

The first thing to consider is that rabbits have a long life span, so be prepared to care for your pet rabbit through the long term. They are also unique creatures, who form tight bonds with their families, though they have some quirks you should know about. They also require some routine vet care from a good rabbit vet, and are not low maintenance pets. If you are prepared for all the unique qualities and needs of rabbits, you will best be able to fully enjoy the wonderful companionship they can offer. Even the best quality rabbit pellet is not adequate on its own as a diet for pet rabbits. Plenty of fresh grass hay is very important in a rabbit's diet, as are fresh greens and vegetables. The right diet is critical to keeping pet rabbits healthy -- find out the scoop on feeding your rabbit a well balanced and high fiber diet. Rabbits are really quite trainable, but it may take some patience, especially when it comes to litter training and redirecting very natural behaviors like chewing and digging.

Rabbit Tips:

They LOVE to chew. They may look big, but they can squeeze into the tiniest openings.

They need to be groomed and nails clipped just like a dog or cat.

They do not need to be bathed.

Food they eat.

Treats they love.

House rabbits need room to run around and they like to hide under things. That's why I have a rabbit room. My rabbits were and are not kept in cages. They had a cage to use as their home, but I never locked them in there.

If you can't keep them in a safe environment without caging them, then it's important to know that they need daily exercise.

The most important thing is that rabbits LOVE to chew. They will chew any and everything. I always said if you want a new pair of shoes but need a good reason to buy them. Well, leave your shoes out where a rabbit can get to them (and they will) and soon you will have a good reason to buy your new pair of shoes.

See? Problem solved. The rabbit has chewed your shoes!

Rabbits are playful, active, and curious, and need a good variety of toys to keep them occupied (and out of trouble!).

Many owners are surprised to find out how playful their rabbits are. Most rabbits will appreciate a selection of fun toys, which can be as simple as a cardboard box or empty paper towel roll.

Toys will help keep your rabbit physically active and prevent boredom. A bored rabbit is much more likely to become destructive or even depressed and overweight. Deprived of toys and play things, your rabbit may turn to your furniture and other belongings as chew toys, or even dangerous things like electrical cords. Experiment with a variety of toys to find out what is entertaining to your rabbit, and continue to provide new toys (or at least rotate the ones he/she has).

While a good selection of toys will help keep your rabbit away from things you do not want him or her chewing on, the toys you provide must be safe too. If your rabbit is interested in eating one type (e.g. plastic, cardboard, etc.) of toy, switch to another type. Watch for soft rubber items or plastic parts that can be eaten and cause gastrointestinal problems or blockages. While your

rabbit will likely enjoy shredding paper and cardboard, make sure he/she is not ingesting much of it.

A huge variety of items can make good rabbit toys. You might not find them marketed as rabbit toys, and some are things you will have around the house. Be creative and pay attention to how your rabbit seems to like to play, and you may come up with ideas of your own (just pay close attention to safety). Some ideas:

- cardboard tubes from toilet paper and paper towel rolls
- paper bags
- cardboard boxes (especially a closed box with two or three rabbit sized entrance holes cut in the sides)
- cardboard concrete forms or large PVC pipes for tunnels (make sure bunny can't get stuck!)

- untreated wicker baskets or other wicker items (a wicker tunnel other items are available at the online stores listed below)
- hard plastic cat balls with a bell inside (make sure your bunny isn't chewing up and swallowing the plastic though)
- hard plastic baby toys such as rings, links, keys, rattles, etc.
- parrot toys and bells
- kitty condos (the shorter ones), tunnels, platforms
- towels
- small straw whisk broom

- straw balls (you can get the ones meant as hamster houses; for added enjoyment fill with timothy hay)
- box full of shredded paper (preferably ink free - you can sometimes get unprinted newsprint roll ends from the local newspaper printer)
- fresh branches from apple trees
- dried pine cones
- large rubber ball

Thumping: When a rabbit thumps or stomps on the ground with a hind leg, it can make a surprisingly loud noise. This is the way rabbits communicate danger to other rabbits, and sometimes it is a sign of annoyance. Interpretation: "I'm scared and nervous" or "I'm annoyed with you."

