

Special Bunny's Bunny Care Basics



So you're getting a bunny rabbit! You are in for a treat. Bunnies are funny, smart, silly, and lots of fun to share your home with. There are a few basic supplies you'll need to keep your bunny healthy and happy in your home.

Bunny Food & Nutrition

Timothy Hay: Timothy hay is the most important part of a bunny's diet. Your bunny will need unlimited access to timothy hay 24/7 to stay healthy. You can find Timothy hay at most pet supply and feed stores (and at specialbunny.org).



Water & Food Bowls: Bunnies actually suck their water, so they like to drink from bowls, not hanging bottles. You'll need a solid, heavy crock for water—or else your bunny will treat the bowl like a toy and fling it (and the water!) all over the place.



High Quality Pellet Food: Bunnies don't actually need to eat a lot of pellets. Their main diet should be mostly hay and fresh veggies. However, limited amounts of pellet food contain added vitamins and supplements that can help keep your bunny healthy. As a rule, avoid any food that looks like it has extra 'goodies' in it. High quality bunny pellets are just green pellets with no added seeds, dried fruits, or oats.



Fresh Veggies! Bunnies love and need fresh veggies. As a rule, look for dark, leafy greens and avoid iceberg lettuce and anything in the onion or garlic family. Also avoid veggies that can create gas, like cabbage or broccoli. For a complete list of bunny-safe veggies, see www.specialbunny.org/diet



Treats & Supplements: Some commercially available treats are good for your bunny, but many are not. Try using unsweetened, spoon-sized shredded wheat cereal as treats, or small pieces of dried or fresh fruit. If you do want to buy packaged treats, look for simple treats with no seeds, added sweeteners, or yogurt coatings. As a rule, if the treat looks like junk food in any way, it's probably bad for your pet. Simple treats like fruit and shredded wheat are cheaper, much more exciting for your rabbit, and much healthier. Also, bunnies don't need salt licks or tablet supplements to be healthy, but there are some good ones that have the extra benefit of being treat-like. Papaya tablets can help digestion, chewable acidophilus tablets (made for humans) may help when they are on antibiotics, and a new line of Oxbow vitamin treats are great.



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Bunny Housing

A House (not a cage!): We believe bunnies should be kept indoors. There are simply too many dangers outside for bunnies to thrive and survive. Most bunny behavior issues (if not all of them!) can be cured by spaying or neutering. Special Bunny volunteers are also available to

help you set up a great indoor bunny housing scenario that works for both you and your pets. Inside, rabbits enjoy having their own space where they can feel safe, and where they know their litter box, water, and food will always be waiting. Avoid bunny cages sold in most chain pet stores - they are far too small. The best option for bunny housing is a metal exercise pen (usually sold for dogs) with a towel floor. See the Bunny Housing page on specialbunny.org for lots more ideas. Any cage smaller than 2' X 4' for even a little bunny is simply too small.



Clean Towels: Visit a thrift store to get some towels you can use for your bunnies. You'll need a towel to put in the pet carrier so that your bunny doesn't slip around. You'll also use towels in your bunny's new living environment, and use them to 'burrito' your bunny to examine him.

Litter Boxes: We recommend medium sized cat litter boxes for bunnies. Most of the small, corner-shaped 'rabbit litter boxes' are too small, and include wire shelves you don't need. It's a good idea to start with two litter boxes, so you can place one where you want it and one where the bunny 'insists' you should put one. Bunnies love to hang out in their litter boxes!



Bunny-Safe Litter: Never use clay, corn, or wheat litter with bunnies. Also avoid wood shavings, especially any shavings with cedar – these can make your bunny very sick. Instead, look for paper-based litters (pulped paper, like CareFresh, or pelleted paper, like Yesterday's News, work great). Or, you can use untreated wood stove pellets, which absorb odor and liquid very well, and are compostable. Cover the bottom of the litter box with one of these litters and then add a generous layer of timothy hay on top for the perfect bun litter box.

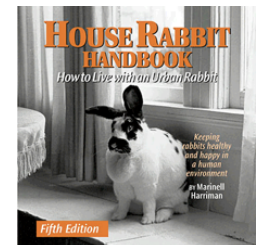


Learn about your new friend!



The House Rabbit Handbook
www.drollerypress.com

www.specialbunny.org



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Bunny Toys, Grooming & Health Care

Toys: Bored bunnies get into mischief! You can make your own toys out of the cardboard centers of toilet paper or paper towel rolls. You can also use toys meant for birds, which are fairly easy to find at most pet stores. Make sure that, if the toys are made of plastic, they are made of a very hard plastic; bunnies can chew through and ingest softer plastics. Baby toys made of hard plastic, such as baby keys, are also very popular with bunnies.



