



April 20, 2007

Ask the Animal Behaviorist

Advice on how to properly care for rabbits

Courtesy of the Humane Society Silicon Valley
Special to the Times

The rabbit cage

The minimum size cage for a rabbit is six times the size of the rabbit when fully grown. The floor on the inside of the cage should be covered with either newspaper (several sheets thick) or with a grass mat (Cost Plus sells these) so as to prevent "sore hocks" which rabbits can get from being on wire.

One part of the cage should be covered for privacy with a towel or something similar.

A cardboard box (if cage is large enough) is nice to place inside the cage for privacy and chewing exercise. Do not let your rabbit eat carpet or swallow cardboard. Providing fresh hay near the play area will discourage eating harmful things.

One corner of the cage needs a litter box large enough for the bunny to hop into and turn around in. Cat litter boxes work well, using Cat Country or Carefresh litter. Anchor the litter box to the inside of the cage with a clothespin from the outside. Encourage the bunny to use the litter box by placing a handful of alfalfa hay or oat hay in the litter box as well as near his/her food dish.



Change the hay daily. Do not use cedar or pine chips as research has shown it is unhealthy for rabbits, especially females. Pet stores use these to cut down odor, but at home, do not use the chips long term.

Food

Rabbits need a food dish, either a metal one anchored to the cage or a heavy crock dish, with fresh pellets (plain rabbit pellets are best). Provide a water bottle of adequate size for the bunny. Check and change often.

Rabbits also need a lot of hay like you would give horses--fresh loose timothy and golden oat hay sold at feed stores. For young bunnies, also add alfalfa hay. Timothy and oat hay are better for bunnies over one year. (Hay is extremely important for digestion and for chewing).

Get the hay fresh off the bale at feed stores, or you can get hay delivered from Oxbow Hay.

Avoid giving bunnies under three months of age green vegetables, as their systems cannot handle them. As a

result, young rabbits not used to eating greens may get diarrhea. Small carrots are fine for youngsters, and of course, hay.

After three months, offer them a combination of carrot tops, parsley, some dandelion greens, cilantro twice daily, but only in moderation to start with, such as a small handful. Discard the vegetables if not eaten within an hour or so. Do not give your rabbit cabbage, spinach, kale or cauliflower, and avoid iceberg lettuce.

You can supplement your bunny's diet with nice cold washed chunks of carrots, apples, pears, or bananas once or twice a day as treats. Limit banana and pears to once a day, cut into half-inch pieces.

Other important things to remember

Rabbits need exercise and your companionship. It is not safe for them to be outside at night at all! Rabbits are most active at dawn and at dusk, so a good hour or two out of the cage with you per day will make for a happy bunny. Cover electrical cords with flex tubing sold at Orchard Supply for a safer playing environment for your rabbit as well.

It is also important to spay/neuter your rabbit at about 4-6 months of age. Females need longer to recover, so don't handle them much for several days after surgery.

About Humane Society Silicon Valley

Humane Society Silicon Valley (HSSV) is an independent, non-profit agency offering quality adoptions, medical care and education programs to enhance the human-animal bond. Established in 1929, HSSV has served Silicon Valley for 77 years and has adopted more than 500,000 animals into permanent, loving homes. HSSV is an "open door" shelter and accepts animals 24-hours a day, seven days a week. HSSV's medical center offers affordable spaying/neutering, vaccinations and microchips to the public. More information about HSSV can be found at www.hssv.org.