Teeth Grinding: Gentle, soft grinding of the teeth in a relaxed rabbit communicates contentment (and sounds almost like a cat purring). On the other hand, loud teeth grinding is a sign of pain or discomfort, and your rabbit will often also be tense or hunched up when this occurs. Interpretation: softly grinding teeth: "This is great"
Loudly grinding teeth: "Oooh, I'm in pain and I don't feel good" (this also means a trip to the vet is in order as soon as possible)

Chin Rubbing: You may witness your rabbit rubbing its chin on objects or even people. Rabbits have scent glands on their chins that they use to scent mark territories and objects

(the scent is not detectable by people, though, the scent is strictly for rabbit communication). Interpretation: "This is mine!" **Binky:** The binky is the unique and acrobatic jump accompanied by twisting the body or kicking the legs. Rabbits use the binky to communicate that they are feeling very happy and playful. Interpretation: "Life is Great! I'm so Happy!" **Licking :** A bunny that licks you has fully accepted you and is showing you affection. Interpretation: "I like you" **Circling Your Feet:** A rabbit that follows you around circling your feet may just be trying to get your attention, but more likely your rabbit is sexually mature and is courting you (especially if accompanied by soft honking or oinking noises). Interpretation: Usually mean "I'm in love with you" and means it is time to get bunny spayed or neutered. Sometimes simply means "Here I am, let's play." **Flat Rabbit:** When a rabbit flattens itself on its belly with its head down and ears held very flat, he or she is frightened and is trying to blend into his or her surroundings. (Note: a relaxed rabbit may also lay flat, but a relaxed rabbit has different body language: relaxed muscles and expression.) Interpretation: "I'm scared!" **Flopping :** A content rabbit that is sitting still or grooming may suddenly flop onto its side and lay still. Owners often fear something dire has happened, but it is a sign of utter relaxation. Interpretation: "oh, I'm just so relaxed." **Lunging:** A sudden movement towards you with the head up, tail up and ears back is a very clear form of rabbit communication: an unmistakable threat. Interpretation: "I don't like that, back off!" **Vocalizations:** Rabbits are capable of some vocalizations that they use for communication, which sometimes surprise owners. Here are their interpretations: **Soft Squeal or Whimper:** mild annoyance or displeasure. **Grunting, Growling, Snorting, and Hissing:** all communicate varied stages of anger, stress, or feeling threatened. May be followed with a lunge or bite. **Soft Honking or Oinking:** communicates sexual interest. If your rabbit is circling you and honking, it is time for neutering. **Screaming:** sign of extreme pain or fear. Do not ignore; reassure your rabbit and if there is no obvious reason your rabbit might be terrified, take your bunny to a vet.

Of course, rabbit body language is much more complex than what I have presented here. Rabbits communicate much information by how they position and move their bodies, and an experienced owner can learn to read their rabbit's signals quite well.

Rabbits usually take well to litter training, although some flexibility may be required by the owner. Rabbits naturally pick one or more toilet areas, and owners can take advantage of this in litter training.

The Litter

First a suitable litter is needed. Your rabbit will probably like to lay in the litter box and may even nibble on the litter, so something absorbent and safe is necessary. Rabbit urine also has a strong odor, so something that absorbs odor is ideal. Do not use clay or clumping litters, or cedar or pine wood shavings. Organic or paper-based pellets and litters are a good choice (brands include Critter Country, Eco-Straw Pellets, Gentle Touch, Cell-Sorb Plus and Yesterday's News - see [Top Alternatives to Cedar and Pine Shavings](#) for more options) Some owners simply use rabbit pellets as litter. These are economical and safe, but are not a good choice if your rabbit continually eats extra pellets from the litter box and/or is overweight.

The Box

For litter pans, cat litter boxes work pretty well, although smaller pans such as cake pans may work for smaller rabbits. If your rabbit tends to back right up to the edge and deposit outside the box, some creativity may be required. A covered cat box is a good option, or a dishpan that has higher sides

can work as well (an lower entry can be cut into one side). The larger size of corner litter boxes might work well for smaller rabbits too, as these usually have fairly high backs.

If our rabbit tends to tip the pan or kick the litter out, try a heavier litter.

Steps to Litter TrainingTo start, confinement and supervision is the key. If a rabbit is allowed to urinate and defecate wherever it likes from the beginning, it will be much harder to train. At first, keep your rabbit primarily in his (or her cage), which should be fairly small at first, with a litter pan. Place a litter box in the cage, and note where you rabbit eliminates. He (she) may start using the box, or may be pick another corner of the cage as a toilet. If this is the case, then move the litter box to the area your rabbit seems to prefer. Flexibility on litter box placement may be necessary both in and out of the cage.

Once your rabbit is using the litter pan in the cage, allow the rabbit out of the cage in a limited area. Provide a litter box within this area, and perhaps make it enticing by placing a a treat or favorite toy in the box. Watch your rabbit for signs he is about to urinate or defecate (they usually back up and lift their tail slightly), and try to herd him to the box immediately (if your rabbit is very calm about being picked up it should be okay to place him right in the box). If your rabbit uses the box, give the rabbit a treat (food, toy, petting, or praise) right away. If you notice your rabbit tends to head to one area to do its business, consider putting the box here.