A Stuffed Friend: If you are adopting a single bunny, buy him or her a stuffed friend. Try to find one around the same size or bigger than your new bunny. Make sure to test to make sure the fur doesn't pull out and that there are no chewable buttons or ribbons, and always wash the new stuffed animal before giving it to your bunny. Bunnies are very social, and this stuffed friend will help (until your bunny convinces you that a real live bunny friend will be endlessly more fun for everyone!)

Avoid Leashes & Harnesses! While it's fun to imagine 'taking your bunny for a walk,' it's actually very dangerous and too often deadly. Bunnies do not do well on harnesses unless the handler is very experienced. Even a minor scare can send the bunny running, and many have been known to reach the end of the leash and jerk themselves into major injuries. Instead, you can take your bunny's exercise pen outside for *supervised* playtime.



A Carrier: Small- and medium-sized bunnies fit comfortably in cat-sized carriers. Styles that have a top-opening door are the best option. Use a seat belt to secure your carrier in the car for your own safety and your bunny's.



Health & Grooming Supplies:

You should never have to bathe your bunny. Bunnies can inhale water and drown hours after a bath. Occasional and as-necessary 'butt baths' require only warm water.

Wait to buy nail trimming supplies until you learn how to trim your bunny's nails from a vet or rabbit-savvy person. Many owners leave nail trimming to the pros!

Wait to buy combs or brushes until you learn what type of fur your bunny has, because many combs and brushes are ineffectual on most bunnies.

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Bunny Care Basics

Never scruff your bunny or lift by the ears. This hurts and can result in injury or death.

To safely lift your bunny, support his rump and hind legs. Hold your bunny with his paws supported on your chest. Hold firmly and always support the rump and hind legs. If your bunny starts to struggle, bounce your body to distract him so you can safely put him down.

Never drop your bunny to the floor. If bunnies are dropped, they can get severely injured. Instead, squat to put your bunny down.

Be aware of how delicate your bunny's spine is. He can kick hard enough to break his own back.

Never use corporal punishment on a rabbit. Bunnies don't understand or learn from being hit or handled roughly (e.g., if you rub their noses in urine accidents). Instead, they will quickly learn to fear you. Ask an expert if you need help with unwanted behaviors.

Do not leave your bunnies in the care of inexperienced people if you go on vacation. Find a bunny-savvy sitter or board. When bunnies get ill, they go downhill quickly, so supervision is critical.

Find an experienced vet and know your emergency vet options. See the Vets & Emergencies page on speicalbunny.org for a list of reliable local vets and clinics.

Know the signs of gas and GI stasis. Spend some time online to learn about this painful and deadly problem so you can spot the symptoms and help your bunny quickly.



Bunny Maintenance Supplies

Q-tips and **hydrogen peroxide** to clean scent glands

Styptic powder in case you clip the quick during a toenail trim.

A small squeeze bottle filled with 1 part white vinegar and 3 to 4 parts water. This is the best solution for ear cleaning—it's antibacterial and gentle. If you have a lop-eared bunny, gently massage 3-5 drops in each ear once a month. Up-ear bunnies may not need this. The solution will soften ear wax and your bunny will shake it out. Do NOT put Q-Tips in your bunny's ears, as this can cause serious injury. You can get a small squeeze bottle from your vet.

Infant gas drops (simethicone) This is the best first aid for gas.



Signs of trouble & what to do

- **Changes in poop.** Your bunny's poop will tell you a lot about his health. If poop gets smaller or stops, consult your vet. If poops are strung together with fur, it's time to groom your bunny so he doesn't develop a very dangerous blockage.
- **Not wanting to eat.** Try offering a favorite treat. If it's ignored, he probably has gas. This is very painful and can lead to stasis. Give your bunny a full dropper of simethicone and massage the belly. If your bunny isn't better within an hour, call your vet.
- **Drooling.** This can indicate painful tooth problems or heat stroke. Call your vet. If you suspect heat stroke, cool the bunny by applying cool towels or alcohol to the ears.
- **Injury.** You must act fast. Wrap him in warm towels to avoid shock and get him to the vet.
- **Dandruff (fur mites).** Consult your vet. Fur mites are easy to treat, but may also indicate a systemic issue.
- **Poopy butt.** You may be overfeeding your rabbit. Try reducing veggies and pellets and consult your vet.

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