

MGP

CARE SHEET : RABBIT (Lagomorph)

Rabbits are intelligent, affectionate and social animals that need daily interaction with humans or other rabbits. Spayed or neutered rabbits tend to be healthier, live longer and are better companions. Contrary to popular belief, they are not rodents but a member of the Lagomorph family.

Average Adult Size	12+ inches
Average Life Span	up to 12 years with proper care and spayed or neutered
Diet	herbivore

Feeding

- * Feed high quality pellet food, fruits and vegetables. Timothy hay must be continuously available; provide a constant, unlimited supply and one cup of greens for every 2 lbs of weight per day. In the Bahamas we have what is commonly referred to as 'shepherd's needle' and 'guinea (long blade) grass' growing by the roadside, both are excellent for rabbits, however, ensure that any greens are washed thoroughly before feeding to remove any chemicals.
- * Clean, fresh, chlorine free water must always be available.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAY IN A RABBITS' DIET CANNOT BE OVER-EMPHASISED as the rabbits' gastrointestinal tract needs this indigestible fiber to make the intestines move along smoothly.

IT IS NORMAL for a rabbit to eat cecotropes - soft black feces filled with minerals and nutrients! This practice generally happens early in the morning.

DO NOT FEED chocolate, caffeine or alcohol as these can cause serious medical conditions. Avoid sugar and high-fat treats.

Housing

- * Rabbits acclimate well to average household temperatures not to exceed 80 F degrees; be cautious of extreme temperature changes. The habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area.
- * Habitat should be at least four times the size of the rabbit and escape-proof with an area that has a solid surface and plenty of room for exercise and play; it is best to provide the largest habitat possible.
- * One to two inches of bedding should be placed in the habitat and should consist of high-quality paper bedding, crumbled paper bedding or hardwood shavings. Cedar-based products are not to be used.
- * Rabbits may be kept in mixed-sex pairs if spayed or neutered, or same-sex pairs if they are raised together. Otherwise, keep rabbits housed separately.

Normal behavior and interaction

- * When handling a rabbit ensure you are fully supporting the body, especially the hind legs. Never pick a rabbit up by its ears or try to hold it on its back.
- * Rabbits can be litter box trained.
- * Rabbits chew on objects to maintain all their teeth, which grow continuously. Ensure your rabbit has plenty of chew sticks or mineral chews available.
- * Rabbits can chew on pine as long as it is untreated.

Habitat maintenance

- * Change bedding weekly or more often, if necessary. Clean the habitat and its contents once a week with mild soap and water; rinse and allow to dry completely before placing the rabbit back into the habitat.
- * Scoop litter pan daily.

Grooming and hygiene

- * Rabbits stay clean and rarely need baths but may be bathed using a shampoo designed for rabbits or kittens, if necessary.
- * It is good to brush rabbits regularly to remove hair that is shedding, help prevent hairballs and keep long-haired rabbits from matting. Short-haired rabbits should be brushed once a week and long-haired rabbits should be brushed twice a week.
- * Consult with a veterinarian if a rabbits' teeth or nails seem too long. Nails should be clipped often so they do not become curled.
- * Because all rabbits are potential carriers of infectious diseases, such as Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis, and Salmonella, always wash your hands before and after handling and/or the habitat contents to help prevent the potential of spread of diseases.
- * Pregnant women, children under the age of 7 years, senior citizens and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing and/or caring for small animals and should consider not having a small animal as a pet.

Signs of a healthy animal

- * Eats and drinks regularly
- * Active, alert and responsive
- * Healthy, clean fur and clear eyes
- * Breathes clearly and walks normally
- * Communicates by making soft noises

Red Flags

If you notice any of these signs, please contact your exotic animal veterinarian:

- * Weight loss
- * Abnormal hair loss
- * Diarrhea or dirty bottom
- * Distressed breathing
- * Lethargy
- * Eye or nasal discharge
- * Skin lesions
- * Overgrown teeth and/or nails

Common Health Issues - symptoms or causes requiring an exotic animal veterinarian

- * Diarrhea - loose stools caused by poor diet, stress, internal parasites, unclean housing or other illness
- * Heat Stroke - emergency condition, can occur if rabbit is left in a hot room. Symptoms include heavy panting, seizures and loss of consciousness.
- * Malocclusion - overgrown teeth
- * Mites - external parasite that causes rabbits to lose patches of hair
- * Tumors - abnormal lumps.

DO NOT USE SPRAYS OF ANY KIND AROUND RABBITS INCLUDING INSECTICIDES AND AIR FRESHENERS