Accidents will happen, and punishment has no place in training a rabbit. Your rabbit will absolutely not be able to make a connection with physical punishment

and eliminating outside the litter box. If you catch your rabbit in the act calmly and gently take him or her to the litter box immediately. But, if you don't physically catch your rabbit urinating or defecating, it is too late for your rabbit to make the connection. Just clean up and watch your rabbit a little more closely next time (clean the spot diluted vinegar, or a commercial pet stain/odor remover). The key is to get your rabbit to the box before he goes, so a trip to the litter box every 10 minutes during playtime can be helpful.

Over time, your rabbit will probably develop a preference for using the box, and amount of freedom you give your rabbit can be increased. You may need to provide more boxes as you allow your rabbit access to more space (rabbits may not go far in search of a box so have them handy). Again, if your rabbit repeatedly chooses one place in the room to eliminate, consider putting or moving a litter box there. Try to work with what your rabbit naturally wants to do, but if the location they "choose" is inconvenient, you can try putting a litter box there for a while and then gradually move it to a better spot. Sometimes, placing a bowl of food where you don't want them to go works too.

The process sounds daunting, but usually goes pretty smoothly as long as the owner works with the rabbit's natural tendencies and provides undivided attention to the rabbit during its free time in the beginning. Establishing a routine with your rabbit will also help. Sometimes a previously trained rabbit will get a little careless, and this usually means backtracking and restricting freedom until your rabbit is trained again.

Rabbits like to chew, and the most important task in rabbit proofing is to make sure there is nothing dangerous within your rabbit's reach. You will also want to protect your belongings from your rabbit.

You will have to decide how much freedom your bunny will have. This might depend on your bunny's age, training, and the level of supervision you can provide. Some bunnies are given access to most of the house, but many owners prefer to limit their rabbit to a single room for out-of-the-cage time. Even if you want to give your bunny full access to your house, you might want start off confining him or her to a single room until bunny is litter trained and you have gotten a handle on chewing and other undesirable behaviors.

Get Down To Your Bunny's LevelOne of the most helpful ways to identify what might attract your rabbit's attention is to get on your hands and knees and look at the house from that perspective. From there you might spot hazards and spaces that you normally wouldn't notice.

Electrical and Phone CordsThese are seemingly irresistible to many rabbits. Because of the risk of electrocution to your rabbit and your home's safety, it is imperative that electrical cords are out of reach. It may be possible to arrange the furniture in your room to hide most electrical cords (but don't run them under carpets due to fire risk). Any that cannot be hidden should be covered. Plastic tubing with a slit down one side is available to encase wires, or you can find different diameters of tubing at hardware and pond supply stores (which you can slit with a utility knife). You can also get hard plastic wire channels that attach neatly to the floor or baseboard. For determined rabbits you might even need to go to PVC tubing to protect wires. Have a look at many options for hiding wires at CableOrganizers.com. You can treat phone cords the same way.

HouseplantsHouseplants should be kept out of reach to prevent rabbits from eating them and/or digging in the soil. Make sure your houseplants are non toxic; even if the plant is out of reach, leaves may fall where your rabbit can eat them. Check this list of [poisonous plants from the](#)

San Diego Chapter of the House Rabbit Society, and remove any that are of concern.

ChewingRabbits will try to chew anything. As mentioned previously, cords are a favorite target, but rabbits will also chew furniture (especially wooden legs), baseboards, books, carpet edges, and anything else that appeals to them. Try to block access to any favorite chewing targets. Wooden furniture legs can be wrapped in heavy plastic or tin foil to discourage chewing. Carpets should be securely tacked down, especially in corners and at doorways. If your rabbit starts chewing, you can cover the carpet in trouble areas with plexiglass, plastic carpet protectors meant to go under office chairs, a piece of furniture, or untreated grass mats. Heavy slipcovers or blankets can be used to protect couches and chairs. Make sure books, treasured knick knacks, shoes, and other chewables are kept out of reach. Also make sure your rabbit can't get into your garbage cans or waste baskets.

Distraction and redirection to appropriate chew toys are used to teach rabbits not to chew.

DiggingRabbits also love digging, and may do significant damage to carpets or furniture from this activity. Favorite spots seem to be corners and under closed doors, although your rabbit may try to dig anywhere. Deal with digging behaviors in much the same way as chewing: block off problem areas, cover favorite spots with plexiglass, plastic mats, or untreated grass mats, and make sure carpets are securely tacked down.

Hiding SpotsRabbits like to get into tight spaces. They like to hide under furniture and beds, but sometimes they chew and climb up into the underside of these items, so you may need to tack a piece of plywood to the

underside of your boxspring mattress or use wood to block access to the underside of furniture. Appliances should be inaccessible, as rabbits can get under or behind them and become injured, stuck, or chew on the wires. Also block any other tight spaces in which your bunny could get stuck, and make sure there are no spaces through which your rabbit could escape.

