Things To Know When..

Adopting a House Rabbit:





Diet:



- Have **unlimited timothy hay** available for your bunny. Oxbow brand has an excellent quality timothy hay. Probably the most inexpensive way of ordering it is by purchasing large bags through Chewy, rather than smaller bags from pet stores. Bunnies under 6 months can have unlimited alfalfa hay. After the bunny is more than 6 months old, **do not** continue to give them alfalfa hay.

- Only give **1/4 cup of timothy hay based pellets** a day (Oxbow brand “adult rabbit food” is great quality food for bunnies). Rabbits under 6 months old can get alfalfa based pellets (Oxbow brand “young rabbit food”). After the bunny is more than 6 months old, **do not** continue to give them alfalfa based pellets.

- **1 cup of raw veggies a day**. See attached list for which kinds are best to give more often than others. Romaine lettuce, cilantro, carrot tops (the leaves, not the orange carrot), and parsley are excellent options and usually inexpensive at grocery stores.

- Rabbits can have certain types of fruits (see attached list) but **very sparingly.** Do not give them fruit daily, and when you do give them fruit, give them one or two very small pieces. Fruit is high in sugar and can cause digestive issues and other illnesses if rabbits are given lots of it.





- **Oxbow Simple Reward Baked Treats for Small Mammals** (see examples to the left). There are many different flavors, all are great quality but do not give more than ONE treat a day. **Avoid** other commercial pet store treats such as yogurt drops or treats with food dye in them, as this can cause extreme digestive issues and even be fatal.

Suggested Vegetables and Fruits for a Rabbit

***NOTE: It is always preferable to buy organic produce if at all possible. If collecting wild foods such as dandelion greens, make sure they are from a pesticide-free area. All fresh foods regardless of the source should be **washed** before serving them to your rabbit.

LEAFY GREENS
Rabbits should get **1 cup of raw veggies** a day, but no more than that!

Leafy Greens (rabbits can have any of these daily):



- Parsley (regular or Italian)
- Cilantro
- Green leaf lettuce
- Red leaf lettuce
- Romaine lettuce
- Carrot tops (green leaves, not orange carrot)
- Spring greens
- Turnip greens
- Dandelion greens
- Mint
- Basil
- Radicchio
- Dill leaves

Other Leafy Greens (need to be rotated in your rabbit's diet and are **not** recommended daily):

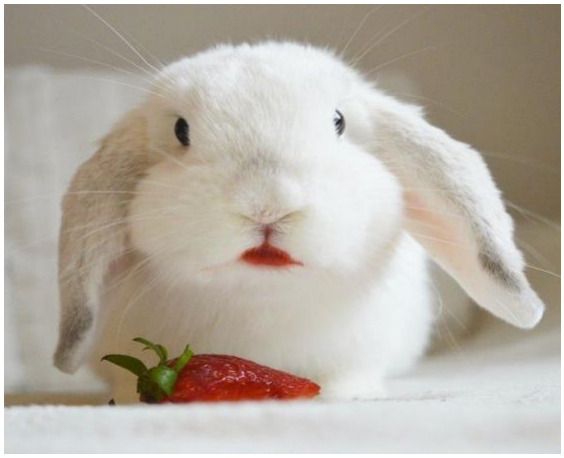
- Spinach
- Mustard greens
- Beet greens
- Kale
- Swiss chard

NON-LEAFY VEGETABLES & FRUITS
These should be no more than about 10 % of your rabbit's diet. Only give one piece of one kind of non-leafy veggie or fruit a day. These do not need to be a part of a rabbit's diet at all if you choose to leave them out as they are high in sugar for rabbits.

NOTE: If you are in doubt about the source of the fruit or veggie and you are concerned about chemicals on it, then please do not feed it to your rabbit.

