



Outdoor Rabbits

By: House Rabbit Society

The pleasures of being outdoors include: 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:

- Predators
- Theft or teasing by humans
- Moldy or poisonous plants
- Toxic pesticides or fertilizers
- Exposure to sun, heat, wind, or wet Bacteria contained in dirt
- Diseases spread by flies and mosquitoes

WHAT IS THE GREATEST RISK FOR OUTDOOR RABBITS?

The greatest threat is attack by predators. These occur primarily at night, but can also happen occasionally in the daytime. Hutches or cages do not provide enough protection to make it safe to leave the rabbit outdoors 24 hours a day. 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 her acute vision, hearing, and smell, a rabbit can sense the presence of a predator such as a raccoon even in your neighbor's yard. She may panic and injure herself, or she may die of shock. Many raccoons can open hutches. Other predators include coyotes, owls, hawks, possums, cats and dogs. Even if you live in the city, your rabbit is not safe. Raccoons come up through storm drains and arrive in very urban areas. These agile animals can climb trees and open doors. Wire cages are no protection for your bunny.

MY RABBITS HAVE ALWAYS LIVED OUTSIDE WITHOUT PROBLEMS...

Some outdoor rabbits avoid death by predator or the other risks mentioned. But what is the quality of life for an animal living outdoors all the time? And what sort of relationship can you build if your bunny is out there and you're indoors? A life spent confined to a hutch 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.

SAFE OUTDOOR PLAYTIME

For safe daytime exercise, we suggest a 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 climbing or jumping in. 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.

A dog exercise pen (ex-pen) also provides a safe space for your rabbit to run around in that is quick and easy to set up. Though you always want to supervise access with any temporary set up.