



The 4-H Rabbit Project:

AN INTRODUCTION

UNIVERSITY
OF WYOMING
Cooperative Extension Service

12204C
October 2003

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2003

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Acknowledgments

Some of the material (both information and illustrations) for this publication came from 4-H rabbit project manuals published by Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and other state Cooperative Extension Service presses. Information also came from *The Standard of Perfection* (2001 Edition) published by the American Rabbit Breeders Association and the rabbit manuals published by National 4-H CCS. These contributions are greatly appreciated.

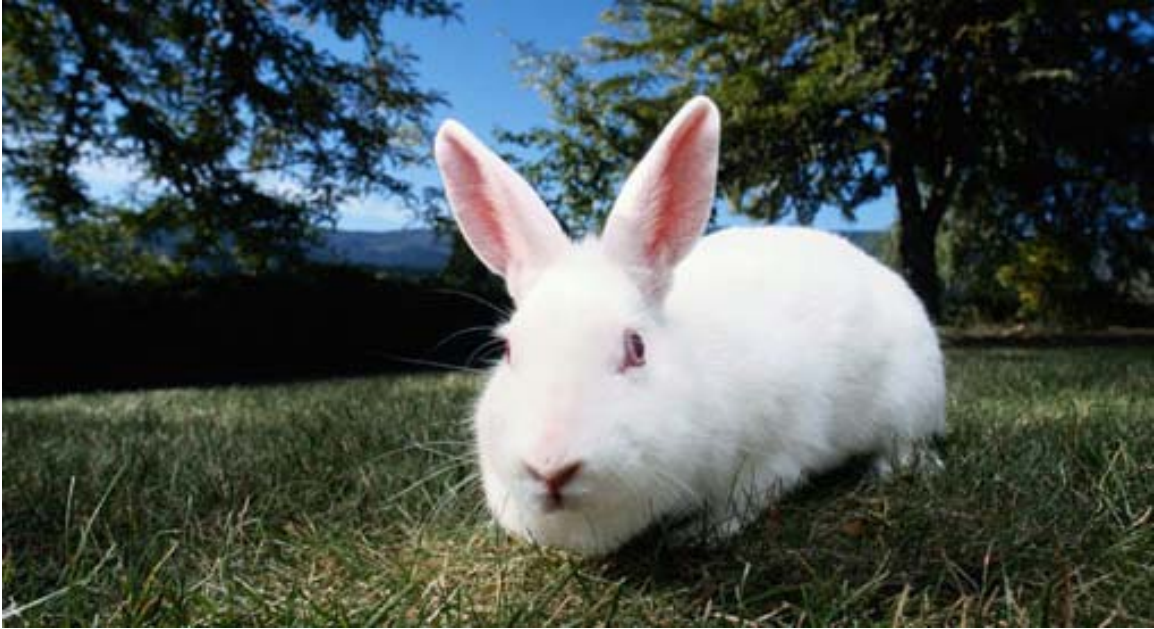
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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Glen Whipple, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming 82071.

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Introduction

A 4-H rabbit project is an exciting and educational opportunity for 4-H members. It requires very little room, expense, or daily chore time. It is also a short-term project, especially when compared to horse, cattle, swine, sheep, and goat projects. Rabbits are also much smaller and easier to control and handle.

Selecting a Rabbit Project

There are two main types of rabbit projects: exhibition rabbits and market rabbits, which are known as fryers. The exhibition project is designed for 4-H members with an avid interest in rabbits, rabbit production, and the rabbit industry as a whole. The market rabbit project is designed for club members interested in rabbits but to a lesser degree. In keeping with the name of the project, a market rabbit project participant raises young rabbits (known as kits), feeds and cares for them, fits and grooms them, shows them, and fi-

nally sells them. In most instances a fryer project participant is required to own the doe (mother of the kits) before she kindles (gives birth).

