

Before Adopting a Rabbit

By Erica Berg

Rabbits can make wonderful pets! They truly enjoy one-on-one time with their people and they have individual personalities that will delight and amuse you. However, there are some things to consider before you decide to add a rabbit to your household. As with any new pet, you'll want to do some research first about care and behavior. While their care is not too complex, rabbits do have some special requirements. So, here are some specifics:



- Rabbits have a life expectancy of eight to 12 years. If you plan to adopt a young rabbit, can you make that time commitment? If not, you may want to consider adopting an older rabbit – like many senior animals, older rabbits can still be active, but they are more settled. Even when they're getting on in age, bunnies can enjoy the love of a family and can be trained to use the litter box.
- Rabbits require daily care and attention. They aren't happy languishing in a cage day after day. They need time outside the cage, with room to exercise. To be comfortable with their people, they need frequent, gentle interaction.
- Rabbits need to be housed in a safe indoor environment. They love to chew, so electrical and telephone cords need to be out of reach or covered with protective tubing.
- Rabbits are very sensitive to heat. They do much better when living indoors in a climate-controlled home. Above 80 degrees can cause heatstroke and, despite all that fur, they run for a warm place when temperatures fall below 40. They are also safe from wild predators inside.
- While bunnies enjoy time outside, they should be supervised and contained in a safe, protected area. Some rabbits will learn to be comfortable with a harness and leash while taking you for a walk!
- Rabbits prefer quiet households rather than highly active ones. They are sensitive to noise, so a very busy home with constant commotion might not be the best place for a rabbit.
- Rabbits can make good pets for children, but kids must be taught how to care for and handle them. Since a rabbit can be seriously injured by mishandling, an adult should always supervise.

- While rabbits can get along with other animals, introductions need to be made gradually and carefully, if at all. Rabbits are more fragile than cats and dogs, and they are prey animals. A lot of stress can be fatal to them, so introducing them to rowdy animals is not a good idea.
- As with any family pet, your bunny will need to see a veterinarian for regular checkups. Because a rabbit's system and needs are much different than a cat's or a dog's, you'll need a vet who is familiar with rabbit care. Some potential health problems are bacterial infections, abdominal stasis, hairballs, malocclusion (overgrown teeth), heatstroke, and parasites such as ear mites and fleas. To find a vet who's experienced in treating rabbits, go to the House Rabbit Society's website at www.rabbit.org/vets.

Don't get a rabbit on an impulse. All too often, they are purchased as Easter presents for the children, and the family isn't prepared to care properly for a rabbit. Then the child's interest wanes, and the rabbit is left without a home. If you want an Easter bunny for your children, please buy them a toy one instead.

Adopt, Don't Buy

If you are prepared to make a lasting commitment to a rabbit, consider adopting instead of buying. There are many wonderful bunnies available for adoption from rescue groups throughout the country. Both the House Rabbit Society (www.rabbit.org) and Petfinder (www.petfinder.com) list adoptable rabbits on their websites.

You can also check out the rabbits that we have here at Best Friends Animal Society. We have many special bunnies looking for loving, attentive homes. Go to Adorable Adoptables on the Best Friends website: adoptions.bestfriends.org.

For More Information

Investing some time in learning about rabbit care and behavior is the best thing you can do before introducing a rabbit into your household. Besides reading the other resources in this section, you might want to visit the House Rabbit Society's website. The society also publishes the *House Rabbit Journal*, a wonderful resource for information on rabbits.

Having a rabbit in your life and your home can be a terrific experience! Do your homework, and you will have one of the most enjoyable animal companions you've ever had.

Erica Berg is a bunny caretaker at Best Friends, where she helps tend to the daily needs of a wide variety of rabbits. She has enjoyed learning about bunnies, and wants to share that knowledge with others.