

Rabbit Proofing: Making The World Safe For Your Bunny

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Rabbits are chewers. Rabbits enjoy small, dark spaces. Rabbits are curious. These are three good reasons why you will need to "rabbit proof" your house prior to allowing your rabbit access to your home. Rabbit proofing your home will protect your rabbit and your belongings. Get down on the floor, and imagine for a minute, that you are a rabbit. Look at all of the wonderful places you have to explore and the many chewable items available for your enjoyment. Now, think of yourself as your rabbit's guardian, and what you need to do to protect him. Rabbit proofing your home will be absolutely necessary if your rabbit will be in your house outside of his cage. Some people prefer to set up an indoor fenced exercise area for their rabbit, so the rabbit proofing does not need to be quite so intense.

Rabbits can be trained not to chew on certain objects or enter certain rooms, but training should not be the only protective measure. There can always be lapses in training. Combining the training with removing access to the problem area is the best formula for success. Also, start out with a small room area. Monitor what materials and items your rabbit is more prone to chew on or get into. Find a successful strategy and use training to prevent the unwanted behavior. Then, start allowing the rabbit access to larger areas.

Allowing your rabbit access to the house so he can have exercise is a good thing, but it is not enough. The rabbit is also a social animal and needs interaction and mental stimulation. Nothing takes the place of spending time with your rabbit.

Potential Problems and Solutions

Potential Problem: **Electrical and other cords**

Electrical cords are a very serious threat to a rabbit. Chewing through a cord could cause severe burns, or even electrocution. There are other cords that can be chewed, including phone, computer, stereo, cable TV, and appliance cords.

Solution: Simply raising the cords above floor level may NOT work. Remember that when sitting up on their hind legs, rabbits can reach a foot or more in the air. Placing cords behind furniture may NOT prevent your rabbit from reaching them. Rabbits can fit into some pretty tight spaces. Bitter sprays often do NOT work, since rabbits tend to like bitter tastes. Three possibilities that may be effective include:

- Spiral cable wrap. This is a flexible plastic sheath that can be wound around the cords. CAUTION: Some rabbits may still try to chew through this. Monitor your rabbit closely, and if he chews on this, try one of the other two alternatives.
- Cord concealers. These are hard plastic, come in various colors and sizes, and are usually applied to the area above the baseboards.

- PVC pipe or polyethylene hard tubing. A slit can be cut through the pipe or tubing, and the cords slipped inside. Tubing that is already split is also available.

Potential Problem: **Wooden furniture and baseboards**

Rabbits especially love to chew wood. Again, a bitter spray will probably NOT be effective since rabbits tend to like bitter tastes.

Solution: By not allowing him to chew wood, we are going against the rabbit's basic instinct, and necessity, to chew. Training the rabbit not to chew these items may help, but "Just saying 'no'" will NOT be enough.

- PVC pipe or hard tubing can be placed around the legs of furniture.
- Place boards that you will allow your rabbit to chew in front of the baseboards.
- Provide a variety of chew toys as alternatives to chewing furnishings.

Potential Problem: **Upholstered furniture**

Rabbits may not only chew the upholstery that you can see, they may get underneath the furniture and chew the underside. Some rabbits will climb into the hole they have made. Use caution with recliners, since rabbits may get underneath them and into the mechanism.

Solution:

- Always know where your rabbit is before you lower or raise a recliner.
- Place a wooden frame, or one made with PVC tubing under the furniture, blocking the rabbit's access. The frame can be stained, and made slightly smaller than the base of the furniture to make it blend in.

Potential Problem: **Carpet and drapes**

Some carpets appear to be almost irresistible to some rabbits. Often they will start to pull up or chew on carpets in the corner of the room.

Solution:

- Use drapes and curtains that are not full length.
- Protect the carpet in those areas most likely to be chewed by covering them with wood or carpet runners (unless the rabbit also chews on the runner).
- Be sure drapery cords do not hang down to the level where your rabbit can reach them.
- Give the rabbit distracting items to dig, such as a cardboard box filled with hay.

Potential Problem: **Books, newspapers, and magazines**

You may not care if your rabbit chews last week's newspaper, but there are many paper items you do not want your rabbit to chew.

Solution:

- Use glass-fronted book cases.
- Place books and newspapers you are still using in chewproof bins, either hard plastic or metal. There are copper and brass wood bins for fireplaces that are very serviceable and aesthetically pleasing.
- Do not place books on the lower shelves of bookcases.
- If you give your rabbit paper to chew, be sure the ink is soy-based.

Potential Problem: **Kitchen Area**

The kitchen can pose special hazards for a curious rabbit. Open cupboards and drawers, open areas on the back of appliances, and toe kicks on lower cupboards are just several of the places that may look inviting to a rabbit. Removing the rabbit from one of these areas may mean moving the heavy appliances, with the possibility of hurting the rabbit in the process, or removing the bottom of the cupboard to free the trapped rabbit underneath.

Solution:

- Close cupboard doors and drawers after use.
- Use childproof latches to keep doors and drawers closed.
- Block off any open areas in the cabinetry.
- Block off areas around appliances to prevent the rabbit from getting behind them. Keep in mind that there must be adequate air circulation around the appliances.

Potential Problem: **Plants**

Some common houseplants can be poisonous to rabbits. Even if they are not poisonous, a rabbit can make a disaster from a potted plant, chewing the leaves and digging into the soil.

Solution: Plastic plants are not a good alternative, since the plastic could cause gastrointestinal irritation or blockage.

- Plant selection: Select plants that are not poisonous/toxic for rabbits.
- Plant location: Hanging plants from the ceiling or placing them on tables several feet high will prevent the rabbit from reaching them. However, leaves may still drop to the floor, so select safe plants, even if you are going to place them out of the rabbit's reach.