. Prey animals interact with their environment very differently than predators like cats and dogs. In general, rabbits do not like to be picked up. The act of bending over them and grabbing them by their ribs to pick them up is very similar to being picked up by a hawk – scary!!

The best way to interact with your rabbit is on the floor. Sit in the room while bunny is out to play and she will soon come investigate you. She will like to be petted sitting next to you, but not necessarily while being carried in your arms! If you choose a cage or pen with a side-opening door and put it on the floor or provide a ramp to a taller cage, you can let bunny in and out for playtime without ever picking her up!

If you are going to pick up your rabbit, make sure you do it correctly. The best way is to place one hand under her rib cage and the other under her bottom, scooping her back legs so she

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can't kick. This method will protect her fragile backbone while protecting you from those strong kicking back legs and sharp nails. It is also important to wear an appropriate shirt when handling a rabbit to avoid being scratched by nails as bunny tries to get away! You can check out some safe ways to carry bunnies at <http://homepage.mac.com/mattocks/morfz/rabcare.html#handling>, or just encourage or herd bunny into a pet carrier or box and move him that way.

Keep in mind your bunny will likely be easier to interact with and handle once spayed or neutered. Spaying and neutering reduces hormone-driven behaviors like lunging, mounting, spraying, and boxing. Spaying also protects female bunnies from uterine cancer, which can be quite common in older unspayed rabbits.

How about playtime outside my bunny's cage or pen?

Just like all animals, your rabbit will need to exercise as well as play. Your bunny will need toys like cardboard tubes, phone books, and rattly rolling things to keep him busy. Your rabbit will also need to have anywhere from 30 to 40 hours of 'run time' outside his enclosure per week. Be aware that rabbits love to explore and discover – which could involve tasting items in your home. That is the nice way to say you will need to 'bunnyproof' your house to protect it from bunny and to keep bunny from getting hurt. You can get ideas on bunnyproofing from <http://homepage.mac.com/mattocks/morfz/rabcare.html#rabhome>.

Some Basic Facts

- Rabbits can be litterbox trained
- Rabbits can live to be 7-10 years old
- Rabbits are inquisitive, sociable animals
- Rabbits make wonderful indoor companions
- Rabbits can purr when contented
- Like cats and dogs, rabbits need to be spayed or neutered to improve health and behavior
- Most rabbits do not like to be held--they prefer to sit beside you
- Rabbits like to play with toys, such as cardboard boxes, wire cat balls, hard plastic baby keys, untreated willow baskets
- Rabbits need to have things of their own to chew on (or they might nibble on your stuff)
- Rabbits need to be protected from predators, poisons, temperature extremes, electrical cords, and rough handling