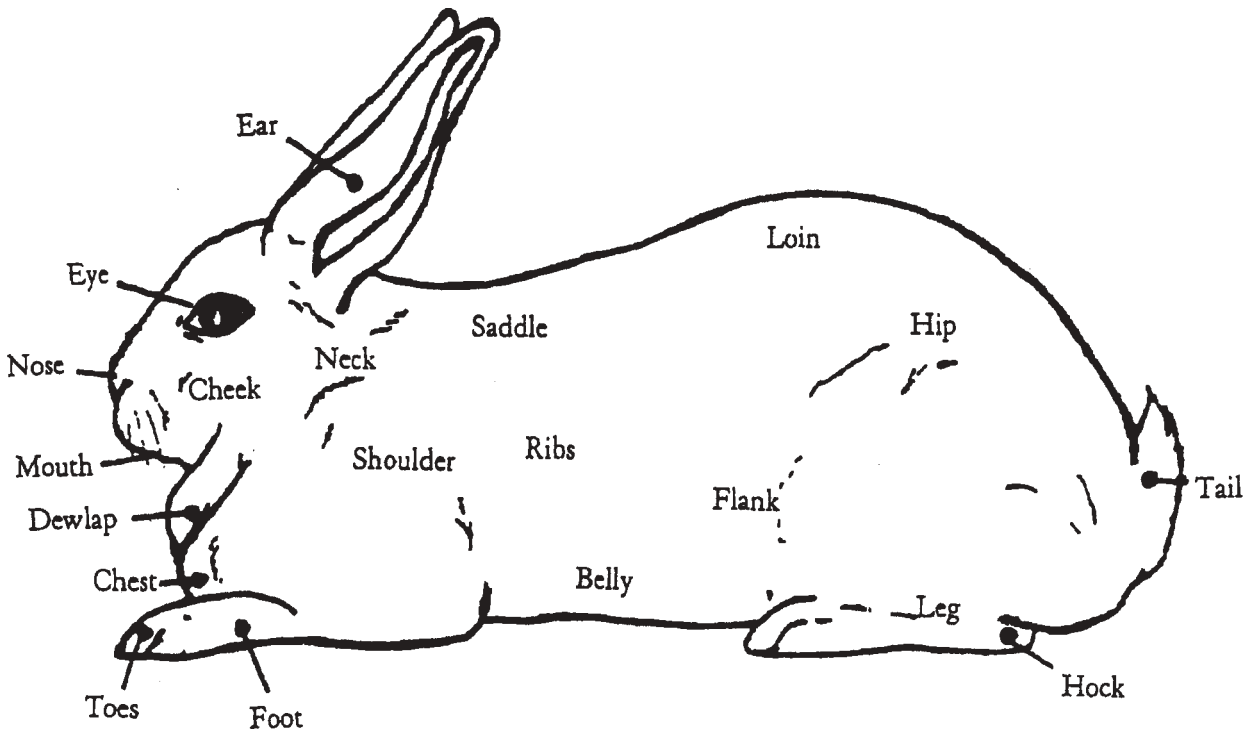
A club member who chooses an exhibition rabbit project also feeds, cares for, fits, grooms, and shows rabbits. However, in contrast to fryer project participants, exhibition rabbit project participants exhibit breeding rabbits (bucks and does) which are not sold at a county fair youth sale. A club member is able to return home with these rabbits and to continue to care for them to produce kits. These kits are then kept to show, to sell to a market, and/or to sell to other club members for their projects.

The rabbit project is one of the most popular 4-H projects in the United States. Rabbits grow fast and cost less to raise than most other types of livestock. A rabbit project also requires less room, less daily chore time, less expense (for both feeding and housing), and is a short-term project (for fryers).

Parts of a Rabbit

Selecting a rabbit to show is as important as the feed and care given to a rabbit once it comes home. A rabbit project should begin with a healthy and high-quality rabbit.

Before one can identify and select a high-quality rabbit, it is necessary to know what such a rabbit looks like. The first step in this process is to learn the important parts of a rabbit. The drawing illustrates these parts.



Rabbit Terms

Understanding the vocabulary used by rabbit producers, exhibitors, and judges is also a necessary step in learning about rabbit selection and production. Knowing the terms listed below will be of great assistance when communicating with people in the rabbit business.

ARBA: American Rabbit Breeders Association, which is the recognized authority on the subject of rabbits

agouti: a hair that has three or more bands of color with a definable or distinct break between each color

albino: a white rabbit with pink eyes

back: the entire top portion (between the neck and tail) of a rabbit

belly: the lower portion (behind the front legs) of a rabbit

dewlap: the large area of loose skin which hangs from the throat; this is more common in does

breed: a group of animals with common ancestry and with similar characteristics that are passed on from generation to generation

breeder: the owner of animals that are mated

buck: an uncastrated male rabbit

condition: the physical state of a rabbit which refers to its health, cleanliness, degree of fat, fur texture, state of molt of the fur, and grooming

crossbred: an animal with parents of different breeds

dam: the mother of a particular animal

doe: a female rabbit

ear canker: an inflamed and scabby condition inside the ear

flank: the side portion between the ribs and hips and above the belly of a rabbit

four-class rabbits: a show category for rabbit breeds that have an adult weight of less than nine pounds

fryer: a young meat rabbit that weighs less than five pounds

hock: the hind leg joint between the foot and the hip

intermediate: an age division (six to eight months old) used for showing six-class rabbits

junior: an age division (under six months old) used for showing all classes of exhibition rabbits

kindling: the process of giving birth to kits

kits: baby rabbits that weigh less than one pound

litter: a group of kits from the same birthing

molt: the process of shedding hair; in the rabbit business, this term is sometimes spelled as moult

pedigreed: an animal whose name and assigned number have been recorded in the record books of its respective breed association; this record also includes the name and assigned numbers of the animal's sire and dam

purebred: an animal with same-breed parents that could be recorded in an association registry

The Standard of Perfection: a book published by ARBA that describes and illustrates the desired characteristics of each rabbit breed

senior: an age division used for showing exhibition rabbits; in four-class breeds the age is more than six months old, and for six-class breeds the age is more than eight months old

sire: the father of a particular animal

six-class rabbits: a show category for rabbit breeds with an adult weight of more than nine pounds

weaning: the process of removing kits from the mother which normally occurs at four to eight weeks old

wool: the descriptive word for the fur of Angora rabbits

wolf teeth: protruding or elongated incisors (teeth) caused by improper tooth alignment; also known as buck teeth