- Carrots
- Broccoli (leaves and stems)
- Celery
- Bell peppers (any color)
- Summer squash
- Zucchini squash

- Apple (any variety)
- Cherries (any variety)
- Pear
- Peach
- Plum
- Kiwi
- Papaya
- Mango
- Berries (uncooked)
- Pineapple (remove skin)
- Banana (remove peel; no more than one slice a day for a 5 lb rabbit…they LOVE this!)
- Melons (any – can include peel and seeds)
- Star Fruit
- Apricot
- Nectarine



GI Stasis: A Deadly Condition



When considering rabbit health, it is important to note that rabbits tend to hide signs of ailing health because they are prey animals. In the wild, sick animals are pinpointed by predators first. This self-preserving instinct to hide illness lives on in domesticated rabbits, so it is critical to continually monitor your rabbit for any changes in behavior.

One very serious, fairly common health issue pet rabbits face is gastrointestinal stasis. GI (or gut) stasis is a potentially deadly condition in which the digestive system slows down or stops completely.

Bad bacteria then builds up in the intestines and releases gas into the system, causing very painful bloating and further decreasing a rabbit's motivation to eat or drink. This compounds the problem because the rabbit will become more dehydrated and starved of essential nutrients and roughage.

The contents of the digestive tract will become more compact, and the rabbit will have an even more difficult time passing it through. The bacteria can also release toxins into the system which overtax the liver and can cause the organ to ultimately fail.

Causes of GI Stasis in Rabbits

The slowdown of the digestive system can be caused by:

- A high starch, low fiber diet
- Stress (from losing a bonded mate, a change in environment, etc.)
- Pain from underlying issues (dental problems like molar spurs, urinary tract infections, gas, etc.)
- Lack of exercise

Signs of GI Stasis

If your rabbit is demonstrating any of these symptoms of GI stasis, **bring him/her to a rabbit-savvy vet immediately**:

- Small and/or malformed fecal pellets
- No fecal pellets
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy / hunched posture

Treatment of GI Stasis



When you bring your rabbit to the vet, he/she will try to determine the cause of the slowdown. If there is an underlying condition, it is imperative to address it. The vet may take x-rays to assess the blockage and the presence of gas. If the vet has determined that the best course of treatment is to stimulate motility in the gut, he/she may administer the following:

- Motility drugs that can help stimulate movement in the digestive system



- IV fluids which help soften the mass in the intestines
- Pain medication to alleviate discomfort due to gas buildup
- Syringe feeding of Oxbow Critical Care to ensure the rabbit continues to get essential nutrients
- Antibiotics to combat the overgrowth of harmful bacteria (used with caution because antibiotics can also disrupt the presence of good, essential bacteria in the digestive system)

It is also important to provide plenty of fresh hay and greens for the rabbit should he/she get the urge to eat. Providing particularly fragrant greens, like cilantro, may help entice a rabbit who is not overly eager to eat.

With these treatments, time, and patience, a rabbit suffering from GI stasis can make a full recovery. But it is important to recognize the symptoms early and take your rabbit to a rabbit-savvy vet immediately for these treatments.

How to Prevent GI Stasis



There are several measures you can take to help prevent the occurrence of GI stasis. First, ensure your rabbit is getting a proper, hay-based diet. A hay-based diet is essential not only because it provides the fiber necessary to keep the digestive system moving, it also helps wear down a rabbit's teeth which paves the way for better dental health.

Another way to prevent this condition is to bring your rabbit in for regular veterinary checkups. After examining your rabbit, a vet may be able to detect underlying health issues that your rabbit has so far successfully hidden from you, such as infections or dental problems.

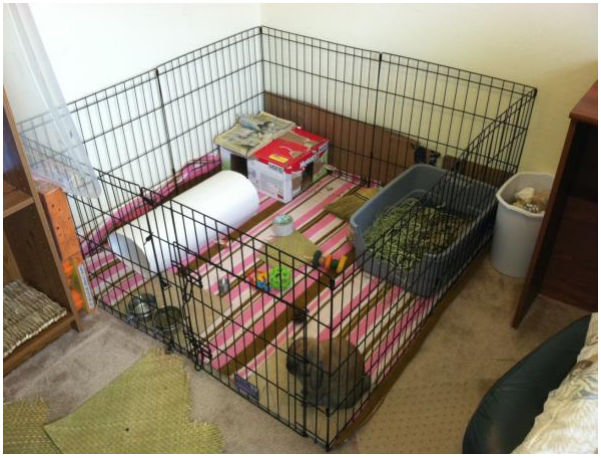
Third, evaluate your rabbit's living space. Rabbits need plenty of room to exercise in a bunny-proofed or supervised area. They do best when they are

included in family life, but they are prone to high stress levels when there are major changes to their environment and routine, such as the loss of a bonded partner or an influx of household visitors. So do your best to create a happy, healthy environment for your bunny.

