

# TAKING YOUR NEW BUNNY HOME

## To Get You Started

Bunnies are prey animals and can become frightened when picked up causing injury to themselves or others. They have sharp claws and children should be supervised at all times when they are around the bunny. Bunnies when frightened can also bite as this is their only defence against predators. Always support your bunny's bottom when picking them up, and hold them close to your chest. Never pick them up by the ears, hit them scream at them or frighten them. Longhaired breeds require daily brushing and other specialist care. Bunnies grow up, and depending on the breed, some bunnies can weigh over 6 kilograms when fully grown. A bunny's behaviour will change as they grow and they will go through a destructive terrible two's phase; however early desexing will greatly modify this behaviour. When you first take your new bunny home put them inside in a quite, small, safe place such as the laundry, bathroom or the corner of the lounge with a litter tray filled with fresh hay, a bowl of water and a shelter for them to hide in. We put a carpet square or a towel in the shelter in case of accidents. Allow them to slowly explore their new surroundings. If you do not restrict your bunny to a specific area initially, they will think the whole house is theirs and you will have wee and droppings throughout your home.



## Housing

Bunnies are prey to a number of predators and should be housed indoors. They do not need hutches but an enclosure with a cat house and litter tray. If you use a hutch, it must be big enough for your bunny to stretch out and move around in, and a pet fence patio should be attached to expand out their area, and the hutch door left permanently open. Remember, hutches should be safe havens not prisons. Bunnies must never be left in metal hutches outside, as they will cook in the

Australian summer. It is preferable for the hutch to be made of wood and have a door for the bunny to come in and out to exercise and play. You can put a carpet square on the floor of the hutch, and in the enclosed area of the hutch for your bunny to lie on. Never leave your bunny to lie on wire, they are a soft footed animal (not like a cat or dog) and will get calluses on their feet.

## Outdoor

Bunnies that live outdoors have an average lifespan of 2 to 3 years. They are prey for predators like, snakes, foxes (yes there are foxes in the suburbs), dog, cats and large birds like crows and owls. Domestic bunnies do not survive in the wild. If your hutch is outside on the porch or veranda, you must fox proof and mosquito proof the hutch, so that you do not expose your bunny to the Myxomatosis or the Calici virus. They must be protected from the wind and weather. We hear of many more bunnies been taken by foxes in the suburbs. Never leave bunnies outside at night or running around unsupervised. They love to burrow and can easily escape in a short time. Summer is a problem for bunnies; they do not sweat and therefore cannot expel heat. They should be brought indoors when the temperature reaches more that 25 degrees or the area where they are kept heats up. Bunnies<sub>1</sub> also need to be out of their enclosures daily for extended periods to exercise and play.



## Indoor

Indoor bunnies can live for up to 12 years. If your bunny lives inside, they also need a pen or space where they can go to feel safe. Bunnies sleep a lot during the day, so they can be secured in their hutch and patio area while you are at work. However, they need room to run and play at other times. If your bunny lives inside, you should bunny proof your home by covering electrical cords and watch out for them chewing the carpet to get to the ground underneath and furniture initially as they explore. This behaviour mirrors a bunny digging burrows and clearing tree roots.



## Toilet Training



Bunnies are smart and will toilet train quickly, they will choose either a litter tray or a hay tray for their toilet. The idea is to train them to use one of these. Use paper based litter in a cat litter tray. Pick up any droppings and put them in the litter tray, so that you bunny gets the idea. If your bunny digs in the litter, you may need to get a litter tray with a lip on the edge. HAY TRAYS can be used as litter trays. Get a suitable sized container for your bunny, put some litter in the base to soak up the urine then put a thick layer of hay in the base and up the

sides of the container. Your bunny will choose where their favourite toilet spot is, so you may need a couple of litter trays and 'chew and poo' stations to start with. Be sure to put a permanent one in the hutch area as well. Your bunny may prefer a separate hay tray and bunny litter tray.

