

Rabbit Environment

Imagine how you would feel if you were locked up in a tiny room all day where you couldn't stretch or exercise? You would quickly become very bored, miserable and frustrated and it's no different for rabbits. Follow the simple steps below to ensure your rabbits have a happy living environment!

Choose the right home

Traditional small hutches can compromise rabbit welfare as they do not allow rabbits to behave normally. A hutch should actually only be viewed as your rabbits' 'bedroom'. The hutch should (ideally) be permanently attached to a much larger run or exercise area, so your rabbits can decide when they go outside to stretch their legs. If a ramp connects the hutch to a run, ensure it is wide enough and not too steep so your rabbits can get up and down safely and easily. A good quality hutch provides shelter and protection from extremes of weather and temperature, is draught-free and predator-proof, and is a cosy place to sleep. Provide lots of bedding to keep your rabbits warm; this should also be safe for your rabbits to eat such as dust-free straw. In the wintertime when it's particularly cold, you should consider moving your rabbits' home somewhere warmer such as a shed, unused garage or outhouse.

The Bedroom area should be as big as possible

- Big enough to allow rabbits to lie down and stretch out comfortably in all directions.
- Tall enough for them to stand up on their back legs without their ears touching the roof.
- Long enough to allow at least three hops from one end to the other (make sure there are no obstructions in the way).

As rabbits should be housed in friendly pairs or groups, their bedroom area should be big enough to allow all the rabbits to perform all the behaviours mentioned above at the same time.

Help your rabbits have a good night's sleep

Although rabbits are social creatures and should be housed together in friendly pairs or groups, like us, they sometimes also need some time to be away from each other. Even if a hutch is your rabbits' 'bedroom' area, you will still need to create separate spaces within it for your rabbits to sleep comfortably. Therefore, make sure you:

- Create separate sleeping chambers for each rabbit.
- Provide at least one sleeping area that is large enough for all the rabbits to sleep together if they want to.
- Line the sleeping area with newspaper (for absorbency) and cover in straw.

Give your rabbits space

It's important that your rabbits have plenty of space to run around, leap, dig, frolic and graze, because this is what they'd be doing in the wild. A secure exercise run or enclosure will allow your rabbits to exercise, graze and play safely (and will also be escape-proof and keep them safe from predators).

- A run should allow your rabbits to stretch up to their full height and run, not just hop. The general rule for the size of a run is the bigger the better!
- Preferably, the run should be placed in the garden so the rabbits can enjoy the grass as they would in the wild.
- Make sure the roof of the run is covered and secure from predators. Make sure the run is escape-proof.
- Areas of shade should be provided within the run.

- Make sure you also provide places to hide in the run, such as boxes or wide tubes. Rabbits are prey animals and need to be able to hide when frightened.
- Provide a 'digging' area with sand or earth. A dedicated area will help discourage them from digging up your lawn, but make sure the bottom of this area is secure so that your rabbits don't end up digging their way out of the run.

Creating a rabbit paddock

- If you have a large or unsecured garden then consider creating a Rabbit Paddock.
- Simply corner off an area using picket fencing and mesh (fencing needs to be put about half a metre underground and curved back into the enclosure by half a metre to make it escape-proof).
- The area should be around 7m² and covered with a roof or mesh to make it predator-proof.
- Lots of hiding places should be provided within this area.
- A wendy house or a large hutch can also be placed inside this area to provide your rabbits with shelter.

A Rabbit Paddock is an alternative to a hutch and run. Rabbits are often a lot happier too because they have lots of hiding areas and space, allowing them to behave as they would in the wild.

Make sure you're aware of what plants are poisonous to rabbits and ensure there are none in the Rabbit Paddock. Consider growing some rabbit-friendly herbs in the Rabbit Paddock for your rabbits to eat.

Keep your rabbits Clean

Rabbits are fastidiously clean animals, and spend a large proportion of their day grooming themselves and their companion rabbit(s). Housing needs to be cleaned out frequently and must be adequately ventilated to deter flies.

- Thoroughly clean your rabbits' home regularly. Replace some of the used bedding material each time, as this will smell familiar and so provide reassurance.
- Clean the toilet areas every day (rabbits tend to pick the same corners of a hutch to toilet in).

House rabbits

Some rabbits are kept as house pets and are litter trained; you can buy special non-clumping litter from pet shops. However, they will chew and dig so ensure you 'rabbit-proof' your home and remove potential hazards. For example, cover electric cables, keep house plants out of reach and collect up any dropped leaves or petals. Provide your rabbits with safe and suitable materials for chewing and digging to reduce the likelihood of them chewing or digging inappropriate items. Provide your rabbits with a secure home enclosure, with litter trays, lots of hiding places and toys, and give them opportunities to exercise in a larger area every day. Ideally house rabbits should be given regular access to an outside area where they can graze.