Rabbit Breeds

There are more than 40 recognized breeds of rabbits in the United States. There are also many varieties (color variations) associated with most of these breeds. As a result, rabbits will vary greatly in size and purpose (meat, fur, or fancy), which means that no single breed is the best for all purposes. Breeds such as the New Zealand, Californian, Chinchilla, Champagne d'Argent, and Palomino are best suited for the production of meat. Breeds such as the Netherland Dwarf, Dutch, Polish, Havana, Mini Lop, and Holland Lop are best suited as pets or fancy rabbits because of their smaller size. An Angora is raised primarily for its wool. Rex and Satin are examples of fur breeds. Complete details and descriptions of each breed can be found in *The Standard of Perfection* published by the American Rabbit Breeds Association. It is recommended that all individuals interested in rabbits obtain a copy of this publication since it serves as the authority and reference for the rabbit industry in the United States.

Deciding upon a breed of rabbit to show is often a difficult decision for first-time participants. The decision should rest upon the purpose for raising a rabbit. Color,



color pattern, and other breed characteristics often play a major role in the decision-making process. However, it is not practical to select a breed simply on looks. The choice of breed affects many things such as the size of the hutch that will be required, the amount of care that is required for proper development of the fur, and the age when breeding can begin. As a result, it is recommended that before buying a rabbit an individual should read about rabbits, read about the various rabbit breeds, visit with rabbit producers, attend rabbit shows, and seek out places where many different breeds can be observed.

Furthermore, when visiting with producers and attending rabbit shows, just look, listen, and learn the first few times — try not to buy. This will not be easy to do because there will be lots of rabbits for sale, and it will be very tempting to take one or two home. One should delay the purchase until understanding the care that is required for the various breeds, finding a breed of interest, making sure that the care of the breed matches the time available, and making sure the breed fits one's needs as a producer. Thus, it is important to decide upon the type of rabbit to raise before a purchase is made. Is the rabbit to be raised for meat, for wool or fur, for pet purposes, or for production and exhibition of the breed selected? Remember, different breeds of rabbits have been developed for certain characteristics. Table 1 has been provided to assist in determining some of the differences in these characteristics. It is important to review this table and understand the characteristics associated with each breed.

Table 1. Selected Breeds and Varieties of Rabbits
(As recognized by the American Rabbit Breeders Association)

Breed of Rabbit	Variety of Rabbit	Mature Weight		Purpose		Show Popularity
		Buck	Doe	Meat	Fur	
American	Blue, White	9	10	Very Good	Very Good	Fair
Angora, English	Black, Blue, Fawn, White	6	7	Small	Fine Wool	Fair
Angora, French	Black, Blue, Fawn, White	8	8	Good	Fine Wool	Fair
Beveren	Black, Blue, White	9	10	Good	Good	Good
Californian		9	9.5	Very Good	Very Good	Very Popular
Champagne D'Argent		10	10.5	Very Good	Very Good	Good
Checked Giant	Black, Blue	11+	12+	Good	Good	Fair to Good
Chinchilla, American		10	11	Very Good	Very Good	Fair & Increasing
Chinchilla, Giant		13+	14+	Very Good	Very Good	Fair to Good
Dutch	Black, Blue, Chocolate, Gray, Steel Gray, Tortoise	4.5	4.5	Small	Small	Good to Popular
English Spot	Black, Blue, Chocolate, Gold, Gray, Lilac, Tortoise	6	7	Small	Fair	Fair to Good
Flemish Giant	Black, Blue, Fawn, Gray, Sandy, Steel Gray, White	14+	15+	Very Good	Very Good	Popular
Florida White		5	5	Small	Good	Fair
Havana	Blue, Chocolate	6	6	Small	Very Good	Popular
Himalayan		3.5	3.5	Small	Very Good	Fair
Lop	English, French	10+	11+	Very Good	Fair	Not Popular
Netherland Dwarf	Many, many, many kinds	2	2	Small	Poor	Fair & Increasing
New Zealand	Black, Red, White	10	11	Excellent	Very Good	Very Popular
Palomino		9	10	Very Good	Very Good	Fair & Increasing
Rex	Many, many, many kinds	8	9	Very Good	Good	Fair
Sable		8	9	Good	Good	Fair
Satin	Californian, White	9.5	10	Good	Very Good	Not Popular
Silver Fox		10.5	10.5	Good	Good	Fair to Good
Silver Marten	Black, Blue, Choc, Sable	7.5	8.5	Good	Good	Good
Tan	Black, Blue, Choc, Lilac	4	4.5	Small	Fair	Good

Housing, Care, and Feeding

Successful rabbit producers have to take care of many details in order to ensure that their animals are comfortable. After all, a comfortable rabbit is more likely to be healthy and grow efficiently. There are five main items that influence or affect the comfort level of rabbits: (1) high-quality housing, (2) environmental control, (3) clean feed, (4) fresh water, and (5) the company of its owner because of the tender loving care (TLC) provided.

