

9 COMMON RABBIT MYTHS

Myth 1: Rabbits are great, low-maintenance starter pets.

Reality: Although they don't need to be walked like dogs, rabbits are anything but low-maintenance. Their quarters need daily cleaning, and fresh food and water must be offered daily, including a salad of well-washed, dark-green leafy vegetables. Certain rabbit health problems can become chronic and can require regular (and sometimes expensive) veterinary treatment. To complicate the picture, veterinarians skilled in rabbit medicine are often hard to find.

Myth 2: Rabbits only live a year or two, so no long commitment is necessary.

Reality: Well cared-for indoor rabbits can live 7-10 years, and some live into their teens. This is approximately the same life span as some breeds of dogs, and requires the same long-term commitment.

Myth 3: Rabbits do not need veterinary care the way dogs and cats do.

Reality: Although rabbits in the USA do not require annual vaccinations, nevertheless, regular veterinary checkups help to detect small problems before they become big ones. Companion rabbits should be spayed / neutered by veterinarians experienced in rabbit surgery. This not only reduces hormone-driven behaviors such as lunging, mounting, spraying, and boxing, but also protects females from the risk of uterine cancer, the incidence of which can exceed 50% as rabbits grow older.

Myth 4: Rabbits are happiest outdoors in a backyard hutch.

Reality: Rabbits kept outdoors in hutches are often forgotten and neglected once the initial novelty wears off. Far too frequently, they are relegated to a life of "solitary confinement" and are subject to extremes of weather, as well as to diseases spread by fleas, ticks, flies, and mosquitoes all of which can adversely affect their health and their life span. They can die of heart attacks from the very approach of a predator – even if the rabbit is not attacked or bitten. Rabbits are gregarious creatures who enjoy social contact with their human caretakers. The easiest way to provide social stimulation for a companion rabbit is to house him indoors, as a member of the family.

Myth 5: Rabbits are rather dirty, and have a strong odor.

Reality: Rabbits are immaculately clean, and, once they have matured and are spayed / neutered, they go to great lengths not to soil their living quarters. They will readily use a litter-box, and if the box is cleaned or changed daily, there is no offensive odor

Myth 6: Rabbits love to be picked up and cuddled, and do not scratch or bite.

Reality: Although some rabbits tolerate handling quite well, many do not like to be picked up and carried. If rabbits are mishandled they will learn to nip to protect themselves. If they feel insecure when carried they may scratch to get down. Unspayed / unneutered rabbits often exhibit territorial behavior such as "boxing" or nipping when their territory is "invaded" by the owner.

Myth 7: Rabbits – especially dwarf breeds – do not require much living space.

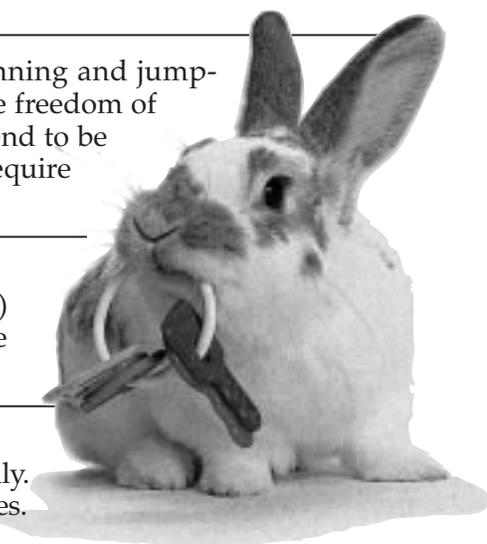
Reality: Rabbits have powerful hind legs designed for running and jumping. They need living space that will permit them ample freedom of movement even when they are confined. Dwarf rabbits tend to be more active and energetic than some larger breeds, and require relatively more space.

Myth 8: Rabbits can be left alone for a day or two when owners travel.

Reality: Rabbits need daily monitoring. Problems that are relatively minor in some species (e.g. a day or two of anorexia) may be life-threatening in rabbits, and may require immediate veterinary attention.

Myth 9: Rabbits do fine with a bowl of rabbit food and some daily carrots.

Reality: The single most important component of a rabbit's diet is grass hay, which should be provided, free-choice, daily. Rabbit pellets should be given only in very limited quantities.



To Buy For Bunny:

Exercise Pen or wire **Puppy Gate** to block off an area in your home for the rabbit to live in. 36" or taller for most, but 30" pens can work if a sheet is clipped over the top during the first week or so to prevent the rabbit from jumping over. Make sure the bunny cannot stick its head through the wire or get stuck. Pens are not recommended for outdoor housing; they are not predator-proof but trap bunny so she cannot get away.

Outdoor housing is not recommended. If the rabbit must live outdoors, purchase or build a large hutch (minimum 2' x 4' per rabbit) with solid flooring.