Housing:

- **Exercise pens (x-pen)** work great to keep a rabbit in a confined area where they can still move around and get enough exercise. Make sure to socialize and have them out of this area at least a few hours a day though. For most rabbits, a 3 foot high (36 inch) exercise pen usually works well.





- Fleece blankets or rugs work well for flooring, especially if on a hardwood floor. If you notice your rabbit is chewing holes in the blankets or rugs, then remove the blankets/rugs so that the rabbit does not get sick.
- If your rabbit is on carpet, and begins to chew on the carpet, you can put tiles over the carpet that can easily be removed later on without harming the carpet underneath.

Toys:

- Cardboard boxes and paper towel rolls (without the paper towel, so just the cardboard roll) are great toys that can cause hours of amusement for a bunny rabbit. It is also okay for them to digest and chew cardboard, this should not cause them to get sick.





- Bunnies also love to play with baby teething toys, such as plastic stackable cups and plastic toy keys on a ring. Make sure the toys are a tough plastic (examples in pictures to the left). Avoid silicone based (these are usually squishy or liquid filled), so that your bunny doesn't bite through and somehow digest the silicone.

- To prevent boredom, you can rotate toys in and out of a bunny's enclosure so that they think they have "new" toys and will continue to chew and play with those, rather than chew on something you don't want them to chew on. If your bunny is completely house trained, or has their own room, try moving toys around to different areas of the house or different areas of their room, to keep them interested in the same toys instead of having to buy new ones.

Litter Box:

- Once rabbits are spayed or neutered, they begin using a litter box with often no assistance in training at all.
- Use a size large cat litter box. You can also use one with high sides, but make sure one side is lower for the bunny to hop in. This is helpful if you have a bunny that squats a little too far over the corner and accidentally gets urine next to the litter box instead of inside it.





- Sprinkle **wood stove/fuel pellets** that are aspen wood based **(NOT pine or cedar!)** on the bottom of the litter box and put timothy hay on top of the pellets for the bunnies to eat the hay right out of the litter box -they love doing this! Pine and cedar cause extreme respiratory issues and even respiratory failure, so make sure the wood pellets are aspen wood based. Examples of aspen wood stove/fuel pellets that can be found at Menards and Fleet Farm:









- You should **add hay daily** to their litter boxes, but will only need to dump them out and clean them once every 5-7 days.
- **Avoid** litter box cleaners from pet stores because they may cause irritation to your rabbit's respiratory system. **White (clear) vinegar** mixed with some water is very effective in cleaning a litter box and also to get rid of any odor left on the bottom of the litter box. Vinegar will not irritate your rabbit's respiratory system either.

Ceramic Food & Water Dishes:

- Ceramic food and water dishes work best for bunnies because they cannot chew through them, and they cannot flip them over as easily as a light plastic bowl. This way their water does not end up spilled and there is less mess.