## Bunny Health

All bunnies should be vaccinated against the Calici virus every 10 to 12 months, and desexed (5 to 7 mths months for girls and 3 months for boys, or as soon as the testicles drop for boys. Smaller breeds must be at least 1kg in weight prior to desexing. Please check with your bunny savvy vet. A list of Australian bunny savvy vets is located on [www.rabbitrunaway.org.au](http://www.rabbitrunaway.org.au) or please contact us. Undesexed girls have a high mortality rate from uterine cancer and also display aggression and destructive nesting behaviours, while the males can be aggressive and spray urine to mark their territory. You bunny should also have their teeth and nails checked regularly. Bunnies are prone to problems with their teeth and gut. If your regular vet does not see a lot of bunnies, they can contact Dr Brendan Carmel at Warranwood Vets (contact details on our website) for updated information on bunny health. Bunnies do get mites, but NEVER use bird mite spray on your bunny. Mite sprays are for feathered creatures, while bunnies are fur creatures and require different medications. Rabbit savvy vets prescribe a kitten dose of revolution to treat mites and fleas in bunnies. Never try to self diagnose or medicate your bunny from information on the internet, which is often misleading. If a bunny stops eating they must be taken to the vet immediately as they can go into gut stasis and die quickly if the gut stops working. Bunnies need to be eating hay continuously to maintain gut and teeth health. IMPORTANT: Bunnies like routine and feeding them greens morning and night will ensure that you are aware if your bunny is unwell and off their food. This will give you time to get them to a vet. Your bunny can die within 24 hours if they stop eating or from other causes.

## Diet

### Water

Bunnies drink lots of water. Use a strong ceramic flat bottomed water bowl that your bunny cannot tip over. Bunnies cannot get enough water from the water drip bottles alone and consume a lot of water at night<sup>2</sup>

especially in summer. If you have a drip bottle put a water bowl in for the bunny as well. Dehydration can cause many health problems in bunnies.

## Hay

All bunnies, no matter what age need an UNLIMITED supply of fresh oaten hay or grass hay. This helps with their teeth and digestion and prevents them from getting gut stasis, a common health condition in rabbits, which can be fatal if not treated quickly. **IMPORTANT:** Never give alfalfa/lucerne hay to mature bunnies (over 12 months old), as it has high levels of calcium unless advised by your bunny vet.

## Bunny Salad

Your bunny needs a variety of fresh greens twice a day to ensure that they are still eating. Never give your bunny salad greens that you would not eat yourself. They must be fresh to avoid gut problems. Your rabbit should eat one tightly packed cup of greens per 2 kilograms of body weight twice a day. Never change your bunny's diet suddenly and always introduce new foods gradually. **IMPORTANT:** Never give iceberg lettuce, raw beans, corn, rhubarb, potato peels, and anything with corn, seeds or processed sugar.



**Good greens: twice a day:** basil, beet tops, bok choy, clover, collard greens, dandelion flowers (be careful of pesticides), endive, escarole, mint, mustard greens, parsley, peppermint leaves, radicchio, radish tops, raspberry leaves, mixed lettuces, spinach, watercress, wheat grass basil, dill, coriander, chicory, parsley.

**Salad treats: once a day in small amounts**

**Fruit and vegetables:** apple, banana, blueberries, grapes (limited quantities), mango, papaya, peach, pear, pineapple, raisins, raspberries, strawberries.

**IMPORTANT:** Dutch carrot tops, dandelion greens, kale... Give in limited quantities...high calcium levels

## Wood to Chew (not really necessary but the bunnies enjoy chewing)

Good sources of wood that has not been exposed to chemicals include apple, willow, spruce, ash, birch, maple, juniper, pear, hazel and hawthorn. **IMPORTANT:** Single seeded fruit tree branches such as plum, cherry, apricot and peach may be toxic to bunnies.

## Companion Bunnies

Bunnies are sociable animals, and are happier with company. It is better to introduce bunnies after they are desexed as their smell and temperament may change. Rabbit Run-Away Orphanage has de-sexed and vaccinated orphans from babies to 12 months old, as well as older bunnies looking for good homes. You can take your desexed bunny on a bunny date to find a compatible desexed bunny friend as not all bunnies like each other. We can only re-home bunnies with bunnies that are also de-sexed and vaccinated.



## What to Do if you can No Longer Care For Your Bunny

Please contact Rabbit Run-Away Orphanage for advise or take your bunny to one of the many animal shelter to be rehomed. You need to ask the question "Will the bunny be euthanaised?" Releasing a bunny into the wild is illegal, as they will not survive, due to incomplete diet, predators and myxomatosis carried by mosquitoes.