



# Rabbits

Thinking of adding a rabbit (or two!) to your family? Rabbits are the third most popular furry pet after cats and dogs. But with unique care needs and behaviours, they're definitely not the same as cats or dogs! Before you bring your new companion home, it's important to know what to expect from living with rabbits.

**Rabbits are a long-term commitment.** Are you prepared to feed, clean up after and spend time with your rabbit every day for up to 15 years?

**Rabbits should be a part of your family.** Your rabbit should be kept in an area of your house where people hang out – ideally in a large, enriched enclosure or with free run of an entire room.

**Rabbits behave a lot like wild rabbits.** And two things are very important to wild rabbits: security and companionship.

**Security.** Rabbits are a prey species. In the wild, they either **freeze** on the spot or **RUN** for cover when they're frightened. As pets, they do the same. To feel secure, your rabbit needs a shelter they can retreat to, whether they are in their enclosure or out free in a room.

**Companionship.** In the wild, rabbits live in large groups. They keep watch over each other for predators, eat together and even groom each other. Consider adopting more than one rabbit so they can keep each other company when you're not home.

## **Rabbits have unique personalities!**

Some are shy and will take more time to relax and feel comfortable in your home. But once used to people, rabbits can make fun, affectionate pets.

So remember: **commitment, patience and an appreciation for rabbit behaviour** are important in becoming life-long friends with your new companion.







# Are you ready to hop to it?

It takes dedication and hard work to be a fantastic rabbit guardian! Here are just some of the care and welfare needs of rabbits. The BC SPCA website – [spca.bc.ca](http://spca.bc.ca) – has more rabbit care tips.



## 1 + 1 = 144?

When it comes to rabbits, this math is right on the nose! In just one year, a female rabbit could have as many as 144 baby bunnies! To help prevent pet overpopulation, all BC SPCA rabbits are spayed or neutered. Yours should be too! Spaying and neutering can make litter box training easier and keep your companion healthier.

## What's up, Doc?

Spending time with your rabbit will show you how they normally look and behave. When you notice something unusual – like diarrhea or loss of appetite – you'll know to take them to the veterinarian right away! Rabbits also need vaccines to protect them from disease.



## PLAYTIME!

Rabbits require plenty of exercise to stay happy and healthy – at least four hours each day outside of a cage! You can let your rabbit hop around part or even all of your house. Be sure to “rabbit-proof” your home by covering electrical cords, moving household plants out of reach, and keeping your rabbit safe from other animals. When the weather is nice, you can also take your rabbit outside for some supervised playtime inside a pen.



## Pile on the hay

Grass hay should be the staple of your rabbit's diet. Feed them a variety of grass hays such as Timothy hay, orchard grass and oat hay – as much as they want. Hay helps with digestion. Avoid alfalfa, though. It's too rich for most rabbits.

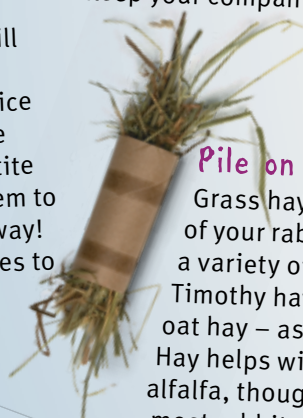


PHOTO: KENDRA GRAHAUER



## Prevent bunny boredom

Keep your rabbit entertained with puzzle feeders and toys such as paper bags and hard plastic baby toys. To wear down your rabbit's constantly growing teeth, give them things to chew on like grass mats and untreated willow or apple tree branches.





## Not just carrots

Rabbits are herbivores, meaning they only eat plants. Feed your rabbit plenty of fresh vegetables every day – especially leafy greens like kale, bok choy, parsley and romaine lettuce. Only feed fruits as a treat and in very small amounts. Your rabbit can also have good quality, high fibre rabbit pellets. Rabbit pellets are a complete, balanced diet. Just don't feed too many or you'll end up with an overweight rabbit.

## Bunny bedding

Habitat bottoms should be solid, not mesh or wire, which can hurt rabbit feet. For bedding, use a thick, clean blanket. Recycled paper bedding or wood shavings such as aspen (not pine or cedar) can also be used. Just watch your rabbit to make sure they aren't eating it.

