

Housing Basics

Adapted from the House Rabbit Society's FAQ's

Is it OK to keep my rabbit in a cage with a wire floor?

Rabbits were not designed to live on wire floors--they're hard on their feet (which have no pads on them, like cats or dogs). If you must use a cage with a wire floor, you need to provide your rabbit with a resting board or rug for her to sit on, otherwise she will spend all of her time in her litter box. Either that, or she could develop sore hocks, a condition where the bottoms of the feet are made raw from being on wire.

You can find cages with slatted plastic floors, which are more comfortable, or you can use a solid floor. As long as your rabbit has a litterbox in the corner that he chooses as his bathroom, there shouldn't be much of a mess to clean up.

What size cage is best? Are there alternatives to cages?

Bigger is better! A cage should be at least 4 times the size of your bunny--more if he is confined for a large amount of the day. You can build or buy your rabbit a two-storey or three storey "condo" with the floors connected by a ramp--they love this!

One thought is to get the largest size dog crate available, and then build a simple loft into it, or place a sturdy cardboard box inside that the bunny can jump up onto.

A great alternative is to buy a dog exercise pen – these come in four foot square sizes and heights up to 48 inches. They give the rabbit plenty of room, can be made to fit around your furniture, and allow you to go in them to visit with your bunny. They are also big enough to put cardboard “castles” and other toys in. Just be sure that you get one that is high enough so your bunny won't jump out!

Can my new bunny run loose 24 hours a day?

An untrained rabbit probably should be kept in a cage or pen while you're not home to supervise and at night when you sleep. Rabbits are crepuscular, which means that generally they sleep during the day and during the night but are ready to play at dawn and at twilight. Be sure to let them out during the evening when you are home, and if possible, in the morning while you get ready for work.

Eventually, when you know your bunny's habits, you will probably be able to let her out most of the time. Just take things slowly!

What can I do to make the rabbit's cage time more enjoyable?

A cage should be seen as the rabbit's "nest" or "bedroom". A special place where he can feel safe and secure. Make the nest enjoyable and she will enjoy being there, even when the cage door is open! Keep it stocked with baby toys, a synthetic sheepskin rug, a piece of wood attached to the inside (like a baseboard), a roomy litter box, and when you put him to bed at night, a nice veggie or fruit snack.

When is it OK to let a rabbit run loose in the house?

When your rabbit is better trained, and when your house (or the part that your rabbit will have access to) has been sufficiently bunny-proofed, your rabbit can be allowed free run of the home (or part of it) even when you are not home. The more room your rabbit has to run around in, the more delightful you will find her as a companion.

Even when a rabbit has a lot of room to run around, he may still get bored. A bored rabbit is often a naughty rabbit. If you don't make every attempt to provide your rabbit with lots of entertainment, in the form of boxes, baskets, brooms, sticks, magazines, phone books, grass mats, etc., then he will make his own entertainment in your carpet, behind your couch or under your recliner.

Can I let my rabbit run loose outside?

NO!! Not without very close supervision!!! Always supervise your rabbit when she's outside. It takes just a few seconds for the neighbor's dog to jump the fence and attack or frighten your rabbit to death. Even urban neighborhoods have foxes, coyotes, raccoons and other predators, and a bunny can die of fright just from seeing a predator!

Make sure that the grass has not been sprayed with pesticides or fertilizers. Check the yard for holes in the fence and poisonous plants. Beware of wild rabbit or raccoon droppings which can carry diseases and parasites which can sicken domestic bunnies.

Under no circumstances should rabbits be left outside after dark. Again, predators are possums, raccoons, skunks, coyotes, dogs and occasionally cats. Even if you have an outside enclosure that you feel is very secure, a rabbit can still die of fright while a predator taunts the rabbit from outside.