Litterbox: the bigger, the better! We like large cat boxes with rims.

Litter: paper- or aspen-based litters are good; other litters can be dangerous. Some brands of safe litter: *CareFresh* and *Aspen Supreme* pelleted litter. Pine shavings cause respiratory and liver damage; clumping litters can clog a rabbit's digestive system; clay litters also cause respiratory problems.

Hay: alfalfa for babies, oat blend, timothy, orchard grass hays for adults. Make sure to transition the rabbit onto alfalfa hay slowly if she is not used to it. Hay is a must for all healthy rabbits.

Fresh Produce: visit your local farmer's market or health food store to buy organic produce (parsley, Romaine lettuce, dandelion, etc.- see recommended vegetable list). All produce must be washed thoroughly to remove pesticides and herbicides. Vegetables keep best in a well-regulated refrigerator in plastic bags with a towel inside to absorb moisture. Don't feed wilted or rotten veggies; if in doubt, throw them out (or better yet, compost)!

Bunny Pellets: we recommend a timothy-based pellet such as *Oxbow Bunny Basics T* for adults (rabbits 8 months and over, done growing) and an alfalfa-based pellet such as *Oxbow Bunny Basics 15/23* for babies and growing bunnies. *Kaytee Supreme* plain pellets, with no nuts or seeds, is the best widely-available alternative to people who find the *Oxbow* products too expensive.

Water/Food Dishes: heavy crocks or clip-on dishes. Crocks are usually preferable to water bottles--they can be easily cleaned and bunnies drink more water from a crock. Food dishes should be small, water dishes, large.

Toys/Treats: hard plastic toys such as jingle balls and barrels for cats and birds make good bunny toys. The rabbit should not be able to ingest or get caught on any element of the toy. Pet store treats are usually not recommended for rabbits (check the ingredients before buying). Small pieces of fresh fruit (see recommended fruit list) or dried applewood twigs are better for bunny.

Hideaway: wooden nest boxes or cardboard houses for bunny to jump and hide in.

Carrier: hard plastic carriers that have a top opening are preferred. Artificial lambswool prevents bunny from slipping and absorbs moisture in the carrier.

Grooming Products: a nail clipper, small flea comb, and hamster brush. A slicker brush can be ok for longer-haired rabbits but use gently—the metal tines can hurt bunny's delicate skin. Laxatone or Petromalt can help prevent hair blockages.

Flea Products: for 'outdoor bunnies' or those in contact with cats and dogs that go outdoors, *Advantage* is the best product. The 0-9 lb. cat tubes are recommended to prevent overdose. Half the recommended dose is usually effective and safer for the bunny. Because rabbits groom themselves and each other constantly, care must be taken to follow the instructions on the packet. Kitten flea powder with artificial carbaryl (*Zodiac*, *Adams brands*) is usually safe. NEVER use flea collars, dips, *Frontline* (all potentially fatal) or other flea products that have not been extensively tested on rabbits.

Cleaning Products: gallon jugs of white vinegar, paper towels, hand vacuum and/or broom. When you change bunny's box, pour a thin coat of vinegar on the bottom of the box, let it soak for a few minutes, then rinse; you'll have no odor and no build-up. Vinegar also works miracles in getting urine off linoleum, tiles and wood and helping litterbox-train your bunny. You will want to keep bunny's living quarters scrupulously clean. Rabbits don't tolerate molds and must have a clean environment, but they are also sensitive to cleaning products such as bleach and other caustic cleaners.

What NOT to buy:

- **Wire Cages.** Wire cages cause hutch sores and are usually too small to provide humane housing.
- **Harnesses.** Most harnesses are not constructed properly and bunny can strangle, get loose, or break her back from a sudden stop. Harnesses cannot protect the rabbit or caretaker from predator attacks.
- **Hay Racks.** These don't provide the amount of hay bunny needs. Rabbits can get their feet caught in the racks and hang.
- **Seed & Nut Treats.** Too fattening as well as choking hazards.
- **Yogurt Drops.** These 'treats' are just too sugar-laden.
- **Vitamin Drops** for the water. That is not the way to provide vitamins for your bunnies.
- **Exercise Balls & Wheels.** These are really cruel for a rabbit.
- **Chew Blocks.** Most of them are a waste of money. Bunnies prefer organic apple twigs or willow.



Keep a Cool Bunny!

If you want to *keep* your bunny, keep her cool.

