



Potter League
Enriching Lives

YOUR FIRST HOUSE RABBIT

Congratulations! We are excited that you have decided to adopt a bunny. We want this to be a positive experience so that you and your bunny can live happily together for a long time. Here are a few tips to help you get started.

Like all companion animals, rabbits should be kept inside with the family. Since rabbits are particularly susceptible to heat, cold and dampness, they need to live in a controlled climate. Although you'll want to give your rabbit supervised run of the house, he will need a place of his own for security and quiet time.

Rabbits are very clean animals and like their environments to be tidy too. You should clean your rabbit's cage two to three times a week. Rabbits will tend to use just one corner of their cage for their bathroom, so you'll want to put a litter box in a corner of the cage in order to facilitate litter-box training. Line the box with newspaper or use pelleted-newspaper litter, and spot clean the litter box daily. Never use clay cat litter or wood shavings for litter. These products can result in respiratory or gastrointestinal problems. You should also put a litter box outside of your rabbit's cage for him to use when he has free run of the house. Remember that rabbits love to chew, so you'll need to keep electrical cords out of reach or covered with vinyl tubing to prevent electrocution. You'll also want to keep ALL your house plants out of your rabbit's reach. Some can be poisonous!

Bunny Handling

Many people are disappointed to learn that their bunny does not like to be held. But consider for a moment the natural history of the rabbit. This is a ground-dwelling animal and a prey item for many predators. Holding her while she struggles and kicks is not only dangerous for the human (bunnies will bite!), but also for the rabbit. Rabbits can break their backs if not handled correctly. Always let your rabbit know you're there by placing your fist on the ground and allowing her to sniff the back of your hand. To pick up your rabbit, gently slide one hand underneath her body behind her front legs, and with your other hand, support her back end, scooping her up in one motion. Quickly bring her close to your body for added support. Rabbits will kick and squirm if they feel insecure and can break their backs if handled incorrectly. Rabbits aren't very agile, so you'll need to hold your rabbit firmly to prevent her from falling or jumping out of your arms.

If you have children, be sure to supervise them whenever they handle the rabbit. Never allow them to pick up the rabbit by her ears or let her body hang. A rabbit's natural instinct is to be close to the ground, so it's best to have the children sit on the floor until your rabbit becomes more comfortable being held.

How to Earn Your Bunny's Trust

Here's the best way to win your new rabbit's trust:

- Remember that a rabbit, unlike a dog or cat, evolved as a prey species. Therefore, most rabbits are naturally shy. It is up to you to be flexible, compromise and alter your behavior so that the bunny understands that you are a friend.



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- You and bunny should be together in a private, quiet room. No other pets. No distractions.
- Have a little treat, such as a carrot, piece of apple, dried papaya or banana in your hand.
- Lie on your tummy on the floor and open the door to the bunny's hutch. Do this at ground level so that your bunny can come out and go into the hutch as she pleases. Having to grab your bunny every time you want her to come in or out can undo hours of patient trust building!
- Don't expect her to approach you right away. Remain quiet and patient, even if it takes an hour or more. Rabbits are naturally curious, and eventually she will come over to sniff you.
- Resist the temptation to reach out and pet the bunny. Instead, let her sniff you, hop on you and get to know your smell. This will teach her that you are not a threat and that nothing bad happens when she approaches you.
- If the bunny finds the treat you have, hold it while she nibbles. Resist the urge to pet if she's shy!
- Do this every day. Gradually, you can start to pet the bunny by giving her a gentle "scratch" on the forehead (bunnies love this!). Never force anything and never chase the bunny. This will only undo all the patient sitting you have done to gain her trust.
- Once the bunny learns that you are a friend, she will bond very strongly to you. It's important to have your bunny neutered or spayed once he or she reaches sexual maturity; otherwise, your bunny will want to make love to everything.