No matter how old or healthy a rabbit is, it will not do very well without a proper place to live. A rabbit needs a proper home (usually called a hutch) as well as proper care, feeding, and watering. The housing for rabbits may be simple and inexpensive, or it may be as elaborate and as expensive as one wants to make it. Either way it must be functional both for the owner and for the rabbit. The housing must provide protection from the heat, sun, wind, rain, and cold as well as protection from predators. The basic requirements of rabbit housing are very simple:

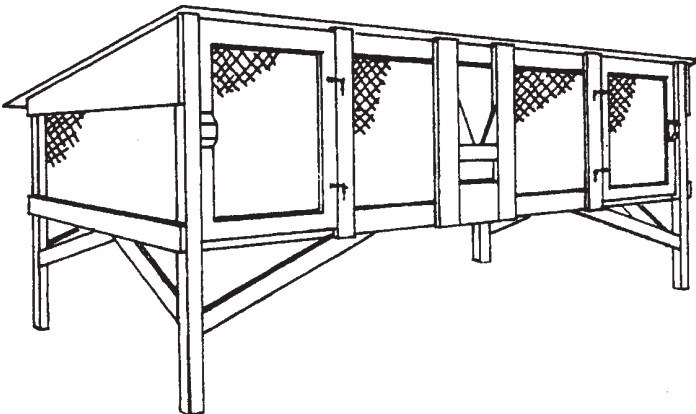
- space for resting, feeding, water, and movement

- protection and escape from the weather and from predators (dogs, opossums, foxes, coyotes, and many others)
- adequate ventilation to avoid stale air and moisture buildup

Space requirements vary according to the breed of a rabbit. The larger a rabbit, the more space it needs. Smaller rabbits, such as Netherland Dwarfs or Mini Lops, only require two to three square feet of floor space. The very large breeds such as Checkered Giant or Flemish Giant require about twice as much room — five to six square feet of floor space. Finally, breeds that are in between these two size extremes such as Silver Marten or New Zealand require about three to five square feet of floor space. As a result, it is important to design a rabbit hutch so that it matches the space requirements for the breed that was selected for the project.

As previously discussed, environmental control tends to go along with housing. Since rabbits prefer temperatures of 50 to 60 degrees, there are two areas of concern when discussing environmental comfort: cold and/or wet weather as well as hot and/or dry weather. In cold and/or wet weather, a place to get out of the weather (a hutch) must be supplied. In extremely cold weather, a source of heat may also be required. Perhaps the easiest and most effective way to provide heat is with additional bedding and the use of heat lamps or lightbulbs, depending on whether the heat source will be placed inside or outside of the hutch.

Safety note: To avoid a possible fire hazard, an adult should set up heat lamps or lightbulbs.



Since rabbits do not sweat, a source of shade (a hutch) must be provided in hot and/or dry weather. Also, doublecheck to make sure that the drinking water is cool, clean, and fresh. If the shade and drinking water are not providing enough relief, additional cooling must be provided. Usually an electric fan is all that is needed. However, if this is insufficient, a sprinkler or mister system used in conjunction with a fan should provide enough cooling.

Safety note: Water and electricity are not a good mix. Therefore, an adult should set up a fan and sprinkler or mister system.

Cool, clean, and fresh drinking water must be available at all times. If using an automatic watering system, check the system daily. After all, if it isn't working, it isn't automatic. As a result, the rabbits will not be getting the water they need.

If using a crock, bowl, or water bottle, make sure to change the water several times each day. Drinking water should never be allowed to get hot. In the winter, make sure the water does not freeze. This is important because rabbits, like other animals, will not grow properly without sufficient water. Regardless of the season, all watering equipment should be checked and cleaned on a regular basis to ensure that it is providing plenty of cool, clean, and fresh water.

Providing fresh water and clean feed are essential parts of a successful rabbit project. In the past, producers had to mix different feed ingredients in order to achieve the proper nutrition for their rabbits. However, this has changed because most feed stores now carry pelleted rabbit feed that is already nutritionally balanced.



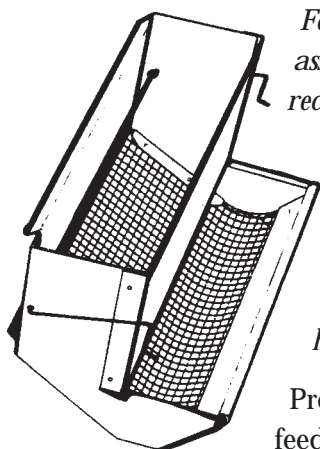
Of course, simply buying a sack of feed does not ensure a proper feeding program.

The amount fed, the condition of rabbit, the time of feeding, the development or gestation stage of the rabbit, and many other factors must be considered and evaluated in order to ensure a proper feeding program. Young rabbits need feed that is 17 to 18 percent protein, whereas a mature rabbit only needs feed that has a protein content of 15 to 16 percent. However, regardless of the age of the rabbit, the feed should also have a fiber content of at least 16 percent because if a rabbit gets less than that, it is very likely to have problems with diarrhea.

