

Your Rabbit's Environment

When you're not home to supervise, your rabbits should be kept in a safe, confined, rabbit-proof area. When you are home, they must be let out for several hours each day, both to exercise and to have social interaction with you and/or your other pets. Also, the more they are let out, the faster they will learn proper behavior through discipline. Younger rabbits tend to get into more mischief and must be watched and disciplined more closely. As time goes on and bunnies know what is expected of them, more freedom may be given.



Eventually, when you feel you can trust your rabbit, give him free run of the house when you're home. But first, you must inspect every room extremely carefully for any exposed wires and other dangerous objects (like plants) that could be harmful to him. You may have to deny him access to one or more rooms if bunny-proofing is difficult or impossible (such as a computer room, where there are numerous exposed wires). But the more space your rabbit has to roam, the more delightful you will find him or her as a pet and companion.

Letting Your Rabbit Outside

It is a joy to watch rabbits play outside, but certain precautions must be taken:

- Do not let your rabbit play on grass that has been sprayed with fertilizers or pesticides, or frequented by feral cats or wild animals (which can spread disease through their feces).
- Always supervise your rabbit while she is outside. It's best to have her on a harness or in an enclosed area. It only takes a few seconds for a dog to jump a fence and attack or frighten the rabbit (literally) to death. Other dangers are snake bites or a hawk swooping down to snatch the rabbit. Rabbits are avid diggers, so the area should also be secured so they can't dig down or under fencing.
- Under no circumstances should a rabbit be left outside after dark, since predators such as possums, raccoons, and coyotes can be present even in very urban areas. And, of course, dogs (and the occasional cat) will attack a small rabbit. Even if you have an enclosure that is very secure, a rabbit can die of fright while a predator attempts to break in.

Rabbit-Proofing Your House

Rooms that are generally easy to rabbit-proof are the bathroom, laundry room, kitchen, and bedroom. Here are things to watch out for in all areas of your house:

Wires. Rabbits love to chew wires – electrical wires, telephone wires, TV antenna wires, etc. To protect your bunny, cover all exposed wires with plastic tubing, available at most hardware or electronic stores. This tubing goes by several different names,

including polygon tubing, plumber's tubing and vacuum tubing, and comes in various sizes, thicknesses, and types of plastic (some are hard while others are soft and easily bendable). Some wires can be taped up on the wall, away from your bunny's reach, making the tubing unnecessary. Check for hidden wires in places that the rabbit may be able to get to that you can't see – such as under a bed or behind furniture.

Corners. Some rabbits will chew on the corners of walls or window frames. Before allowing your bunny the run of the house, you'll need to be patient and observe your rabbit for a while to see whether he has this particular habit. If your bunny finds a favorite spot to chew, you can purchase hard plastic or wood corner protectors from hardware stores to affix over the area.

Furniture. If your rabbit chews on items like chair legs, kitchen cabinets, and baseboards, a product called Bitter Apple (available at pet supply stores) can be applied to the area being chewed. This product has a terrible flavor and should deter any further chewing. Unfortunately, for some reason, a few rabbits seem to like the taste. You can also try to protect chair legs with wrapped cardboard.

Another deterrent is to keep a lot of toys – blocks, baskets, boxes, and other toys – around the house to give the rabbit something to chew on besides your furniture. Just make sure that the material the toy is made of is natural and has not been painted, stained, varnished, or treated with any chemicals (no plywood, press board, particle board, or pressure-treated wood).

Plants. Many house plants are toxic to rabbits. If you have an active bunny, it's best to hang your plants from the ceiling, but be sure to watch for falling leaves. For more information, visit the House Rabbit Society's website (www.rabbit.org) and search for "toxic plants."

This resource was compiled by Liz DiNorma of the House Rabbit Society and rabbit expert Cinnamon Gimness.