Question: How Can I Train My Rabbit Not to Chew Everything in Sight?Chewing is a very natural and needed behavior for rabbits -- the key is to teach them what is appropriate for chewing and what is off-limits.**Answer:**

1. Provide AlternativesSince your rabbit needs to chew, first you need to provide a good variety of alternatives on which your rabbit can safely chew. Branches from apple or willow trees, safe rabbit toys, untreated willow baskets and toys, untreated grass mats, and cardboard all make good alternatives. Providing multiple items gives your rabbit more choice and if you have different sizes and types of chew toys around, chances are one of them will satisfy your rabbit's craving to chew. Of course, you should also provide your rabbit with a couple of safe chew toys in the cage as well. A variety items to help keep your rabbit occupied can be found in "Rabbit Toys."

2. Rabbit-Proof Your HomeGood rabbit-proofing takes away much of the temptation and opportunity to get into trouble. Don't give your rabbit free run of your home, at least not at first: pick a limited space and thoroughly rabbit-proof that space to make training easier. Things like electrical wires are very dangerous for your rabbit so you must make sure there is no way your rabbit can get to them in the first place. Furniture and other belongings should also be protected. The less your rabbit can demolish, the less frustrated you will be, and training will be smoother. See

"Rabbit-Proofing Your Home" for more strategies.

3. Supervise and RedirectYour rabbit doesn't instinctively know that he is not allowed to chew on your furniture and other belongings, so you must teach him. This means when you are starting out with a new rabbit, you must watch your rabbit carefully at playtime. Make sure you start this training as soon as you bring your rabbit home, so no bad habits get started. Whenever your rabbit tries to chew something he/she should not, say "no" firmly (no need to yell) and clap your hands, and then give your rabbit an appropriate chew toy.

4. Have PatienceYour rabbit will take time to learn, and he or she will probably test you along the way, so be patient but consistent. Never hit your rabbit. If your rabbit keeps going back to your things instead of chewing on her toys, put your bunny in a "time-out" in the cage for a few minutes. Another alternative is to use an exercise pen (collapsible, portable cage for dogs) for at least part of playtime outside of the cage, so you can relax on supervision and training a bit. As your rabbit gets older and settles down, chewing will become less of an issue, but consistency and patience right from the beginning is your biggest training advantage.

5. Spay and NeuterSpaying or neutering rabbits helps make them less prone to destructive behavior, including chewing.

Note: about Bitter Apple Spray and other Deterrents:You can try using a bitter apple spray (available at pet stores) on items your rabbit likes to chew.

Many rabbits don't mind the taste, though (and some even seem to like it), so while this may be worth a try, is often not effective. If it does work with your rabbit, the spray must be re-applied frequently.

It is difficult to create a list of poisonous plants. While some plants are outright toxic to anyone who eats or comes in contact with the plant (Jimson Weed, nightshade), others may cause a reaction in some but not in others.

The following is a listing of plants normally thought to be poisonous. The list is not complete. People should not eat plants not grown as food crops. Children should be taught never to eat non-food crop plants. And you should restrict your pets' access to questionable plants.

Poisonous plants vary between animals. Don't assume that since a bird, squirrel or pig ate a plant with no problems, others (human or rabbit) can do the same.

Unless otherwise stated, consider all parts of the plant poisonous.

Never hesitate to seek medical aid if you think a person or animal has ingested a poisonous substance.

Agave (leaves) Amaryllis (bulbs) Apple (seeds) Azalea Bird of Paradise (seeds) Bloodroot Buttercup (leaves) Black Locust (seeds) Boxwood (leaves/twigs) Buckeye

(seeds) Buckthorn (berries) Caladium
Calla (rhizome) Castor Bean (seed) Christmas
Rose Cone Flower Crown of Thorns
Daffodil Daphne Delphinium Dumbcane
(Dieffenbachia) Eggplant (plant) Elderberry (unripe
berries) Elephant Ear Flowering Tobacco
Foxglove Holly (berries) Horsechestnut
(nuts) Hyacinth Iris Ivy, Boston &
English (berries) Jack-in-the-Pulpit Jerusalem
Cherry Jimson Weed Jonquil
Lantana Larkspur Lily-of-the-Valley
Lupine Mayapple Mistletoe (berries)
Morning Glory (seeds) Mustard (root)
Narcissus Nicotiana Nightshade
Oleander Philodendron Poison Hemlock
Poison Ivy Potato (green) Privet
(berries) Ranunculus Rhododendron Rhubarb
(leaf blade) Rosary Pea (seed)
Snow-on-the-Mountain Sweet Pea (seeds) Sweet
Potato Skunk Cabbage Tansy Tomato
(leaves) Tulip Virginia Creeper (berries)
Water Hemlock Wisteria (seeds/pods) Yew
(berries)