Furthermore, the amount to feed will vary according to the size of the rabbit. Smaller breeds only need about three to four ounces per day, mature rabbits from medium-sized breeds require about six ounces per day, and the larger breeds require about eight ounces per day. As one can tell, this is not very much feed. As a result, overfeeding is one of the most common errors that beginning producers make. Therefore, Table 2 has been compiled to assist in determining how much feed to provide.

Table 2. Rabbit Feeding Guidelines

Type or Age of the Rabbit	Amount of Pellets to Feed per Day		
	Small Breeds	Medium Breeds	Large Breeds
Buck	2 to 4 ounces	4 to 6 ounces	6 to 9 ounces
Doe	2 to 3 ounces	4 to 5 ounces	6 to 8 ounces
Doe, bred 1 to 15 days	2 to 3 ounces	4 to 5 ounces	6 to 8 ounces
Doe, bred 16 to 30 days	3 to 4 ounces	6 to 8 ounces	9 to 11 ounces
Doe, with week-old litter	6 to 8 ounces	8 to 10 ounces	10 to 12 ounces
Doe, with month-old litter	10 to 14 ounces	14 to 18 ounces	20 to 24 ounces
Doe, with 6 to 8-week-old litter	18 to 22 ounces	24 to 28 ounces	30 to 36 ounces
Weaned Rabbit, 8 weeks old	2 to 3 ounces	3 to 5 ounces	5 to 7 ounces



Feeding hint: Due to the dust associated with pelleted feed, it is recommended that feeders have screened bottoms to allow dust to fall through. This will result in less dust being inhaled by a rabbit while it is eating; thus, it will be healthier.

Providing the proper feed and feeding program are very important to the success of a rabbit project. Thus, it is essential for a purchased rabbit to be fed the kind of feed it received before it was purchased. Therefore, when a rabbit is bought, it is advisable to request about five to seven days' worth of the feed it was receiving. For the first couple of days, provide the feed as it was received. During days three and four, provide a mixture of about one-third new feed with two-thirds of the original feed. During the following days, change this mixture to half and half and finally to one-third original feed with two-thirds new feed. After about a week, a rabbit should be switched from the original

feed to the new feed. By following this slow procedure, a rabbit will not be as likely to get sick because of having its feed changed. This procedure should be followed whenever the feed changes.

Feeding note: Many beginners are tempted to feed greens, carrots, turnips, sweet potatoes, and other fresh vegetables to their rabbits. This is not recommended because the supply may get depleted, forcing a feeding change that could make a rabbit sick.

By feeding according to the guidelines and recommendations shown in Table 2 and following the items listed below, few feeding problems should be encountered and a more successful and enjoyable rabbit project will be the result. For questions or concerns regarding the care or feeding of a rabbit, contact a county Cooperative Extension Service office for assistance and advice.

- Provide clean, clear, cool, and fresh water.
- Begin by feeding small amounts of the ration.

- Feed only what is required and feed a balanced ration.
- Feed at the same time each day and try to feed every 12 hours.
- Do not skip any feedings or vary feeding times.
- Gradually increase the amount fed.
- When changing feeds, gradually change from one to another. Mix them together (first more of the original and then more of the new one) and make the change over 5 to 7 days.
- If a rabbit goes off its feed, start over by reducing the amount fed and then slowly bring the rabbit back to full feed by gradually increasing the amount of feed given at each feeding.

Health Care

In order to have a successful rabbit project, it is extremely important to start with a healthy rabbit and to maintain the health of the rabbit throughout the project. Therefore, one must be able to identify the difference between a healthy rabbit and an unhealthy rabbit.

A healthy rabbit will be alert, frisky, playful, and bright eyed. It will have an erect tail and erect ears (unless the breed has lop ears) and appear happy to see its caregiver. A healthy rabbit will drink plenty of water and eat with eagerness. The stool (manure) will be pelleted, firm, and moist.

An unhealthy rabbit will have a decreased appetite. It will not drink as much and will not be frisky or appear happy. The rabbit will also appear listless, depressed, shrunken, and dull eyed. The stool may be

very dry and hard (constipation) or just the opposite – very watery and loose (diarrhea). The tail and ears will not be held in their normal positions. The nose may appear runny and/or encrusted with dirt. The body temperature may be higher than the normal temperature of 102 to 103 degrees.

If a rabbit appears to be sick, there are two very important steps to follow: tell an adult and separate the sick animal from the other rabbits. After getting advice from a veterinarian or other professional, follow that advice very carefully.

Many diseases and health problems may affect a rabbit. Most of these are fairly easy to control once the problem is identified and the proper treatment is provided. See Table 3 for a summary of diseases, symptoms, prevention, and treatment. Most health problems can be avoided or kept to a minimum by following these seven simple steps:

- Buy only healthy rabbits from healthy herds.
- Keep vaccinations up to date.
- Only provide feed and water that are clean and fresh.
- Clean the pen at least once a week.
- Clean the waterers and feeders at least once a week; twice a week is much better.
- Remove and replace bedding that is wet and/or dirty as soon as it is noticed.
- Watch rabbits closely and on a daily basis for signs of sickness. Inform an adult if a rabbit appears to be sick.

