

RABBIT CARE GUIDE

So You Got a Rabbit

Bay Area Bird & Exotics Hospital

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Congratulations. You now share your home with a tiny, judgmental furball who will destroy your baseboards and steal your heart. They did not agree to live in a tiny box, they will find every electrical cord, and they will absolutely sit on their hide box. Here's what you need to know.



HOUSING — THEIR PALACE, YOUR PROBLEM

- Enclosure must be big enough for a litter box, hide box, food dishes, and room to flop dramatically — plus full standing height on hind legs, because surveillance is important
- Free-roam in rabbit-safe areas is ideal — but never unsupervised. They will find every electrical cord. Every one.
- Outdoor yard space: **minimum 4' x 4'** — if using an open-top pen, make it tall enough. Rabbits are motivated escape artists.
- **Solid flooring only** — wire-bottom cages cause bumblefoot. Add a soft mat or bedding.
- Safe bedding: **paper-based, aspen, or dust-free** bedding only. Cedar and pine are respiratory irritants.
- Hide boxes must have multiple exits — rabbits are prey animals and deeply committed to escape routes — and sturdy enough to sit on, because of course they will
- Spot clean daily, full clean weekly — old hay makes excellent litter box bedding and yes, they will eat in there



DIET — THE SURPRISINGLY COMPLICATED PART

Adults (6+ months):

Food	Amount	Notes
Grass hay (Timothy, orchard, oat, meadow)	Unlimited — daily	The main event. Body volume in hay every single day. Keep in a rack.
Pellets (Oxbow recommended)	1/8 cup small breeds; up to 1/2 cup large breeds (>4 kg)	Optional but fine. No colorful bits, nuts, seeds, or “fun mix” energy.
Fresh greens	1–2 cups chopped daily	Romaine, flat leaf parsley, cilantro, green leaf or red leaf lettuces, escarole, and dandelion green Go easy on chard, turnip greens, collard greens, mustard greens, and kale.
Treats (fruit, carrot)	Tiny amounts only	A slice, not the whole carrot. They'll look betrayed. Ignore them.
Water	Always available	Heavy ceramic bowl preferred. Your rabbit will have opinions.

- **No alfalfa for adults** — it's a legume hay, far too rich, and contributes to health issues. Save it for the babies.

Never feed: iceberg lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, potatoes, sugary treats, seed or nut mixes, or anything from the "rabbit treat" section of most pet stores. You've been warned.

Juveniles (under 6 months):

- Growing rabbits need juvenile pellets — follow bag instructions
- Alfalfa hay is appropriate at this stage — they're actually using those extra nutrients
- At 6 months, begin reducing alfalfa to 50% of total hay. By 9–12 months, phase it out entirely — transition slowly
- Offer small amounts of greens initially

GROOMING — THEY WON'T THANK YOU

- Brush **at least once weekly** for all rabbits — daily for long-haired breeds and during molts
- Rabbit skin is paper-thin — be gentle. If you find a mat near the hindquarters, **call your vet** before attempting removal. Do not cut it out yourself.
- Hairballs are a real danger in rabbits — unlike cats, rabbits **cannot vomit**, so a blockage becomes a life-threatening GI emergency. Regular brushing is not optional.
- Nails: trim when they sound like a tiny tap dancer on hardwood floors — or before that, ideally
- Keep hindquarters and inner thighs groomed, especially in long-haired breeds — urine-soaked mats cause serious skin damage. Gross but important.

EXERCISE & ENRICHMENT

- Minimum **2–4 hours** of supervised out-of-cage time daily — rabbits are athletes who happen to live in your house
- Binkying (spontaneous zooming and leaping) means they're happy — try not to trip
- Top enrichment items: cardboard boxes, tunnels, untreated wood chews, and rabbit-specific toys — an empty toilet paper roll can become a beloved treasure
- Rabbits are social and should not be left alone for long stretches regularly — if solitude is unavoidable, a bonded companion is twice the chaos and twice the wholesomeness
- Yes, rabbits can be clicker-trained — Barbara Heidenreich has excellent tutorials on YouTube. It's enrichment and behavioral management in one.

HEALTH — PAY ATTENTION, THIS SECTION MATTERS

- **Annual wellness exams** for adults — senior rabbits (5+) need more frequent visits. They age faster than you'd expect.
- Spay/neuter: please do this. Intact females have extremely high rates of uterine and mammary cancer. Intact males will spray urine to assert dominance. Best done at **4–6 months**.
- Vaccinate against **Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus (RHDV)** — even strictly indoor rabbits. The virus spreads via insects, birds, and shoe soles and survives months in the environment. Don't gamble on this one.
- Weigh your rabbit monthly at home — early weight loss is often how serious illness is caught before it becomes an emergency

Red Flag	What to Do
Not eaten or pooped in 12 hours	Call us immediately — GI stasis can be fatal within 24 hours
Diarrhea	Rare in adults; potentially fatal in babies — call us
Sneezing, eye or nasal discharge	Prompt veterinary evaluation — upper respiratory infections spread fast
Lethargy or behavior changes	Rabbits hide illness expertly — if something seems off, it probably is
Weight loss	Often the first sign of dental or systemic disease

Any change in appetite or droppings is serious. Rabbits can go from “fine” to “GI stasis emergency” within 24 hours. If your rabbit hasn’t eaten or pooped in 12 hours, call us now. Don’t wait.



LITTER TRAINING — EASIER THAN YOU’D THINK

- Most rabbits are already inclined toward litter box use — reinforce it by keeping hay in or near the box. Rabbits love to eat and poop simultaneously. It’s efficient.
- Paper-based litter only — no clay, no clumping, nothing scented. Old hay is also perfectly acceptable.
- Spot clean daily, full clean weekly — a clean box is a box they will actually use



SAFETY — YOUR HOME IS A HAZARD ZONE

- Electrical cords are basically rabbit candy — hide them, cover them, or accept the consequences
- Many common houseplants are toxic to rabbits — check before you assume any plant is safe
- No unsupervised time with dogs or cats, even friendly ones — prey animals and predator animals in the same space is a stress and safety risk
- Always support the hindquarters when holding — rabbits can injure themselves badly if they kick and struggle when improperly held
- **Never lift by the ears.** Ever. Not even once.

You’ve got this. Probably. When in doubt — and you will be in doubt — call us.

Questions? We’ve heard weirder ones. Call us.

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