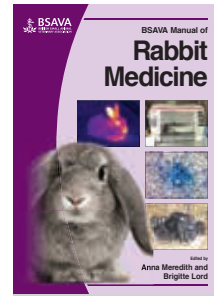


Housing your rabbit

Molly Varga



Most rabbits live in hutches; however this traditional form of housing often doesn't give the rabbit enough room to behave normally.

What does my rabbit need?

- Every rabbit should be able to travel three hops in every direction inside their house.
- Every rabbit should have access to a large exercise run, either indoors or out.
- Every rabbit should be able to stand up on its hindlegs without its head or ears being squashed by the ceiling.
- Every rabbit should have shelter from adverse weather (wind, rain and direct sunlight).
- Every rabbit should have access to fresh water at all times.
- Every rabbit should have access to fresh appropriate food at all times.
- Every rabbit should be able to get away from scary situations: a hide box for each rabbit plus one extra is necessary, especially in outdoor runs.

How can I provide what my rabbit needs?

- Provide a large sheltered house: this can be a shed, an inside room or a large hutch if your rabbit is fairly small. Building your own shelter can be a cheaper option and allow you to customize the space to your rabbit's needs.
- Provide some additional exercise space. This enclosure can be inside or out and should be as large as possible. Let your rabbit play in the larger enclosure for at least 4 hours every day, more if possible.
- If the larger enclosure is outside, make certain your rabbit has access to their indoor shelter, or that there is an area in the enclosure that is covered to protect from wind, rain and direct sunlight.
- Outdoor enclosures also need to protect your rabbit from predators, e.g. neighbourhood cats and dogs, foxes and birds of prey. If the enclosure does not have a secure roof, you will need to keep a careful watch while your rabbit is outside.
- Give each rabbit a place to hide and provide one extra one so that each rabbit can run from one hide to another should it choose to. Hides can be pieces of wide-bore plastic drainpipe, cardboard boxes, wooden boxes or even pet carriers.
- Make certain that you check your rabbit has enough food and water twice every day, and more frequently if the weather is very cold or very hot.
- If you use water bottles, make sure these are cleaned regularly and check they are working (they can freeze in cold weather or clog up with limescale).
- Give your rabbits unlimited access to hay. This can be used for food and also bedding in cold weather.

Why is space important?

- Just like humans, rabbits benefit from regular exercise.
- Exercise promotes muscle and bone health, reduces obesity and helps your rabbit's guts stay healthy.
- Rabbits kept in a small hutch are unable to exercise and may suffer from diseases such as sore hocks, arthritis, gut stasis, failure to eat their soft faeces, or urine scalding.
- The larger the space available, the better the opportunity for your rabbit to run around and play. A pair of rabbits will need even more space.
- If your rabbit is usually happy to run and play but suddenly doesn't want to, get him/her checked out by your veterinary surgeon.

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Housing your rabbit

continued

What if my rabbit seems bored?

- All rabbits enjoy having something to play with. Giving your rabbits toys can give them hours of entertainment.
- There are lots of toys that you can buy for your rabbit, but homemade ones are just as good. Wicker balls, cardboard cylinders stuffed with hay and fresh leaves, sisal mats and even some plastic dog toys are all acceptable.
- If your rabbit is a single rabbit, give serious consideration to getting him/her a companion. Rabbits are very social animals and they benefit from having a rabbit friend. (We DO NOT advise getting a guinea pig to befriend your rabbit, because often the guinea pig gets bullied and they can also catch *Bordetella* from the rabbit. This is a bacterium that causes pneumonia in guinea pigs.)