



NATURE'S  
FEAST

**Guide to  
caring for your  
Rabbit**



**Westland Horticulture Ltd (Yorkshire)**

Pexton Road • Kelleythorpe Industrial Estate • Drifffield  
East Yorkshire • YO25 9DJ

Telephone: 01480 443 789

[customer.care@naturesfeast.co.uk](mailto:customer.care@naturesfeast.co.uk)

**[www.naturesfeast.co.uk](http://www.naturesfeast.co.uk)**







## Rabbits

In the wild rabbits are social animals that live in groups, typically living in the edges of woodland with easy access to grassland. They live in warrens, which have underground rooms called burrows. These are their bedrooms, usually dug by the females for them to litter in. Within the warren they usually sleep alone in their burrow.

- They are a prey species, with many other animals predated upon them.
- To survive they have developed to be alert, vigilant, with eyes positioned on the side of their heads so that they have a wide area of vision.
- They have good hearing.
- They are light weight and with long legs, allowing them to be fast runners over short distances.
- They are grazers, living off mainly grass in the wild.
- They have a highly modified digestive system, which is very efficient, which allows them to spend a minimum amount of time above ground grazing and in danger of being predated.

## General Information

### LIFESTAGES

#### Junior

Age: 0-16 weeks

Birth weight: 30 - 80g

Eyes open: At birth

Young: Kit

Weaning age: 4-7 weeks

Litter size: Variable (depending on breed)

#### Adult

Male: Buck

Female: Doe

Pregnancy: 30-33 days

Weight: Varies depending on breed  
(between 1 to 10kg)

Sexual Maturity: 12-24 weeks

#### Senior

From Age: 5 years

Life Expectancy: Up to 10 years.

**Rabbits**  
are the third  
most popular pet  
in the UK

There are  
an estimated  
1.35 million  
**Rabbits**  
in the UK

## Pet Rabbits

There are an estimated 1.35 million rabbits in the UK (PFMA, 2016) making them the third most popular pet.

As pets they tend to be shy animals, however once they have become bonded, they can be very affectionate pets. They are relatively easy to train, and being clean pets can even be house trained.

**However they do need companionship, and should be kept in pairs.**



# The nutrition your Rabbit needs

## WATER

Rabbits should always have access to fresh clean water, which can be supplied either in a bowl or a drinker. The water should be changed on a daily basis. Vitamin supplements should not be added to the water, as this can lead to an overgrowth of bacteria unless strict hygiene is maintained.

## HAY

Rabbits eat grass, but when that is not available they should always have access to a constant supply of hay. Ideally they should be provided with a similar volume as their body size on a daily basis.

## FOOD

Rabbits should have access to a daily portion of nuggets to ensure that they receive the vitamins and minerals they need.

## FRUIT & VEGETABLES

To provide some emotional and mental stimulation, as well as supplementing their diet, some fresh vegetables can also be supplied, ideally this should increase fibre intake. Vegetables such as Beetroot, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Celery, Cauliflower, Peppers, Rocket, Romaine Lettuce, Spinach and Watercress are all examples of good vegetables to feed. You do not have to chop the vegetables up into small pieces as the rabbits enjoy chewing them. If you do decide to chop, make them into long sticks for them to gnaw on.

### Rabbits

have a very sweet tooth so be careful not to over feed

## SNACKS

Hand feeding snacks is an excellent way to bond with your rabbit. Avoid feeding sugary treats as this can lead to obesity and other health issues.

### Please note

this is not a complete list so always check if you are unsure

## VEGETABLES TO AVOID

Some vegetables are bad for rabbits such as Potatoes, Rhubarb, Tomatoes (especially their leaves) and Beans.





# Common Problems

## Dental/Teeth

Dental disease is common in rabbits.

Rabbits teeth grow at about 10-12 cm per year for the front ones and 3 cm for the cheek teeth. Overgrown teeth is a very common problem, therefore they need something to wear them down.

Problems can develop when rabbits are not receiving sufficient fibre in their diet, and may also be associated with a lack of calcium in their food.

It is important to ensure that a rabbit always gets sufficient abrasive fibre (grass or hay) in its diet to assist in wearing the teeth down.