Table 3. Common Diseases of Rabbits

Disease	Symptoms	Cause	Clinician/Prevention	Treatment
abscess	swelling under the skin, usually where there was a cut	bacterial infection	reduce fighting and eliminate or remove sharp objects	clip fur, lance, drain pus, and apply an approved antibiotic
blue breast or mastitis	mammary gland is swollen and tender; blue streaks appear	bacterial infection from injury to the mammary gland	reduce chance of injury while the doe enters and leaves the nest box	disinfect nest box, penicillin is usually effective
buck teeth, wolf teeth, or malocclusion	difficulty in eating, lower teeth protrude, upper teeth are long and curve into mouth	inherited defect, must be carried by both parents for it to show up	do not use rabbits with buck teeth or the babies of these rabbits for breeding purposes	teeth can be cut or trimmed in order to get the rabbit to market weight
coccidiosis	poor appetite, dull, listless, weight loss, diarrhea, rough fur	protozoa (which is a one-celled parasitic animal)	use wire floors, keep pens clean, and prevent fecal contamination	disinfect pens, use sulfaquinoxaline in feed or water
ear canker	scabs or crust in the ear, shakes head, scratches head, and may also lose weight	ear mite	prevent contact with affected individuals	treat all rabbits with a cotton swab used to apply mineral, vegetable, olive, or baby oil to ear
eye infection	pus around eyes and they may stick shut	bacterial infection	usually found in kits, reduce drafts and stress	apply antibacterial ointment to eye
fur block or hair ball	eats small amounts of feed, a firmness can be felt in the stomach	swallowing large amounts of hair while preening itself	usually associated with breeds that have longer hair (like Angoras)	half an ounce of mineral oil, or surgery if large ball
heat stroke	panting, salivation, high breathing rate	lack of ventilation, temperatures above 85 degrees, and/or lack of water	provide ventilation and shade, reduce exposure to sunlight, provide plenty of cool water	apply cool compress to ears, submerge in cool water (not cold), place in shade
pneumonia	nasal discharge, hard breathing, fever	bacterial or viral infection	control snuffles, reduce drafts and moisture	an antibiotic is usually helpful
ringworm*	loss of hair or fur in circular patches	an infection caused by a fungus	do not permit contact with other animals	clip hair, treat with fungal medication
snuffles or pasteurellosis	nasal discharge, head shaking, watery eyes	upper respiratory bacterial infection	reduce stress, increase sanitation procedures	tetracycline in feed is usually effective
sore hocks	lies stretched out, scabs on hind legs	injury followed by an infection	avoid wet bedding, check for sharp objects	clean and disinfect the affected legs
vent disease or spirochetosis	blisters or dark scabs on external genitals	infection by a spirochete	increase sanitation and husbandry procedures	apply antibiotic and give penicillin
weepy eye or conjunctivitis	excessive tears that run down the cheek	inflammation of the eyelid	reduce sources of eye irritation- dirt, dust, etc.	use an eye wash to remove irritation

** Disease note: Ringworm can be transmitted to other animals and humans. Therefore, it is very important to always wear gloves when handling an infected rabbit (or other animal).*

Fitting and Grooming

Fitting and grooming do not start at a show or even during the week of a show; they start the day a rabbit comes home. Fitting a rabbit means feeding, watering, and otherwise caring for it so that it achieves and maintains proper condition. Proper condition means that a rabbit is neither too fat nor too thin. Proper condition has the same meaning for all rabbits. However, not all rabbits achieve proper condition at the same time or in the same manner. Some rabbits start to get fat at a young age, and others remain lean all the way to market weight. Therefore, it is important to observe a rabbit and regulate its feed intake according to its body condition.

Grooming a rabbit for exhibition is a simple and easy process especially since a rabbit does most of the work by cleaning itself on a daily basis. However, grooming, like fitting, does not start at a show or even during the week of a show; it starts the day a rabbit comes home. Rabbit grooming consists mostly of brushing the hair with a soft brush and cleaning the eyes, ears, and nose with a damp rag or cotton swab— all of which should be done on a regular basis from the day a rabbit arrives.

When a rabbit first arrives, brushing should be a weekly task. As the time for a show approaches, this should become a daily task because it results in a clean and shiny hair/fur coat. It also removes dead and dull skin particles and loose hair. Additionally, it creates a bond between the exhibitor and the rabbit. Furthermore, as the time for a show draws near, it is doubly important to make certain that the eyes, ears, and nose are clean because this extra cleaning results in clean, clear, and shiny skin.

The extra grooming time also provides additional opportunities to check each rabbit for any eliminations or disqualifications that may have arisen since it was last checked or shown. Some common problems that might arise are a chipped tooth, a missing toenail, or a change in weight. If a problem is located, perhaps it can be corrected with special or additional care, or maybe another rabbit can be selected and groomed as a replacement. Most shows allow substitutions if a rabbit is from the same owner, is the same breed, is the same variety, is the same sex, and is in the same age classification. However, before substituting one rabbit for another, check with show officials to make sure of the rules for a particular show.

