

Litter Box Training Tips

From House Rabbit Society

By nature, rabbits choose one or a few places (usually corners) to deposit their urine and most of their pills (feces). Urine-training involves little more than putting a litter box where the rabbit chooses to go. Pill training requires only that you give them a place they know will not be invaded by others. Here are some suggestions to help you to train your rabbit to use the litter box.

AGE

Older rabbits are easier to train than younger rabbits, especially babies. A rabbit's attention span, and knack for learning, increases as he or she grows up. If you have a baby, stick with it! And if you are deciding whether to adopt an older rabbit, or litter-train your older rabbit, go for it!

SPAY/NEUTER

This is often the most important factor. When rabbits reach the age of 4- 6 months, their hormones become active and they usually begin marking their territory. By spaying or neutering your rabbit, he will be more likely to use his litter box (as well as be much healthier and happier).

TYPES OF LITTER

Use a litter made from plants or paper. Some brands to look for: CareFresh, Cat Country, Critter Country, and Yesterday's News. You can also use horse bedding (available at feed stores) or wood stove pellets. These have been heat-treated in the manufacturing process, so they don't present the same hazards as soft wood shavings, which can cause liver damage in rabbits. Silica, clay, and clumping cat litters are dangerous for your rabbit, and should never be used. Corn & wheat based litter also should be avoided, because rabbits will often ingest it. Another approach is to place a handful of hay in each box, or to simply use hay as litter. It is helpful to put several layers of newspaper under the hay, to absorb urine. Most newspapers today are using soy-based ink, which is safe for your rabbit. Obviously, you need to change the hay fairly frequently (daily), since your rabbit will be eating it. This method often helps to encourage good litter habits as well as to encourage hay consumption, since rabbits often eat at or near the same time as they use the litter box.

Hay is placed at one end of the litter box and litter is placed at the other end. Your rabbit will usually sit on the soft litter while it eats the hay. Newspaper on the bottom of the litterbox makes cleaning easier.



Oat hay and Carefresh bedding with shredded paper pictured.

RUNNING SPACE

Even if your goal is to let your rabbit have full run of the house, you must start small. Start with a cage and a small running space, and when your rabbit is sufficiently well trained in that space, gradually give her more space. But do so gradually! If you overwhelm her with too much freedom before she's ready, she will forget where her box is and will lose her good habits.

THE METHOD

Start with a box in the cage, and one or more boxes in the rabbit's running space. If she urinates in a corner of the cage not containing the box, move the box to that corner until she gets it right. Don't be concerned if your bunny curls up in his litter box -- this is natural. Once she's using the box in the cage, open her door and allow her into her running space. Watch her go in and out on her own. If she heads to a corner where there's no box, or lifts up her tail in the characteristic fashion, cry "no" in a single, sharp burst of sound. Gently herd her back to

her cage and her litter box, or into one of the boxes in her room. Be careful, however. You don't want to make the cage or the litter box seem like punishment. A handful of hay in the box makes it a more welcoming place. After she first uses the box, praise her and give her a favorite treat. Once she uses the box in her room a couple of times, you're well on your way, as her habits will be on their way to forming. As she gets better trained in her first room, you can increase her space. Don't hurry this process. And if the area becomes very big, or includes a second floor, be sure to include more litter boxes, so as not to confuse her. Remember, as she becomes more confident and uses fewer boxes, you can start to remove some of her early, "training" boxes.

PILLS VS. URINE

All rabbits will drop "pills" around their cages to mark it as their own. This is not failure to be litter-trained. It is very important for your rabbit to identify the cage as her property so that when she leaves the cage for the bigger world of your house, she will distinguish the family's area from her own and avoid marking it. To encourage this, make the rabbit the king of his cage. Try not to force him in or out of it- - coax him. Do not do things to his cage that he doesn't like, or things to him that he doesn't like while he's in the cage.

For more information and tips on litter box training, visit these websites:

Source: Rabbit.org/faq/sections/litter.html (House Rabbit Society)

Myhouserabbit.com (My House Rabbit)

Binkybunny.com (Binky Bunny – good step-by-step picture guide)

3Bunnies.org/litterbox_training.htm (3 Bunnies Rabbit Rescue in Connecticut)