

Hilltop Pet & Aquariums

Rabbit Information Sheet

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Open Monday - Friday 9:30am-6pm Weekends & Public Holidays 10am - 5pm

Introduction

Rabbits have long been a favorite pet among children and adults alike. If they are looked after properly your Rabbit can provide you with up to ten years of love and companionship.

There are two incorrect facts regarding Rabbit care. The first is regarding handling, some people think you can pick up a Rabbit by its ears. This is not only cruel, but also very dangerous. The ears are very sensitive and can be severely damaged as major arteries run through their ears.

The second fact is that their main diet consists of mainly lettuce. Lettuce provides very little nutritional value at all as it is 90% water and excess lettuce can cause diarrhea.

Housing

A variety of hutches are available, including indoor and outdoor. Size requirements depend on the breed of Rabbit (size), how many Rabbits are to be housed and how often the Rabbit is going to be taken out for regular exercise.

Dwarf Rabbits don't grow as big as standard Rabbits but should still have plenty of room to jump and get daily exercise. The outdoor Rabbit hutch should have a sheltered area for sleeping filled with soft bedding such as straw. The main area of the cage should be made out of wire so the Rabbit can enjoy plenty of fresh air and sun and perhaps even nibble the grass. The hutch should be placed in an area free from draughts in the winter and from the blazing heat and sun in the warmer months.

Some Rabbits are kept inside (similar to a pet cat) with litter trays, but care must be taken with electrical cords as Rabbits have a tendency to chew them.

Typical bedding used for Rabbits is straw or pet pine shavings which should be changed regularly.

Feeding

Rabbits are herbivores so as a base diet, pellets or a Rabbit and Guinea Pig should be fed and supplemented with fresh fruits, vegetables and grass (free from pesticides, etc).

As Rabbits digest fibre quickly, lucerne should be offered daily.

Commonly fed vegetables include carrots, spinach, cauliflower, parsley, bok choy, broccoli, and lettuce. As mentioned before, lettuce can cause diarrhoea and

holds no nutritional value, so it is best avoided. Popular fed fruits include bananas and apples. Be aware not to feed your Rabbits too much carrot (or any other orange vegetables) as they are high in calcium and should be fed as a treat only.

Avoid feeding Rabbits potatoes (and their peel), beetroot and rhubarb leaves, raw beans, and carbohydrate rich foods (breads, biscuits) as these can be toxic.

Any uneaten vegetables and fruit should be removed after 24 hours.

Vitamin and mineral supplements are available and should be given at least once to twice a week to ensure a happy and healthy pet.

Rabbits should have access to wooden gnawing blocks to prevent their teeth from overgrowing.

If the Rabbit begins to get overweight, reduce the amount of food given or increase the amount of exercise (or both).

Fresh water must always be available. The best waterers to use are large gravity bottles which should be cleaned regularly.

Food bowls must be heavy, e.g. terracotta, so the Rabbits can not flip it over. They should be cleaned and refilled daily.

Temperament & Handling

Rabbits can become quite tame if correct handling and tender loving care is used. Children should always be supervised when handling animals to ensure they are not rough and do not squeeze their pet. Rabbits will enjoy handling and calm down a lot more if they are treated with care.

Rabbits have very powerful back legs and have the ability to scratch and bite if not tamed. The best way to handle a Rabbit is to scruff the fur at the back of the neck (like you would a cat) and support the back legs. They must always be supported to minimize the chances of scratching and injury to the bunny (possible broken back if legs kick freely). Once the Rabbit is more placid, you may be able to just scoop it up out of the cage.

Never pick up a Rabbit by the ears. It is not only cruel, but also very dangerous as major arteries run through the Rabbit's ears. You also risk the Rabbit breaking its back by whirling around trying to get out of your grip.

When Rabbits come out for 'play time', it is very important to supervise them as they can be mischievous little creatures, willing to gnaw on your phone or other electrical cords and must also be protected from any other family pets, e.g. the dog or the cat, if necessary. They can be housed alone, in pairs or in groups (cage size dependant). Females can be housed together. Males can be kept together if they are housed with each other from a young age. Males can have the tendency to fight, if left undesexed. If you intend to keep a Rabbit by itself, it should receive regular love and attention as they can become a solitary animal, not inclined to handling.

Breeding

Breeding should not be entered into unless you are prepared. Male and females should not be housed together otherwise they will breed as often as possible which will affect the mother and the offspring. Should you choose to breed Rabbits, vitamin and mineral supplements are available and should be offered to the female Rabbit before, during and after pregnancy.

Health

The general life span of a Rabbit is approximately 8-10 years.

Rabbits can be prone to Calicivirus, for which they require annual vaccinations.

Myxomatosis is another fatal disease Rabbits contract from mosquitoes or Rabbit fleas. There is no vaccination for Myxomatosis. It is recommended to cover your Rabbit hutch with fly wire so mosquitoes can not gain access to your Rabbit. If your Rabbit can come into contact with Rabbits in the wild, it is recommended to use flea powder around the cage.

If it is over 30°C, they should be brought indoors into cooler conditions and should be kept dry and covered from draughts in cooler conditions. A moist bed will soon become the breeding ground from varying bacteria and fungi, which can affect the health of your Rabbit.

A Small Animal Wormer should be used every three months to control any possible intestinal worms. Bathing can be done every 3-4 months using a Small Animal Shampoo (never a human shampoo).

If you are planning on housing a male and female together and do not want baby Rabbits, desexing the male is recommended. The cost of desexing a male Rabbit is similar to the cost of a female cat.

Veterinary Care

You must be prepared to take any sick or injured animal to a vet without delay to minimize any pain or further complications to the health of your pet.

Something that may begin as a minor problem can easily end up developing into something major, and possibly life threatening, so it is advisable to contact your vet without delay.

Mites and mange can be a problem with any small animal. If you suspect mites or mange, please feel free to contact us or your local veterinarian for advice on treatments available.

This brochure was put together by the staff of Hilltop Pet & Aquariums as a general guide to assist you in raising your pet and advising requirements to keep your friend happy and healthy.

If you cannot provide the proper care and housing, we strongly suggest you not purchase the animal.

We have books available for sale should you require more information.