

# BunnyPeople

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[www.petfinder.com/shelters/PA256.html](http://www.petfinder.com/shelters/PA256.html)

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A non-profit, domestic rabbit rescue, adoption and education organization

## Is a Rabbit the Right Choice?

Deciding to adopt a bunny as a family pet requires a great deal of thought. Bunnies are not a pet of choice for all people or family situations.

What are the expectations of the family regarding this new family member?

Bunnies are quiet companions; they can be entertaining in their own way. If you want a pet to greet you at the door or chase a string, re-think your decision to adopt a bunny.

Bunnies are inquisitive, gentle and endearing. They can do “Happy Hops” to express their great happiness or roll over on their backs in sheer delight. Bunnies do not tolerate loud noise or sudden movements. These actions scare most rabbits. Rabbits can die from stress or fear.

BunnyPeople does not recommend bunnies as pets for children under the age of nine. The reason for this is rabbits are delicate animals and can not withstand rough handling whether intentional or not. Most rabbits do not care to be picked up or held, especially by inexperienced or insecure handlers and when improperly handled will kick, scratch and bite. Rabbits when dropped suffer from broken backs, necks and death. They do not have the mobility to land on their feet or withstand the force of a fall. Small children should never be left unsupervised with a rabbit.

Rabbits love to be petted. Sitting on the floor with your bunny and petting him/her is a relaxing and enjoyable experience. There are some bunnies that enjoy sitting on your lap; in some cases, they have even become bed buddies.

Are you ready for a possible ten-year commitment?

Please don't adopt any animal if you are not willing to commit to loving and caring for an animal for the length of his life. Make sure that any life changes you or your family may encounter will not give you reason to abandon your smallest family member.

# Housing

## Outdoors

BunnyPeople does not advocate outside housing of rabbits. Several reasons for this policy are:

1. Maggots, warbles, heat stroke as well as other health issues are a real threat to bunnies housed outdoors. This topic will be covered under the “Health” section of this packet.
2. the interaction between rabbit owner and the rabbit is very limited when the rabbit is housed outdoors. How much time will you spend outdoors in hot, humid weather or very cold weather?
3. The bunny you adopt is to be a family pet, not a farm animal, and should live and interact with other family members.

## Indoors

We recommend a cage at least 36” x 36” x 18” high. A wire bottom with a pull-out tray for easy cleaning and to keep the rabbit from standing in its own waste is good. At least half of the wire floor must be covered to protect the bunny’s feet. This covering can be ceramic tiles, dry decks (available from BunnyPeople), towels or folded sheets (must be changed and washed regularly).

Another type of cage is a dog crate. You can purchase one large enough to accommodate a litter box and still allow the bunny to stretch out fully. Again, covering the bottom with towels or a folded sheet will give bunny a comfortable place to lay.

BunnyPeople recommends “Yesterday’s News,” available at most pet stores or “Woody Pet Litter,” available at most feed/farm stores be used for litter. It is a safe alternative to clay litter and a good odor control product. **NEVER** use clumping cat litter; your bunny will eat it, causing a fatal blockage in your bunny’s digestive system. Also, **NEVER** use pine or cedar shavings in or around your bunny – they give off a gas that causes liver disease, which could lead to an early death.

Dishes for water should be heavy enough so that bunny can’t tip them over. Ceramic crocks work well. A sipper bottle may be used, as long as the water is changed daily and the bottle is washed and rinsed well. A non-breakable food dish is best, as bunnies like to throw their bowls around. (Great Fun!)

A very important part of housing your bunny is deciding where in your home the bunny will live. Bunnies need a minimum of one to two hours a day out of their cages to exercise. Make sure whatever room you choose has been properly bunny-proofed. Bunnies enjoy chewing, so you must take precautions by covering all wires with PVC pipe, or any other type of hard plastic tubing. Another choice is the tubing used in fishponds. This plastic tubing is reinforced with wire and comes in several sizes. Also, protect wood baseboard and wood furniture legs. There are several items you can give your bunny safe chewing fun – **untreated** scrap wood from your local hardware store, or insecticide-free branches from willow and apple trees are excellent choices. Be aware

that most houseplants are poisonous to rabbits. You can obtain a list of poisonous and safe houseplants from BunnyPeople upon request.