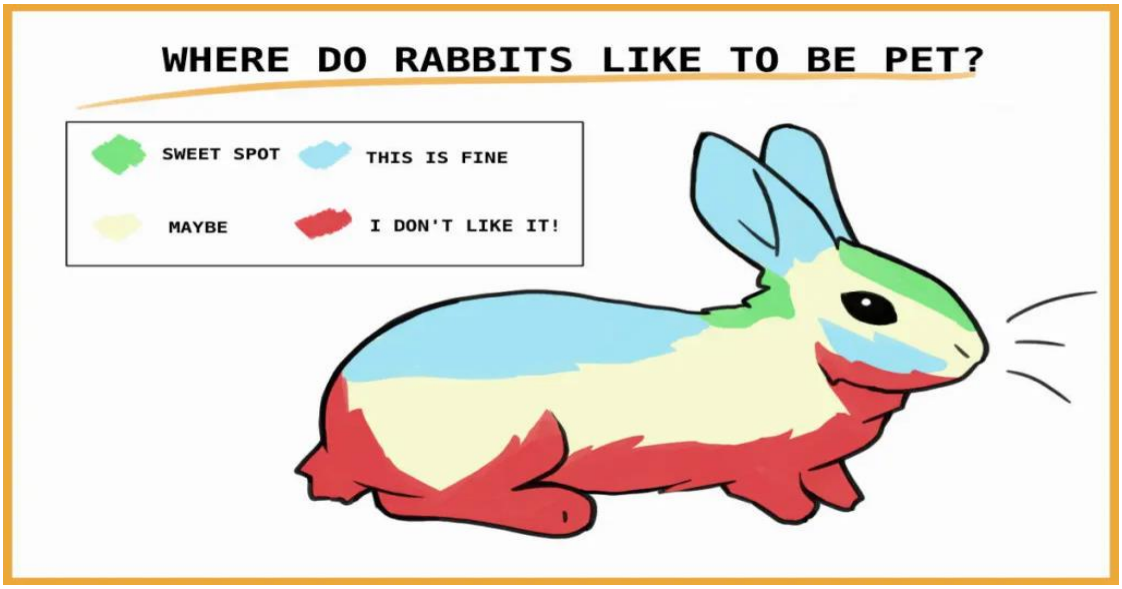
- Kaytee makes excellent ceramic water and food dishes specifically for small mammals. You can find these on Amazon or at a pet store.





Petting Your Rabbit:

- Rabbits LOVE to be pet on their face/forehead area. This is always the best way to start out with petting your rabbit so that they get used to you, before petting them elsewhere. It can be very scary to an undersocialized or shy rabbit if someone reaches from behind them and touches their back. Their back is where a predator would catch them, so this immediately puts them in a state of fear and makes them afraid of you.
- It is always best to have the rabbit COME TO YOU and not the other way around. One technique that has a lot of success in getting a rabbit to trust a person, is to sit on the floor with a treat either in your hand or on your lap and wait for the rabbit to come to you and take it from you. With very shy or very defensive bunnies, this may take awhile before they are willing to come to you. Once they do, you can keep doing this every day and eventually start to pet their foreheads, then their ears, the back of their neck, and eventually overtime be able to pet their backs.



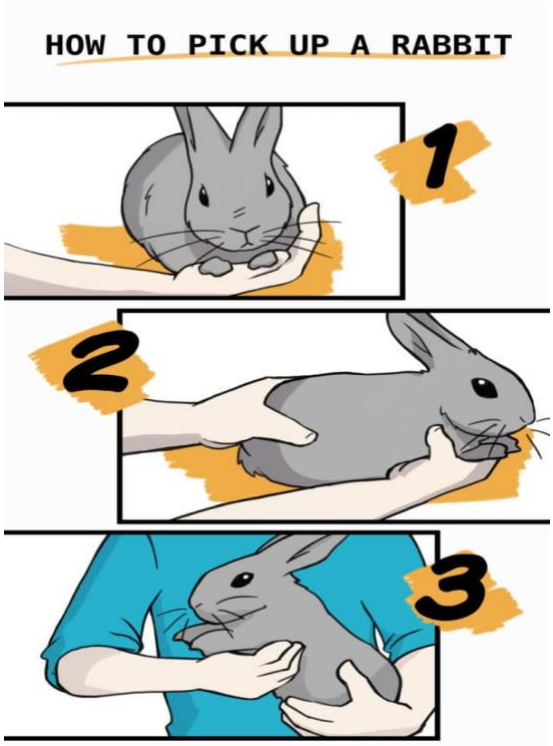
Grooming Your Rabbit:

- Rabbits are very clean animals and are constantly grooming themselves. However, you should **brush** your rabbit on a regular basis to keep their fur healthy and to avoid the formation of mats which can irritate the skin and even cause infections. You can also simply pull out the “tufts” of fur yourself with your fingers.
- Rabbits cannot cough up hairballs, so it is important to help groom them when they are shedding and to remove and wash blankets with lots of fur on, vacuum the area, sweep, etc.