## Types of teeth

### Incisors

These are used for grazing and gnawing through hard fibrous material such as roots.

Structurally they have a hard enamel on the front surface, which wears away more slowly than the rest of the tooth. This allows them to develop into a chisel shape, which is very sharp.

Rabbits have secondary incisors called peg teeth.

If the front teeth overgrow, then this can cause problems for the rabbit eating, as well as pain.

**Rabbits**  
need sufficient  
hay or grass to  
assist in wearing  
teeth down

### Molars

These are known as the cheek teeth.

They are used to grind the food into smaller particles.

If the molar teeth overgrow, this can stop the rabbit being able to close its mouth properly and be unable to chew properly. Sharp spikes can develop which will dig into the cheeks and the tongue.



## Common Problems (cont.)


### Gastric Stasis and Bloat

Gut stasis means that the digestive system slows down or stops completely and the contents become compact causing a blockage within the digestive tract. This often happens when rabbits don't get enough indigestible fibre, which is needed to keep the digestive tract mobile.

Gut stasis can also be caused by stress, lack of exercise, dramatic weight loss, or dehydration.

Gastric stasis allows bad bacteria to build up and release gas in the intestines, causing the rabbit to bloat. This is very painful and can be life threatening. Symptoms of gastric stasis and bloat include; swollen abdomen, small faecal droppings or no faecal dropping at all, loss of appetite, lethargic/subdued behaviours and hunched posture.

You can prevent gut stasis and bloat by providing rabbits with a healthy diet which should include a constant supply of good quality forage and fresh water. You should also allow them to have frequent exercise and monitor any change in the shape or size of your rabbit's droppings.



**Rabbits**  
with a low gut  
mobility are at  
a heightened risk  
of gut stasis

### Flystrike

This is a condition when flies lay their eggs in a warm moist environment, very commonly around the rabbit's anus, when sticky caecotrophs (faecal pellets) are attached to the fur. It normally occurs during warm weather. The eggs hatch out into maggots which then burrow under the skin, and will make the rabbit very ill. Rabbits most at risk are those that are overweight, or fed on an inappropriate diet. Poor hutch hygiene can also be a factor. Regularly checking your rabbit, especially during the summer, is important to ensure that flies do not lay their eggs.

### Prevention of Common Problems

- ✓ **Healthy Diet**
- ✓ **Regular Health Checks**
- ✓ **Vaccination**

There are two main diseases that rabbits should be vaccinated against to protect themselves.

**Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD)** is a disease caused by a virus that leads to internal bleeding. There is often little outwards symptoms until it is too late. Rabbits should be vaccinated annually.

**Myxomatosis** is spread by insects, such as mosquitoes and fleas. This means that although garden rabbits are most at risk, even rabbits that are kept in the house can still be infected. Signs include swelling on the head, mouth, nose and eyes, and also around the anus. The rabbit can develop secondary infections and may not be able to eat. It is usually fatal. Rabbits should be vaccinated regularly, at least once per year.



# 5 Welfare Needs of Rabbits

## 1. Suitable environment

Rabbits require a bedroom, a hutch. This should be mimicking the security provided by the burrow in the warren.

We suggest a minimum hutch size of 6ft x 2ft x 2ft. Another way of putting it, is that your rabbit should be able to **hop three or four times along the hutch**. The rabbit should be able to stand on its hind limbs with their ears pricked and not touch the roof.

The hutch should provide them their bedroom, dining room and bathroom, as they need separate areas for sleeping, eating and toileting.

Hutches should be off the ground to ensure they stay dry, as a damp floor can lead to breathing and leg problems. It should be out of the way of inclement weather, and sheltered from direct sunshine as rabbits are very prone to heat stroke. It should have good ventilation.

**Hutches**  
should be off  
the ground to  
ensure they  
stay dry

The floor of the hutch should be lined with newspaper, with a dust free bedding material placed on top. This could be hay, barley straw or dust free wood chippings. Shavings should be avoided as they have a high level of dust and can lead to respiratory problems.

Rabbits are clean animals and will create a 'toilet' in a corner of their hutch. This should have a deeper lining of newspaper and hay. Replace every 2-3 days.