**Never** use harsh cleaning solutions around your bunny. Bunnies are very sensitive to chemicals and can develop health issues if exposed to many common household products. BunnyPeople recommends a solution of ½ water and ½ white vinegar in a spray bottle. It's inexpensive and **safe** for your bunny, your family, and the environment.

If you have other pets (cats, dogs), be sure your bunny is protected from unwanted and dangerous interaction with these pets. Cats and rabbits can get along in some circumstances; the rabbit should not be so small as to appear as prey, and generally an older cat is a safer bet.

## Toys

It is important to supply safe toys for your bunny to play with; boredom can sometimes lead to misbehavior. Bunnies like to toss objects, chew and rearrange things. Their toys can be very simple and inexpensive. Empty paper towel and toilet paper tubes, paper bags, cardboard boxes (remove any staples), hand towels, a plastic Slinky, empty oatmeal boxes and certain cat toys such as a wire ball (remove the small toy inside before giving it to your bunny), a plastic multi-colored drum with a jingle bell inside. Specialty toys made by BunnyLuv are available through BunnyPeople and on the internet. Watching your bunny play will bring hours of enjoyment to you and your family.

## **Health**

The adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” is most relevant in bunny care. Common drugs to treat most pets are toxic to rabbits and can cause death; this is why it is important to choose a veterinarian knowledgeable in rabbit care. A clean living environment, balanced diet and exercise are the building blocks for a healthy bunny.

Rabbits living outdoors and rabbits allowed “run time” outdoors are at risk for a variety of serious health threats.

1. Warbles – warbles are the larvae of the warble fly. The fly deposits its larvae under the skin of the rabbit; the larvae then feed on the rabbit in order to mature. This is the equivalent of being eaten alive. Rabbits infected with warble fly larvae can experience permanent disfigurement, can become crippled, and can even die.
2. Maggots – from the time a fly lays her eggs it takes as little as four hours for maggots to appear. They generally lay their eggs around the genital area, attracted by feces and urine. Maggots can enter the rabbit's body through the rectum, once again feeding on the rabbit's tissue. In most cases it is fatal.
3. Fleas and ticks – feed on the blood supply of animals. In severe infestations, they can cause anemia and death. Due to the sensitivity of rabbits to chemicals, you

must consult your veterinarian before using anything on your bunny for treatment of this condition. Treatments commonly used on cats should not be used on rabbits.

4. Heat Stroke – rabbits are extremely sensitive to heat. When the temperature reaches 80 degrees, your rabbit is at serious risk of heat stroke. Some symptoms of heat stroke are panting, labored breathing and listlessness (lying around, no energy). Immediate action must be taken to move the rabbit to cooler surrounding and to call your vet immediately. Heat stroke is the most common reason for death in outdoor rabbits during the summer months.
5. Cold Weather – Rabbits do tolerate cooler temperatures better than heat, but contrary to popular opinion, the “fur coat” will not keep them from freezing to death. Rabbit breeds today are not bred to be housed outdoors, especially the smaller breeds. Their fur coat is the equivalent to your winter coat, and how long would you be comfortable sitting on your porch in 30 degree weather?
6. Animal Attacks – Rabbits are prey for most other animals (cats, dogs, foxes). When in a hutch outdoors, your rabbit is vulnerable to attack from other animals. Even if they fail to knock over the hutch and gain entry, the fear alone could kill your rabbit.
7. Loneliness and Depression – Rabbits love the company, attention and stimulation of humans. Their life span is only five to ten years...is it too much to ask that the quality of their lives be an issue?
8. Sanitation – Cleaning your bunny’s cage and living area is important whether it lives indoors or out, but outdoors a dirty cage can cause sores on your bunny’s body which can lead to infection and in turn increases the risk of warble and maggot infestation.

