

Using the Bunny Box

By Debby Widolf

People sometimes say to me, “I hear rabbits can be trained to use the litter box.” Yes, rabbits can learn to use the litter box – but with some different twists. After all, rabbits are not cats. So, let’s look at some strategies and tips for getting bunnies to use the box.



First, younger rabbits are usually harder to train than older rabbits. Youngsters have a shorter attention span and want to explore and quickly hop on to the next adventure. Training can begin early, but don’t expect quick results.

Second, spaying or neutering will make a difference in how quickly bunny will learn to use the litter box. Un-neutered males have other important matters (such as mating) on their minds and un-spayed females going through a false pregnancy, or a real one, will also be preoccupied. Plus, marking territory is important to both sexes when they are not spayed or neutered. This undesirable trait is only one reason to spay or neuter your rabbits at the appropriate age: two to three months for males and five to six months for females. (For other reasons, see “Spaying or Neutering Your Rabbit.”)

Another key to success: Take the time to observe your rabbit’s behavior, so you know what indicates that the bunny is about to go potty. Some rabbits back up into a corner to urinate; others want to potty as soon as they are let out of their cage. Look for the tail to go up and the ears to relax. You’ll want to catch the rabbit before she urinates and steer her into the litter box.

You will want your rabbit to be excited about spending time in the litter box, so make it welcoming. Fill the bottom of the box with rabbit-safe litter, such as wood pellets, aspen shavings, or thick layers of newspaper. Don’t use clay, cedar or clumping cat litters because these are bad for bunnies’ health. Pile fresh hay on top and, to really entice your bunny, add a few papaya treats, a piece of apple, a favorite herb or a toy. When bunny is in the box, give lots of praise. Don’t ever punish your bunny for “accidents”; punishment doesn’t work and it will just cause stress for the rabbit.

What’s the actual process for teaching the bunny to use the box? First, she’ll need her own piece of real estate – a space that the rabbit distinguishes as hers and separate from the space she shares with you. If the rabbit does not have a cage, section off a space in a room or run.

Next, prepare a couple of litter boxes and put them out in the rabbit’s space. In the beginning of training, it helps to place a few of the rabbit’s droppings and the scent of his urine into the litter boxes to let him know that this is the place to go. Place one box inside

the rabbit's cage, one just outside and another in a corner, or wherever you see your rabbit doing his business. Move the boxes as needed, according to where your rabbit chooses to urinate.

As bunny gets better at using the litter box, you can start eliminating boxes. When your rabbit is consistently successful, you can expand the bunny's living space, but go slow, adding a little space at a time. Don't expect perfection: Rabbits will occasionally leave some droppings outside the litter box. "Hop and drop" just happens and a few droppings are easy to clean up.

Clean litter boxes every two to three days, or as needed. A good cleaning solution is half white vinegar and half water. Top the box daily with fresh hay.

To respect the rabbit's space, don't reach into the cage or space to pull the rabbit out; instead, coax him out. Also, don't clean the space or cage when the rabbit is inside. Keep food dishes close to the door to minimize intrusion. If you are carrying the bunny back to his area, let him hop into the door of the cage or sectioned-off area rather than placing him inside.

Finally, if your rabbit's litter-box habits change, there may be something medically wrong with him. Have the bunny checked by your veterinarian, just to make sure. Of course, a change in litter box habits can also result from the rabbit being frightened, new rabbits in the area, or a change in caregivers or in the bunny's environment.

With a bit of luck, you should soon be experiencing the joys of a litter-box-trained bunny!

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