## 2. A proper diet including fresh water and hay

**Hay or Grass** Forage helps to mimic the grass diet that rabbits would consume in the wild. It also helps to maintain good dental health, by wearing down rabbit's teeth which continuously grow. Hay should always be available, as a rough guide you should provide a bundle of hay which is roughly the size of your rabbit every day.

**Nuggets** Predominantly made up of grass and other fibrous ingredients, with additional vitamins and minerals to help maintain good overall health. Follow the feeding guide on the back of pack and adjust up or down as needed to maintain a healthy weight.

**Fresh Vegetables and Healthy Snacks** Greens provide variety and a tasty source of fibre. Getting creative and hiding small amounts of healthy snacks around a rabbit's hutch or enclosure can help to prevent boredom and maintain good emotional health. You can also hand feed snacks to help generate trust and bond with your pet.

**Water** Rabbits should have a constant supply of clean water.



## 3. Ability to express normal behaviour

Pet Rabbits are known to enjoy performing similar behaviours as wild rabbits such as running, hopping, digging and grazing. It is important when considering getting a rabbit that you can provide an environment that allows suitable accommodation for them to be able to carry out normal behaviours.

Exercise and ideally the ability to graze is important to ensure that they stay physically healthy, as well as providing them with emotional and physical enrichment. It helps to minimise behavioural problems such as fur plucking, which can occur if they are bored. Inadequate space reduces activity levels which is associated with weak bones, obesity, swollen limbs and behavioural issues.



#### 4. Companionship and other pets

Rabbits are social animals, enjoy companionship and should not be kept on their own. Housing them in pairs or groups is recommended. Rabbits from the same litter tend to get along, (i.e. bonded) as do females when mixed young. However introducing un-bonded rabbits can lead to aggression and fighting, so care must be taken when mixing rabbits.

Rabbits should not be housed with guinea pigs or chinchillas.

#### 5. Protection from and treatment of illness and injury


Rabbits should always be neutered as this decreases aggression in males, and removes the possibility of unwanted pregnancies. Ideally rabbits should be neutered from about fourteen weeks of age (females), and in the case of males when the testicles have descended.

It is important that the hutch and outside run are safe from predators. Rabbits are prey species, so have many predators such as dogs, cats and foxes. The hutch also needs to be rat proof.

You can make the whole garden rabbit and predator proof. However if you do this you must watch out for any poisonous plants.

#### SOME POISONOUS PLANTS TO BE AWARE OF:

Bindweed, Bryony, Buttercup, Bluebell, Crocus, Daffodil, Dock, Foxglove, Hyacinth, Laburnum, Poppy, Ragwort, Sorrel, Antirrhinum (Snapdragon), Tulip and Yew.

  
**Please note**  
this is not a  
complete list so  
always check if  
you are unsure

#### The Fur Rabbits

The Chinchilla, Beveren and the New Zealand



New Zealand Rabbit

#### The Fancy Rabbits

Himalayan, Flemish and Netherland Dwarf



Himalayan Rabbit

#### The Rex

Of which there are a large number of different colours



Rex Rabbit

There are  
over 60 breeds of  
**Rabbits**  
made up of over  
500 varieties\*

\*Source: British Rabbit Council



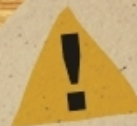
# Health and Wellbeing of your Rabbit

Health checks are important for your Rabbit. Owners should develop a routine to do this regularly...



## Regular health checks

- ✓ **Eyes:** Clear bright and alert
- ✓ **Ears:** Clean, dry and free from discharge
- ✓ **Nose:** Clean, dry and free from discharge
- ✓ **Teeth:** Front incisors should meet correctly
- ✓ **Coat:** Clean, free from knots and matting or bald spots. Should also be free from parasites such as fleas, mites or ticks
- ✓ **Bottom:** Clean and dry
- ✓ **Healthy weight:** Use our size guide to check your rabbit is maintaining a healthy weight (pg16-17)
- ✓ **Good appetite:** Rabbits should eat a good quantity of quality hay, some nuggets and fresh leafy vegetables.
- ✓ **Attentive and alert**