### Trouble Shooting

The following examples are to help you better recognize what may be a sign of something abnormal in your bunny. The final decision to call your veterinarian is yours. A word of caution in delaying care: rabbit symptoms of illness are often sudden and delayed treatment can be a mistake. As prey animals, rabbits often try to hide an illness until it is almost too late.

General Warning Signs of Trouble - your veterinarian should be consulted when you notice:

Decreased Activity  
Swellings/Lumps on body  
Weight Loss

Hair Loss and Scratching  
Trouble Breathing  
Discharge from eyes or nose

1. Stopped eating – First check the bunny’s teeth. Make sure they are straight and not so long that they overlap. A rabbit that hasn’t eaten in 12-24 hours is a real reason for concern.
2. Decreased urine output – If you notice your bunny is not urinating in the same volume as normal or if it seems to be straining to urinate, these could be

symptoms of calcium sludge in the urinary tract. Once again, these symptoms need to be addressed immediately.

3. String of pearls poop – When the stool is strung together with what appears to be hair, this could be the beginnings of a hair ball problem. If not monitored it has the potential to become serious. If this condition persists, consult with your vet.
4. Poopy butt – Sometimes due to change in diet, age or for no apparent reason, your bunny may have soft stools that stick to the genital area. Use baby wash or baby shampoo and warm water soaks to remove the feces. Cutting back on the serving size of your bunny's greens may also help this problem.
5. Diarrhea – liquid stools. This is very serious and requires immediate medical attention. Note: if your veterinarian prescribes yogurt as a dietary supplement, make sure it is a good quality no-fruit type and contains live active cultures such as *L. acidophilus*.
6. Swallowed objects – If your bunny swallows any small object or chews on an electrical cord resulting in a shock, your veterinarian should be consulted immediately.

### General Health Care

Rabbits do not require a lot of maintenance care. Keeping nails trimmed, checking their teeth every few months, brushing their coats to remove loose fur and lots of love are the four general needs in bunny health care.

1. Nail trimming – your veterinarian can trim your bunny's nails, and if you care to learn, will instruct you in the proper and safe way to do this simple by necessary function.
2. Checking teeth – Take a minute every few months to inspect your bunny's teeth for proper length and alignment. They should be straight and not overlap. If you notice any unusual wetness around the mouth, this is a sign of mouth problems.
3. Grooming – Brushing your rabbit often with a soft bristle brush not only improves your bunny's appearance but removes loose fur, which can aid in the prevention of hair balls due to the rabbit ingesting large amounts of their fur. Long hair breeds may require a daily brushing to eliminate matting of fur as well as a precautionary aid in prevention of hair balls. A brush with stiff bristles may work better on longhair breeds. Professional grooming for rabbits is also available.
4. Weight – Always be aware of any weight fluctuations your bunny may be experiencing. This could be a sign of a medical problem, and should be addressed with your veterinarian.

### Choosing a Veterinarian for Your Rabbit

The most important requirement is to choose a veterinarian with a working knowledge and experience in rabbit medicine. A list of bunny-savvy vets is available from BunnyPeople.

Establish your bunny as a client with your veterinarian with a general check-up **before** an emergency arises.

### Spaying and Neutering

BunnyPeople is a strong advocate of spaying and neutering. Spaying and neutering can stop aggressive behavior and make your bunny a more enjoyable companion. It can also prolong the life of your bunny by reducing the risk of some cancers.

**There are many more rabbits than there are good homes, so please don't add to the problem. Be responsible...spay and neuter all pets.**

## Diet

A well-balanced diet with variety will go a long way in keeping your bunny happy and healthy. Always provide unlimited timothy hay and/or oat hay and fresh water. Good quality pellets in limited quantity purchased from a pet or feed store are best. The freshness of grocery store pellets is questionable. Refrain from buying rabbit treats in grocery stores or pet stores; there is very little, if any, nutritional value in these treats.

### Is feeding hay important?

Hay is **essential** to a rabbit's good health, providing fiber, which reduces the danger of hairballs and other blockages. Apple and willow tree twigs from pesticide-free trees also provide good fiber.

