

Rabbit care

Owning rabbits is great fun and very rewarding, but it is a big responsibility and a long-term commitment. Did you know rabbits live on average 8 – 12 years?

Getting your rabbit's diet and environment correct is the best way of ensuring a long and healthy life. Here are some guidelines for offering your rabbits the best care:

- **Rabbits are sociable animals and need to live in pairs.** Rabbits should be neutered to prevent unwanted litters and reduce health problems. In the event that one passes away, they will need a new companion.
- **As prey animals,** rabbits are naturally adapted to be fearful of predators, and seek a safe place to hide when they suspect danger. Rabbits do not like being picked up or carried, so do not always make the most suitable pets for young children.
- **Rabbits are inquisitive.** In the wild, rabbits will spend hours exploring for new sources of food and new places to burrow. Domestic rabbits share this love of exploration and love to investigate new toys and places to hide.
- **Chewing and digging are natural behaviours** for rabbits and without these activities their nails and teeth can be badly affected. You will need to provide things to chew (grass, hay, willow/apple twigs) and somewhere safe for them to dig, such as a sandpit filled with peat or soft sand.
- **Rabbit veterinary care** can be expensive so having adequate insurance is highly recommended. Finding a rabbit-savvy vet may require some research. We suggest checking with your vet that they are experienced in treating rabbits.
- **Check your rabbits for signs of injury or illness every day and seek veterinary advice if necessary.**
 - Check teeth and nails are not becoming overgrown.
 - Check coat and skin for signs of mites, bald patches, sores or lumps.
 - Check for a clean bottom to reduce the risk of flystrike.
- They need annual vaccinations for Myxomatosis, RVHD1 and RVHD2.

Diet

Rabbit's teeth grow continuously throughout their life. The teeth need to be worn down every day by eating grass and hay. Failures to eat the right diet with quickly result in serious dental disease.

The diet should include:

- **80% hay:** the best diet consists almost entirely of good quality hay and dried grass forages, available at all times. They love to graze and will keep their heads down all day, mowing as they go.
- **15% fresh vegetables and herbs:** leafy herbs, spring greens, curly kale, chard, broccoli, celery, parsley, coriander, carrots (small quantities) and outer leaves. Small quantities of fruits, e.g. apples, pears, banana, melon and grapes. Clean, dry grass, dandelions, bramble, hazel sticks and fruit wood.
- **5% complimentary feeds:** this should be in pellet form with balanced nutrients, rather than a muesli mix, to prevent selective feeding.
- **Fresh water,** available at all times. This should be in a bowl to allow natural drinking.
- **Treats:** If treats are given avoid commercial treats which are high in sugars.

Finding your new companions

Thank you for your enquiry regarding adopting rabbits from Raystede; choosing to adopt rather than to buy makes a huge difference. Finding the perfect pet can take time. Please be patient; they will be worth the wait.

Step 1: Submit your application form (available on our website) **and photos**

We will need to see photos and measurements of your rabbits' accommodation. If you are looking to adopt a companion for your existing rabbit/s, please also send proof of neutering (for males and females) and vaccinations. Please email these documents to smallanimals1@raystede.org

We will consider your application and contact you if we need a few more details or to invite you to Raystede for a chat. If you do not hear from us, we have everything we need for now, thank you.

Step 2: Wait for the magic to happen

Once you have registered with us, please keep an eye on our website for new arrivals and contact us if you feel someone might suit your home.

When animals arrive at Raystede, we get to know them through behaviour and medical assessments. Our expert animal care teams carefully use this information alongside your application to see if the match could be a success.

Step 3: Visit Raystede

We will invite you to Raystede as soon as we have found any potential matches for your home. We will discuss the animals' background, health and behaviour. This sometimes requires a few visits. You will need to provide photo ID, proof of address, and if applicable, written landlord permission to have a pet in your property.

Step 4: Take your new pet home

Once we have found your perfect partner, we will book an adoption appointment; our Rehoming Team will talk you through caring for your pet. Your adoption fee will help us continue our work to give animals a better life.

Rehoming criteria

Our housing requirements aim to ensure the best welfare standards for rabbits. Our team are happy to offer advice in purchasing or adapting your set-up to provide the best home before adopting.

Rabbits are rehomed in pairs: Rabbits are social animals and naturally live in groups. We only rehome rabbits in pairs, unless as a companion for an existing rabbit. Raystede provide a bonding service which we can discuss. All rabbits must be neutered and be up to date with vaccinations before bonding.

Rabbits need a hutch/shed of at least 180 x 60 x 60cm / 6 x 2 x 2ft

Rabbits need space to run, jump and stand fully upright on their back legs and stretch out when lying down. A garden shed or wendy house with windows for light and ventilation are ideal.

Rabbits also need constant access to a secure enclosure of at least 304 x 180 x 90cm / 10 x 6 x 3ft

Rabbits need the freedom to express their natural behaviours which include exercising, foraging and grazing. The run should be attached to the hutch, so they have room to exercise all the time.

House rabbits need free-range access to at least 60 sq. feet. / 5.6 sq. metres

Some rabbits can happily live indoors, with constant access to fresh hay, a litter tray, food, water and somewhere quiet to relax. Please make sure your home is rabbit-proof; removing or covering up any wires and moving any objects that could cause injury to a rabbit.

Is your property rented? If so, we will need to see permission from your landlord that you are allowed to keep rabbits.

Peace of mind when adopting

All Raystede rabbits are:

- Health checked by a vet
- Behaviour assessed
- Vaccinated against Myxomatosis, RVHD1 & RVHD2
- Neutered/spayed
- Microchipped

You will also receive:

- Four weeks' free Petplan insurance
- A comprehensive adoption pack and appointment with our Rehoming Team to ensure you have everything you need to care for your new rabbits
- Follow-up advice from our expert Small Animals Team

Thank you for your adoption fee, which will help to cover some of our costs:

- Adoption fee: £30 each
- Bonding fee, if applicable: £30

The average daily cost of care for all small animals at Raystede is in excess of £300.