

# Caring for Your Pet Rabbit

## Caging and Bedding

- Rabbit cages should have a flat bottom to prevent foot injuries and should be large enough for the rabbit to hop around in any direction. Rabbits need lots of space to stretch their legs, so your rabbit should have at least a few hours outside his/her cage in a pen or rabbit-proof room.
- Bedding should be unscented, dye-free paper bedding. Avoid wood chips/shavings.
- Rabbits are easily litter-trained! Pick a litter box that is large enough for your rabbit and use a recycled paper-based or straw-based litter (e.g. Carefresh, Yesterday's News, Oxbow Ecostraw). Do not use clumping cat litter or wood shavings.

## Food and Water

- 80-90% of a rabbit's diet should be high quality grass hay, such as timothy hay or orchard grass hay. Hay should always be available to your rabbit.
- Pellets should be plain, timothy-based pellets and not mixed with any seeds, nuts, or dried fruit. Pellets should be measured and rabbits should get about ¼ cup per 5 pounds of rabbit each day.
- Rabbits should receive leafy greens every day. Some greens should be fed in limited quantities. (Learn more about recommended diet and greens below)
- Fresh water should always be available in either a bowl or a bottle, depending on what your rabbit prefers. Water should be changed daily.

## Activity and Enrichment

- Rabbits enjoy playing with and chewing on toys, but it is important that they are made out of safe materials. Toilet paper rolls, cereal boxes, and cardboard egg cartons make great toys (especially if you hide some treats inside and stuff them with hay!).
- Many rabbits enjoy toys that make noise, such as rattles or rings of plastic keys sold for babies; just make sure that your rabbit isn't chewing on or ingesting pieces of the toy.
- Your rabbit may also enjoy natural wood blocks or branches to chew on. Be sure to obtain them from a source that doesn't use pesticides.
- Rabbits are social animals and many rabbits benefit from having a friend. Some rabbits can be aggressive when first introduced to an unfamiliar rabbit, so be sure to ask your veterinarian or local rabbit rescue group for advice before bringing another rabbit into your household.

## Veterinary Care

- Young rabbits should have annual veterinary exams to evaluate their overall health and well-being. Older rabbits or rabbits with known medical problems may need to be seen more frequently.
- Rabbits should be spayed and neutered to decrease behavioral problems and to prevent health problems as they get older. Research indicates that 80% percent of intact female rabbits develop uterine cancer by age three.
- Some rabbits require regular dental care. Your veterinarian should always evaluate your rabbit's dental health at your visit.
- Signs that your rabbit is sick include a decreased appetite, decreased fecal output, lethargy, sneezing or nasal discharge, excessive salivation, sores on the feet, or a head tilt. Rabbits are very good at hiding signs of illness until they are very sick, so please contact your veterinarian right away if you have any indication that your rabbit may be sick. Not eating for more than 12 hours is always an emergency.

# Rabbit Diet

Rabbits are herbivores, meaning they eat only plant material. Herbivores must have food moving constantly through their digestive system to avoid health problems. They require a high fiber, low carbohydrate and low fat diet. This is accomplished by feeding your rabbit a diet that consists of high-fiber grass hay, a fortified pellet diet, and fresh produce.

Our recommendations for a balanced rabbit diet are:

## Hay

Your rabbit should always have fresh grass hay available and hay should make up 75-80% of his/her diet. The most common grass hays available in pet stores are timothy and orchard grass. Alfalfa hay contains too much calcium and protein for an adult animal and should only be fed to young rabbits (<6 months) and lactating females.

## Fresh Produce

We recommend offering your rabbit a daily salad that consists of leafy greens and herbs. Some types of greens should only be offered in limited quantities (see provided greens list for more information).

## Pellets

For adult rabbits, we recommend a timothy-based pellet without added fruits, nuts, or seeds, such as Oxbow's Essentials – Adult Rabbit. Most adult rabbits do well with ¼ cup/5 lbs/day, but your veterinarian may recommend increasing or decreasing the amount, depending on your rabbit's weigh. We recommend feeding your rabbit a measured amount of pellets every day so that you will notice as soon as possible if their appetite has decreased.

## Treats

The rabbit gastrointestinal system is not designed to handle foods that are high in fat or sugar. We do not recommend feeding yogurt drops or other commercial rabbit treats that are high in sugar. Breads and cereals should also be avoided. Good treats for rabbits include a small piece of cucumber, bell pepper, sweet potato, or other vegetables. Your rabbit can also have carrots and fruits, but only in very small quantities (~½" piece a few times a week).

## Water

Rabbits should have access to water at all times, either in a water bottle or a heavy flat-bottomed bowl. Some rabbits have problems with moist dermatitis under their chins when provided with water in a bowl; these rabbits may do better with water in a bottle. Regardless of how it is provided, water should be changed daily.

## Greens

Greens are a very important part of your pet rabbit's diet. They provide important nutrients, increase water intake, and help provide interesting variety in your pet's diet. We generally recommend feeding about ½ cup of greens per two pounds bodyweight daily. If your pet is not accustomed to eating greens, you should introduce them slowly to prevent diarrhea.

Recently, there has been a lot of interest in the role that the mineral content of greens plays in the development of urinary tract disease in small mammals. The focus has been primarily on calcium and oxalates, since these are the common components of urinary stones in small mammals. In general, we recommend feeding greens that are lower in calcium and oxalates as the basis of your pet's salad and rotating through the higher calcium/oxalate greens in smaller quantities, unless otherwise directed by your veterinarian. The calcium and oxalate contents of common greens are listed below. If your pet has a history of urinary problems, consider misting the greens with water before serving to increase water intake.

Vegetable	Calcium <sup>1</sup>	Oxalate <sup>2</sup>
Arugula	Low	Low
Basil	Low	Moderate
Beet Greens	Low	High
Bibb/Boston Lettuce	Very low	Very low
Bok Choy	Moderate	Low
Cilantro	Very low	Very low
Collards	Moderate	Low
Curly Endive	Low	Medium
Dandelion Greens	Very high	High
Dill	Very low	Low
Green Leaf Lettuce	Very low	Very low
Kale	Moderate	Moderate
Mustard Greens	Moderate	Low
Mustard Spinach	Extremely high	Very high
Parsley	High	Moderate
Radicchio	Very low	Low
Red Leaf Lettuce	Very low	Very low
Romaine	Very low	Very low
Spinach	Low	Very high
Swiss Chard	Very low	Very high
Turnip Greens	Very high	Low
Watercress	Low	Low

<sup>1</sup> Compiled from nutritiondata.com

<sup>2</sup> Compiled from lowoxalateinfo.com