### Pellets

Good quality pellets should be included in your bunny's diet, but in limited quantities. Small to medium rabbits should not exceed  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups of pellets a day. Large breed rabbits may have  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  cups of pellets daily. Pellets may be offered at both meals (am-pm) or served alone once daily. To ensure freshness, only purchase what your rabbit can eat in four to six weeks.

### Water

Fresh water must be available to your rabbit at all times. This is needed for hydration and to keep the hay moving through the digestive system.

### Food List

**Never** give your rabbit these items:

Beans	Onions
Cabbage	Potatoes
Iceberg lettuce	Rhubarb

Provide at least three kinds of vegetables daily. A variety is required in order to assure necessary nutrients, including one daily that contains vitamin A (indicated by a "\*" on the list). Add one new vegetable to the diet at a time, eliminating it if it causes soft stools or diarrhea. Be sure to wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly, and to removed an bad or rotten spots before serving them to your bunny.

**Veggie List** (\* = contains vitamin A; ! = use sparingly, because it is high in either oxalates or giotrogens, which may be toxis in accumulated quantities over time).

Alfalfa, radish, and clover sprouts	Green peppers
Basil	Kale *!
Beet Greens (tops) *	Mint
Bok Choy	Mustard Greens *
Broccoli (mostly leaves and stems) *	Parsley *
Brussel Sprouts	Pea pods (flat, edible kind) *
Carrots and Carrot tops *	Peppermint leaves
Celery	Radicchio
Cilantro	Radish Tops
Clover	Raspberry Leaves
Collard Greens *	Romaine Lettuce *
Dandelion greens and flowers (pesticide free) *	Spinach * !
Endive *	Swiss Chard
Escarole	Watercress *
Green Leaf Lettuce	Wheat Grass

**Fruit List** (1-2 small servings a day; for example, a 1” piece of banana or 1/8 of an apple)

Apples (no seeds, which contain arsenic)	Peaches (not the pits)
Apricots	Pears
Bananas (very favorite)	Pineapples
Blueberries	Plums
Grapes (remove seeds, pierce skin)	Raisins
Oranges (including peel)	Raspberries
Papayas	Strawberries

Examples of fall day serving size for a medium (3-5 lb.) Mini-Lop bunny: 2 romaine leaves, 6 endive leaves, 6 sprigns parsley, on broccoli floret, 3 inches of carrot, and 2 inches of banana. Adjust for smaller or larger bunny, and cut in half if bunny is fed both AM and PM.

### **Wild Rabbits**

Wild rabbits are not legal to keep as pets. If you have questions about wild rabbits, call 717-469-2540 or a licensed rehabber in your area.

### **Additional Information**

For specific information on a particular topic, such a bonding, bunnyproofing your home, litter training, etc., call BunnyPeople at 717-469-0125, or check the Internet under

House Rabbit Society ([www.rabbit.org](http://www.rabbit.org)). Information may also be found in the library and at your local pet store.

### **TEN REASONS TO ADOPT A BUNNY FROM BUNNYPEOPLE**

1. If for any reason you are unable to keep the bunny you adopted from BunnyPeople, the bunny is to be returned to us, no questions asked.
2. If you return your bunny in the first two weeks after adoption, the adoption fee is fully refunded.
3. You always have a support system with BunnyPeople via phone numbers provided to you to use for any questions or concerns regarding your bunny.
4. BunnyPeople provides a list of veterinarians experienced in rabbit health care and treatment.
5. If a loaner cage is needed, one will be provided for a two-week period.
6. You will be given a 24-hour supply of food for your new bunny.
7. A “Survival sheet” suitable for posting on the refrigerator will be included with the adoption of all bunnies. This list includes foods and food quantities the bunny is accustomed to eating, along with important facts to keep your bunny safe and healthy.
8. All BunnyPeople bunnies are either rescued or have been surrendered to us. You will be giving a home to a bunny who otherwise would live out its life in a shelter, never knowing the love of a good home.
9. Our staff knows the personality and temperament of our bunnies, which aids in helping to match you with your perfect bunny.
10. You will receive a free one-year membership to BunnyPeople, which includes important information for bunny owners, along with listings of upcoming BunnyPeople events.