- You should **never bathe your rabbit** unless you are advised to by a veterinarian or the rabbit is special needs. Baths are highly stressful for a rabbit and could cause them to fracture a limb or their spine if they are scared and thrashing around.

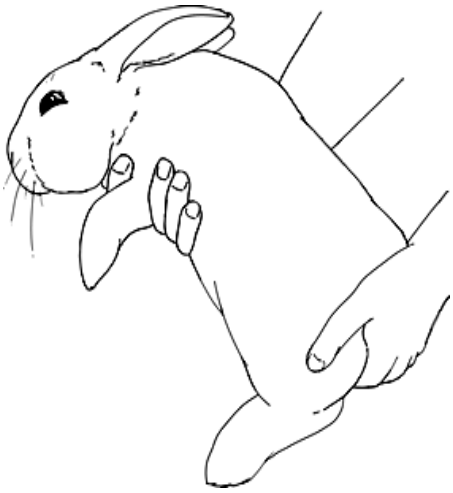
Holding Your Rabbit:

- It's common for rabbits to **not** like being held, and especially being picked up. Since they are prey animals, they are inherently scared when someone is reaching towards them and picking them up since this is how a predator would capture them.



- Start by petting their face/forehead, and then moving back to pet their ears, and eventually to grab them around their middle region. Then keep one hand around their middle while placing your other hand on their bottom.

- Since rabbit spines are fragile, make sure you have a secure hold on their bottom or hind legs so they cannot kick out their legs and damage their spine.



- You can then place the rabbit against your stomach or chest and continue to have one hand on their middle region and one on their bottom.

- **DO NOT** pick up a rabbit by the back of their necks! This is terrifying to a rabbit since this is how a predator would pick them up. It's also uncomfortable and can be painful, and can cause the rabbit to flail their legs and bend their spines leading to possibly damaging or breaking their spines.

- **DO NOT** hold a rabbit like an infant on their back with legs and arms out as seen below. This actually puts rabbits into a state of panic and fear. They can seriously injure themselves by trying to kick out of this hold and can also damage or break their spine.



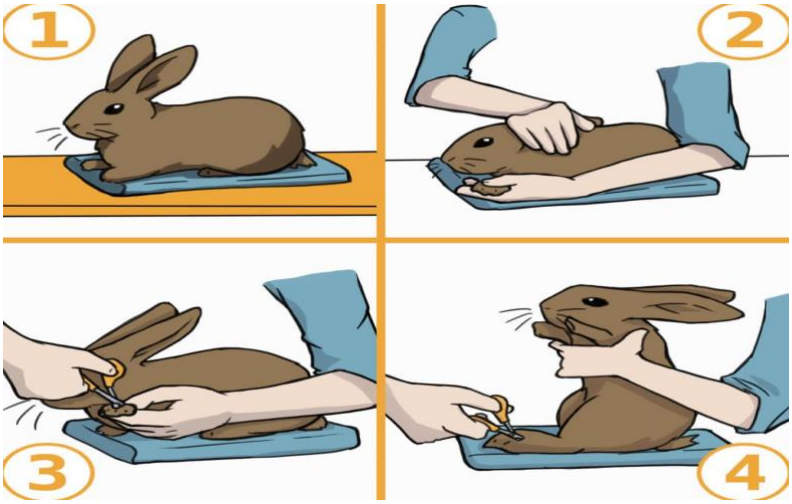
Nail Trimming:

- Rabbit nails constantly grow and should be trimmed about every 8 weeks, or once you notice they are getting long and sharp when you are handling your rabbit.
- You can trim the nails yourself with a small mammal nail trimmer as seen below:

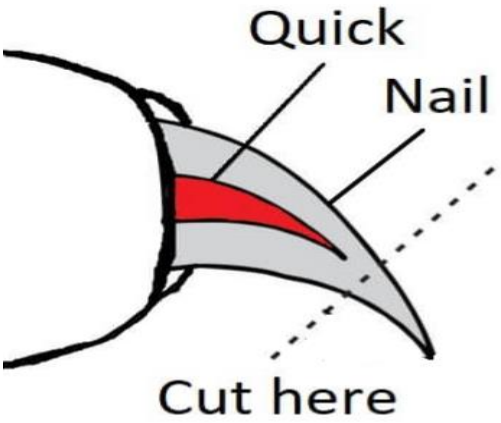




- Trimming bunny nails works best with two people - one person holding the rabbit around the rabbit's middle region with the rabbit's bottom resting on the person's lap or on a surface, and the other person holding the rabbit's paw and trimming the nails. If your rabbit is calm and cooperative with nail trims, then you might be able to have them sit on the ground with all 4 feet touching, while simply holding a paw and clipping the nails. Both of these techniques are shown in the picture below:



- To avoid trimming the "quick," or blood inside the nail, only clip off the tips of the nails before the red. In darker nails, this can be very difficult to see, so clipping less is better in this case.
- Many people do not feel comfortable trimming their rabbit's nails. Fortunately, we offer FREE nail trimmings for life for small mammals adopted from the Oshkosh Area Humane Society, so just give us a call to schedule an appointment for your bunny to get their nails trimmed.



Rabbit Proofing Your Home:

- Bunnies often like to chew on cords, especially phone chargers because the cord is often thinner. You can purchase plastic tubing to put over cords or even just electrical tape wrapped around cords can do the trick to deter your buns. However, your bun might still chew on the plastic tubing or electrical tape and that could be detrimental to their health if they digested it. The best option is to keep cords in places where bunnies can't get to them, like behind a heavy piece of furniture wedged between the wall and the furniture fixture. You can also use a few panels of an exercise pen to block off an area by a tv stand or computer desk where there are many exposed cords.
- Baby gates can also be an effective way to block off a room from a bunny, or to keep a bunny in just one bunny-proofed room.
- If you don't want a bunny to get comfortable chewing on something you don't want it to be chewing on, make sure to not give them toys made out of that same or similar material. For example, if a bunny is chewing on baseboards, do not continue to give them toys made of wood or plastic, and try to block the base boards with other furniture or x-pen panels.
- Rabbits are very **sensitive to warm temperatures** because they cannot sweat or pant, so they overheat very easily. Make sure temperatures stay between 60-75F because they can have heat stroke at just 80F.



Other Useful Resources:

- **WI House Rabbit Society:** this is a volunteer organization that rescues homeless rabbits and provides education on rabbit care. Please join their FB page to learn more about them and about rabbit care. Joining their FB page is also a great resource you can use to ask other rabbit enthusiasts questions and advice about caring for a house rabbit.
- The National House Rabbit Society has a webpage with lots of useful info on rabbit care, housing, diet etc.: www.houserabbit.org
- Your local **small mammal/exotics vet**. Make sure you make a **wellness exam** with your local small mammal vet as soon as you can after adopting your rabbit. They are another great resource to ask questions to. Once you are an established client with them, it is much easier to get an appointment if an urgent medical situation arises with your rabbit. This not only is helpful for your bunny, since your vet will know their medical history, but also will save you tons of money if you don't have to take your bunny to a 24 hour emergency veterinary hospital.

Thank you for choosing and supporting the Oshkosh Area Humane Society!

Small Mammal Vets in Fox Valley Area:

(Rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, & mice)

- **Animal Medical Center of Appleton (Dr. Chris Barber and Dr. Keri Weyenberg)**

  322 N Metro Drive

  Appleton, WI 54913

  (920) 749-1717

- **Birch Bark Veterinary Care (Dr. Jennifer Cyborski)**

  1055 Truman Street

  Kimberly, WI 54136

  (920) 738-7700

- **North Heights Veterinary Clinic (Dr. Laura Russo-Klister and Dr. Nicki Schaetzl)**

  1001 W Northland Ave

  Appleton, WI 54914

  (920) 729-7816

- **Appanasha Pet Clinic (Dr. Pat Laritson)**

  1205 Wittmann Drive

  Menasha, WI 54952

  (920) 725-8307

Outside of Fox Valley Area:

- **Brook-Falls Veterinary Hospital and Exotic Care**

  14850 W Lisbon Rd.

  Menomonee Falls, WI 53051

  262-781-5277

- **UW-Madison Veterinary Care: Special Species Services & Exotics**

  2015 Linden Dr.

  Madison, WI 53706

  608-263-7600