

The pleasures of being outdoors includes fresh air, sunshine, and freedom to run, chew and dig. For a prey animal such as a rabbit, your garden can also be a place of danger from...

- Predator attack: dogs, cats, foxes, birds
- Theft, teasing, mutilation by humans
- Moldy or poisonous plants
- Toxic pesticides or fertilizers
- Exposure to sun, heat, wind, or rain
- Bacteria contained in dirt
- Diseases spread by flies, mosquitoes
- Myxomatosis and Calici Viruses



What is the greatest outdoor risk for rabbits?



The greatest threat is attack by predators. These occur in the daytime as well as at night. Commercial hutches or cages do not provide enough protection to make it safe to leave the rabbit outdoors unattended. The House Rabbit Society receives many calls every week from baffled people whose rabbit died during the night while confined in a hutch.

"I don't understand, the hutch wasn't even unlocked, and the rabbit didn't have a mark on him. What happened?"

With their acute vision, hearing, and smell, a rabbit can sense the presence of a predator such as a dog, cat or fox even in your neighbor's yard. They may panic and injure themselves, or they may die of shock. Many foxes and dogs can easily get into hutches. Other predators include large birds, owls, hawks, possums, cats and dogs can also kill your pet.

I live in the city. Do I still need to worry about predators?

Don't think your balcony, courtyard or garden is free of predators just because you live in the city. Foxes come up through storm drains and arrive in very urban areas. These agile animals can climb walls and onto roof tops. Wire cages are no protection for your rabbit. If your rabbit cannot stay in your house at night, make sure that he's enclosed within solid walls and behind a solid door such as a garage, shed, or basement with a good lock. Foxes are across all suburbs in Melbourne.



My rabbit has lived outside for a long time without harm from predators – why should I consider bringing her inside now?

Some outdoor rabbits avoid death by predator, or the other risks mentioned by PURE LUCK. As time changes and foxes move into suburbia, you are playing ‘Russian Roulette’ with your animals.

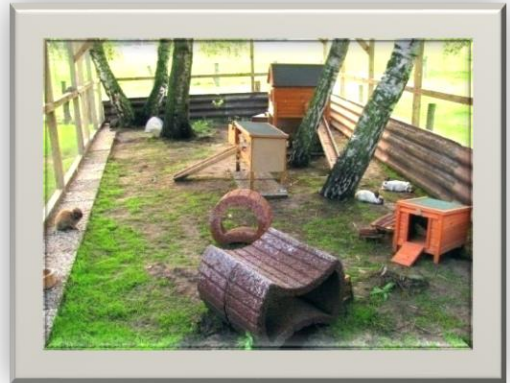
And what is the quality of life for an animal living outdoors?

And what sort of relationship can you build if your rabbit is out there and you’re inside?

A life spent confined to a hutch outside is boring, depressing, and stressful for a sensitive creature such as a rabbit.

A life spent unconfined, but outdoors is simply too dangerous for domestic animals. By domesticating them, we have deprived them of whatever natural ability they had for survival on their own.

If your rabbit currently lives outdoors, we strongly urge you to bring her in at least during the night, when predators are most common. Even if she’s confined to a smaller cage, or a bathroom or utility room, she’s safe, and she’s making a first step to being part of your family. There’s no magic in turning an “outdoor rabbit” into a house rabbit. It can begin in a single evening.



What kinds of safe daytime exercise can I provide outdoors?

For safe daytime exercise, you need to be home to watch your rabbit. We suggest a shaded spot for a mosquito proof pen within your fenced yard, one with a top and bottom as well as sides, to keep the rabbit from digging out and unwelcome visitors from digging in, swooping or jumping in. Provide a place for the rabbit to hide with a bowl of fresh water and plenty of hay.

A plan from the [House Rabbit Handbook](#) (Drollery Press, 1996) describes an 8’L X 32”W X 32”H made from a frame of pine 2 X 4’s and 1” welded wire. A plywood top gives shelter and shade, and a wire floor covered with clean straw provides the rabbit with safe material to burrow in for outdoor playtime. You should NEVER have your pet outside if you are not there.



Lessons from Rescue

It was Christmas 2018 when Rabbit Runaway Orphanage bonded one of our rabbits to a bunny that had come in with his owners for a bonding date. The owners showed us a picture of a suitable indoor setup. They told me that their bunny was outside in the daytime. I told them that the rabbit should not be left outside if they were not home to watch it. ‘We have never had any trouble in 5 years’ they assured me. Unconvinced, I explained again the risks and told them not to leave the rabbits outside when they were not home. It was March 2019, when I had a call from the owners with “sad news”. Both rabbits were killed by a predator that had got into the back yard. “A new neighbor’s dog...” he began. My mind drifted away, I was horrified that these people had not heeded my warning and now our rescue bun and her little husband had suffered a horrific and needless death. Their deaths were completely avoidable.