## Keep your bunny grounded

Most rabbits don't like to be picked up. If you do, always use two hands: one under the hind end and the other around their chest. It may be best to have an adult pick your rabbit up for you. Rabbits have strong back legs and can jump quickly. Not only could you get scratched, your rabbit could be seriously injured. Instead of carrying your rabbit around, try playing with them on the floor, and letting them hop on and off your lap as they like.



## Hare salon

Rabbits are great groomers, so they don't need baths. But they do need brushing – especially long-haired rabbits – to prevent matting. Rabbits need their nails trimmed every four to six weeks by an adult. Cutting nails too short can be painful and cause them to bleed.



## The scoop on litter box training

Rabbits can be trained to use a litter box so they won't make a mess in the house. A large plastic cat litter box works well, as long as your rabbit can fit completely inside. Make sure your rabbit has one in their cage, and at least one to use during playtime. Keep the litter box topped with fresh Timothy hay to encourage your bun to use it. Clean the litter box every other day and the entire cage once a week.

## Some-bunny to LOVE

Rabbits love company. For all those hours people are at work or school, think how happy your rabbit will be having a rabbit friend around! They'll eat, play and sleep together, and groom each other.

## Condos for "cottontails"

Rabbits are best kept indoors as part of your family. Your rabbit's habitat must be big enough to fit food and water bowls, a litter box and a shelter for resting and hiding – while still allowing them to take several hops in a row. The more space, the better!





## BCSPCA Small Animal Care Series

The British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



PHOTO: HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY

A 4 foot by 4 foot dog exercise pen like this one provides 16 square feet of room and costs about \$130.

A pack of 16 cubes is about \$45 to get 16 square feet. You would need a minimum of three packs to make a secure pen.



Wire storage cubes measure just over 1 foot by 1 foot each and you can connect as many together as you like!

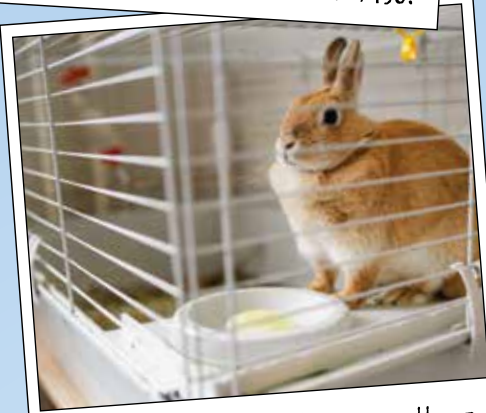
PHOTO: KENDRA GRAHAUER

## What's the deal with pet store cages?

Even though they're sold as complete rabbit "starter kits," most pet store cages are not a deal at all! For what you pay for them, they're way too small to properly house a rabbit. Once outfitted with a litter box, food and water bowls and a shelter, you'll find there's barely any room for your companion!

You can easily make a large habitat from inexpensive materials. Two designs that cost about the same as an "extra large" pet store cage can be made from either a dog exercise pen or wire storage cubes. Either design provides three times the bunny space!

Larger cages give you a lot more room to "decorate" by adding toys and places to perch and hide. Rabbits are more active and playful when they're given extra space. Not only do larger cages keep your rabbit happier and healthier, they also make your job a lot easier because they don't get dirty as quickly!



This pet store cage is too small — around 2 feet by 3 feet (6 square feet) — and costs about \$175.

### The rabbit guardian pledge

As their guardian, you are responsible for your rabbits' health and well-being. You should make sure:

1. **They never go hungry or thirsty;**
2. **They are taken to the vet when they are sick or injured;**
3. **They are not afraid all the time;**
4. **They are comfortable in their surroundings;**
5. **They are free to behave like rabbits!**

For more information on providing these "Five Freedoms," check out [spca.bc.ca](http://spca.bc.ca).

### An a-bun-dance of rabbit resources!

This guide provides basic care information. Please visit [spca.bc.ca](http://spca.bc.ca) for more rabbit care tips. You can also follow your nose to these other great rabbit resources:

**The House Rabbit Society**  
[rabbit.org](http://rabbit.org)

**House Rabbit Handbook: How to Live with an Urban Rabbit**  
By Marinell Harriman

Published by Drollery Press

**Understanding Your Rabbit's Habits**  
By Tamsin Stone  
Published by T-Squared



Make the **BCSPCA** your first adoption option! Visit [spca.bc.ca](http://spca.bc.ca) to view all adoptable rabbits.