## Signs to look out for

- ! Subdued and not active/interacting as they would normally
- ! Discharge from eyes, ears or nose
- ! Over grown teeth, drooling or blood coming from the mouth
- ! Laboured breathing
- ! Changes in coat/matting/bald patches
- ! Parasites such as fleas, mites or ticks
- ! Reduced appetite
- ! Swollen abdomen
- ! Weight gain or loss
- ! Change in droppings consistency and shape
- ! Sticky, dirty bottom
- ! Heightened aggression
- ! Fur plucking

A proper diet is essential for the health of your rabbit

If you are concerned about the health of your rabbit consult a VET



# Rabbit Size Guide

## Score

## Characteristics

### 1 Very Thin

More than 20% below ideal body weight



- Hip bones, ribs and spine are very sharp to the touch
- Loss of muscle and no fat cover
- The rump area curves in

Your pet is very likely to be underweight. Your pet may have a naturally lean physique but we recommend you speak to your local vet to rule out any underlying medical reasons such as dental or kidney disease. If your pet is healthy but otherwise underweight, your vet is likely to advise some dietary and lifestyle changes.

### 2 Thin

Between 10-20% below ideal body weight



- Hip bones, ribs and spine are easily felt
- Loss of muscle and very little fat cover
- Rump area is flat

Your pet is thin and potentially underweight. Your pet may have a naturally lean physique but we recommend you speak to your local vet for a health check up. If your pet is healthy but otherwise underweight, your vet may advise some dietary and lifestyle changes.

### 3 Ideal



- Hip bones, ribs and spine easily felt but are rounded, not sharp – ribs feel like a pocket full of pens!
- No abdominal bulge
- Rump area is flat

Congratulations your pet is in ideal body condition! This is great news, as being at its ideal weight increases the chances of your pet living a long and healthy life. To keep your rabbit in tip top shape, monitor its weight and body condition on a regular basis (eg. once a month) and be careful what you and everyone else in the family feeds it.

### 4 Overweight

10-15% above ideal body weight



- Pressure is needed to feel the ribs, spine and hip bones
- Some fat layers
- The rump is rounded

Your pet is potentially overweight. Being overweight is unhealthy for pets as it can lead to a shortened lifespan, high blood pressure, heart disease, arthritis, cystitis and other health complications. Speak to your local vet for advice and a thorough health check-up. The vet will look for any underlying medical reasons as to why your pet may be too heavy. If there are no underlying health issues, a change of diet and lifestyle is suggested.

### 5 Obese

More than 15% above ideal body weight



- Very hard to feel the spine and hip bones – Ribs can't be seen
- Tummy sags with obvious fat padding
- Rump bulges out

Your pet is likely to be obese and this can have serious medical implications. Being overweight is unhealthy for pets as it can lead to a shortened life-span, high blood pressure, heart disease, arthritis, cystitis and other health complications. Speak to your local vet for advice and a thorough health check-up. The vet will look for any underlying medical reasons as to why your pet may be too heavy.

Produced by the PFMA



## With natural ingredients that bring out your Rabbit's personality

### Rabbit Nugget, Grass & Veg Mix

A healthy and tasty blend of nuggets with rye grass and veggies for variety and stimulation.

Feed alongside hay or grass, some fresh greens and occasional snacks.

#### Feeding guide Suitable for all rabbits

Rabbit Size	Daily amount of feed per Rabbit	
Dwarf 0.5 - 1 kg	25g	1 serving spoon
Small 1.5 - 2 kg	50g	2 serving spoons
Medium 2.5 - 3 kg	75g	3 serving spoons
Large 3.5 - 4 kg	100g	4 serving spoons
Giant 4.5 - 5 kg	125g	5 serving spoons

#### Specially blended to:

- Add variety and interest
- Encourage foraging behaviours
- Maintain healthy teeth
- Help digestion
- Stimulate the senses

### Snack Selection

A selection of three snack pots for Small Animals in easy to store containers

- Fruit Garden
- Vegetable Patch
- Flower Garden

### Garden Forage

A blend of five varieties of grass and hay topped with a delicious mix of flowers

- Mixed Hay
- Marigold
- Flower Petals