Grooming note: No amount of grooming can correct or make up for a poor job of feeding, care, and management of a rabbit.



Showing a Rabbit

Showing a rabbit, like fitting and grooming, does not start at a show; it starts at home. It begins with the feeding, exercising, brushing, care taking, and other tasks that should be done from the very first day that a rabbit arrives at its new home.

Proper feeding gets a rabbit to the desired show weight. Proper care gets it in show condition (lean, not fat). Brushing the fur, cleaning the eyes and ears, and other grooming techniques make a rabbit neat, clean, and otherwise presentable to a judge.

Training a rabbit begins by earning its trust and confidence and by making friends with it. This is accomplished by playing with it, brushing it, petting it, and otherwise spending time with it. The exhibitor must know what is expected of himself or herself and the rabbit. He or she must also possess some basic knowledge about rabbits such as terms, breeds, feeding, and showing. After all, showmanship is an activity in which an exhibitor gets to show that he or she knows how to handle a rabbit and gets to demonstrate his or her knowledge of rabbits and rabbit care.

Showmanship tip: Each exhibitor should know the parts of his or her rabbit, its breed, its age, its sex, how much it is being fed, and the protein percentage of the feed being provided to the rabbit.

The first thing for an exhibitor to learn about rabbit showmanship is what will be expected of him or her and the rabbit. The second thing for an exhibitor to learn is the basic information (breed of rabbit, amount being fed, parts of the rabbit, etc.) that will be requested by a judge. The next items for an exhibitor to learn and practice

are the showmanship steps and procedures. These should be practiced several times with the rabbit to allow the rabbit to have some idea of what is expected of it before a contest. Rabbits may not be the smartest creatures in the world, but practice does make a big difference in their behavior during a contest.

Training hint: Placing a rabbit in its carry crate a couple of times before show day is a good way of teaching it to be calm when it is in its crate.

The first step in a showmanship contest is to carry the rabbit to the judging table. The proper procedure for carrying a rabbit is to have it facing the exhibitor. Place the right hand underneath its chest and stomach. Balance it on the right hand, slightly lift it up, and then place the left hand underneath its rump. Once the left hand is secure, pull the rabbit forward until its head is securely tucked under the left arm and then remove the right hand and lay it on the back of the rabbit. This provides additional security and comfort for a rabbit while it is being carried.

Once a rabbit is on the judging table, it must be posed in the proper position. The proper position is facing the judge with its front feet coming out straight from its body and its rear legs set straight on each side of its body. The front feet should be about even with the eyes, and the rear feet should be set about even with the rear flank. There should be a slight rise from the shoulder to the loin and a roundness to the hind quarters. Furthermore, a rabbit should be trained not to move. Once a rabbit is in position, an exhibitor's hands should be placed at his or her side or clasped together in front of his or her body while waiting for further instructions from the judge.

Usually the next instruction will be to turn the rabbit to the left so that the judge can check the ear tattoo, ears, eyes, teeth, and nose. This will be followed by examining the legs, chest, hocks, tail, sex, and fur. The final aspects of showmanship involve a

re-pose of the rabbit, the exhibitor's appearance, the exhibitor's attitude, and the exhibitor's knowledge of rabbits. The following drawings provide greater detail and further illustration of these procedures.

1. Pose the rabbit



2. Check the tattoo and ears



3. Examine the eyes



4. Examine the teeth



5. Examine the nose



6. Check the front toenails



7. Check the front legs



8. Check the chest and abdomen



9. Check the rear legs



10. Check the hocks and sex



11. Examine the tail



12. Evaluate the fur



Showing tip: Attending showmanship clinics and workshops is a good way to learn more about recommendations and techniques. However, do not just attend – go home and practice what has been learned.

Training and practicing for showmanship involves preparing oneself as well as teaching the rabbit. The exhibitor must know what to do and how to do it. To assist in these efforts, a rabbit showmanship score card has been provided for review and study. Be mentally prepared. If an exhibitor lacks poise and self-confidence in the

show ring, a rabbit will sense that something isn't right and will become confused and uncomfortable. Consequently, the rabbit will not respond to the cues. This will lead to further frustration, and the result is a cycle of confusion and frustration between an exhibitor and a rabbit.

Showing hint: Remember, showing involves the appearance and attitude of an exhibitor, the appearance of a rabbit, and the showing or showmanship of a rabbit. Also, be on time for the class and be courteous not only to the judge and ringmaster but also to fellow exhibitors.

Rabbit Showmanship Score Card*

Presentation or Task	Points	Score
Carrying the Rabbit	4	
Posing the Rabbit	3	
Examining the Ears	4	
Turning the Rabbit	5	
Examining the Teeth	4	
Examining the Eyes	4	
Examining the Nose	3	
Checking the Toenails	5	
Checking the Hocks	4	
Checking the Straightness of the Legs	9	
Checking for Abscesses or Ruptures	6	
Sexing the Rabbit	6	
Reposing and Checking the Tail	3	
Examining the Fur	4	
Proper Grooming	6	
Posing for Evaluation and Balance	10	
Knowledge of the Exhibitor	10	
Appearance of the Exhibitor	10	
Total Point Values	100	

** This is a typical or general score card for rabbit showmanship. The points may vary from one card to another, but the basic tasks to be performed by the exhibitor will not change from one card to another or from show to show.*

To prepare for a show ring:

- Wear clean, neat, and appropriate clothing.
- Wear boots or hard shoes, not soft shoes.
- Carry a small brush or rag in a pocket.
- Arrive on time for the appropriate class.
- Know the rabbit's tattoo number, weight, breed, and date of birth (kidding date).
- Know other relevant information such as the sex of the rabbit, ideal body temperature, protein percentage of the feed, etc.
- Know what the judge looks like and/or is wearing.
- Know what the ringmaster looks like and/or is wearing.

To prepare a rabbit for a show ring:

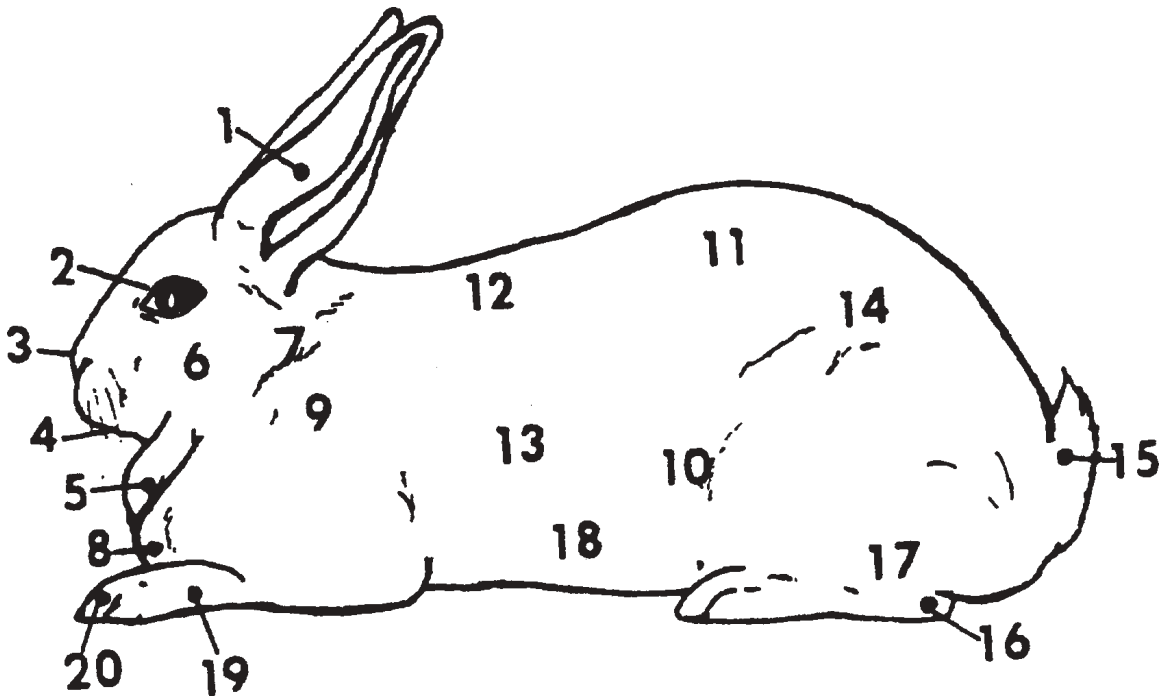
- For about a week before a show, clean and brush the rabbit on a daily basis.
- On show day, feed the rabbit at least two hours before show time but only feed approximately half of the usual amount. This keeps the rabbit attentive and alert.
- On show day, give about half the amount of water usually provided. This prevents the rabbit from looking fat and helps keep it active and alert.
- Groom and brush the rabbit just before show time. This brings out the natural oils as well as removing dust and dirt, resulting in a cleaner hair coat.

- Before leaving the pen for the show ring, give the rabbit a drink of water and a final brushing.
- Be calm and gentle with the rabbit while on the way to the show ring and while in the show ring.

To work as a team in a show ring:

- Be aware of the location of both the judge and the ringmaster as well as any instructions they may give.
- Be courteous to the judge, ringmaster, and other exhibitors. Be sure to say "yes sir" or "no sir," "excuse me," and "thank you."
- Know the rabbit's location at all times, especially in relation to oneself and the judge.
- Maintain a distance of about two feet between oneself and the rabbit except when working with it.
- Keep one hand free to open or close doors and to work the latches. Always latch all doors after use.
- Keep a small brush or rag in a pocket; use it to clean the rabbit if it happens to get dirty.
- Maintain eye contact with the judge.
- Smile, relax, and enjoy the competition.
- Keep cool, calm, and collected; this helps to keep the rabbit under control.
- Be humble when winning and gracious when losing.
- Remember to thank the judge and congratulate the winners after the final placing.

Identifying Rabbit Parts



- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 8. _____ | 15. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 9. _____ | 16. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 10. _____ | 17. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 11. _____ | 18. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 12. _____ | 19. _____ |
| 6. _____ | 13. _____ | 20. _____ |
| 7. _____ | 14. _____ | |

Notes

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