Temperatures over 85° Fahrenheit are dangerous for a rabbit. In hot weather, please observe the following to protect your bunny from overheating:

- * NEVER leave a rabbit unattended in your vehicle. Even with the windows down, cars heat up fast. When you transport your bunny to the veterinarian or pet-sitter, make sure you bring along frozen water bottles to place in the carrier in case of emergency. Avoid traveling with your rabbit in the middle of the day.
- * Housing a rabbit in an outdoor hutch is not recommended. If you absolutely cannot keep your rabbit indoors during the summer, make sure the hutch has adequate ventilation and is shaded throughout the entire day. When the outside temperature reaches 85° or higher, place a jug of frozen water in the hutch to keep bunny cool. But keep in mind that may not be enough to protect your bunny if the temperatures get too high.
- * If your bunny lives indoors but you do not have air conditioning, keep her cool on hot days by placing jugs of frozen water in her living area. Cross-ventilate when possible by leaving windows open during the middle of the day.
- * If you go on vacation, make sure your pet-sitter knows how sensitive bunnies are to the heat.
- * Symptoms of overheating include: listlessness, wet nose and mouth, hot ears, convulsions, and bleeding from the nose, mouth, and ears. To treat an overheated bunny, run cool water over her ears and wrap her in a cool, wet towel before rushing her to a rabbit-savvy veterinarian.



Rabbit Care



Rabbits make wonderful animal companions in the home. But contrary to common belief, they are **not** "low maintenance" pets. Please read this care sheet to learn the basics **before** you decide to adopt a rabbit!

Neuter Your Bunny! ■ Neutering not only helps curb overpopulation of domestic rabbits, it dramatically decreases the chance of reproductive cancers, makes litterbox training easier, and reduces chewing and territorial behavior, such as spraying. Shelter rabbits that are not already neutered should be neutered **IMMEDIATELY**. See our list of Los Angeles area veterinarians who offer relatively safe, low-cost neuters for rabbits.

Litterbox Training ■ Most rabbits can be litter-trained and allowed supervised freedom in the house. Start with a large cat litterbox; put newspaper and/or rabbit-safe litter on the bottom and cover it with lots of fresh timothy or oat hay. Since a rabbit usually urinates in one corner of his space, this is where you place the litterbox. Once the bunny uses the box reliably, you can let him out into a larger area, putting out a second box. Keep bunny confined to a 4' x 4' space until he is very good with his box.

Handling ■ Handle with care! Rabbits have fragile skeletons and can be seriously injured if dropped or allowed to fall. When picked up, a scared rabbit may kick out with her powerful hind legs and fall to the floor, breaking her back. A child struggling to hold a wiggly bunny could be badly scratched or bitten and the rabbit injured. For this reason and others, children should always be supervised with rabbits. Also, because rabbits are prey animals, they would rather not be picked up, but prefer that you meet them at their level and pet them on the floor. To pick up a rabbit correctly, place one hand under the rabbit behind the front legs and the other hand just above the bunny's tail. Hug the rabbit against your body firmly but gently.

NEVER pick up a rabbit by the ears—this is very painful and can cause permanent injury.

Never chase your rabbit, use force or yell—that will only teach her to fear you. Always be sensitive and gentle with your rabbit!

Diet Your rabbit's diet should include lots of fresh hay (timothy or oat for adults; alfalfa hay for babies), plain commercial rabbit pellets (no nuts, seeds, etc.) and fresh, washed vegetables and leafy greens. Romaine lettuce, carrot tops, dandelions, parsley, radish leaves, broccoli leaves, and cilantro are all good. Treats include small slices of apple, pear or other fruit, or pieces of carrot. Do not feed human treats like crackers and cookies. Fresh water should be available at all times in a bowl or a water bottle. Please note: Rabbit digestion is very sensitive, so you must introduce new foods gradually. Young rabbits age 3 months and under should only be fed hay, rabbit pellets, and water, and **NO FRUIT**. See our diet sheet for more information.

Location ■ Rabbits do not tolerate heat, dampness, or drafts. Your rabbit should be in a quiet, safe location close enough to human activity so she doesn't become lonely.

Indoor Housing ■ Secure puppy or rabbit pens 30-36" tall are best for indoor "starter" housing. If bunny jumps out, you can clip a sheet across the top of the pen for a couple of weeks until she establishes boundaries. You can put linoleum or plastic chair mats over your carpet or flooring during "potty training" and to prevent bunny from chewing or digging the carpet. If you must cage your bunny, the cage should measure a minimum of 2' x 4' per rabbit, and the rabbit must get daily exercise time. The cage should allow adequate ventilation (no aquariums!). Rabbits need a solid surface, such as a board, in part of their enclosure to prevent foot sores and discomfort from standing or resting on wire mesh. Caged rabbits should have a nest box for hiding.

Indoor Bunny-Proofing ■ Cover phone and electrical cords in plastic tubing (consult a hardware store). Don't let rabbits chew rugs or carpets; they can ingest fibers. Keep the floor clear of anything that can harm your bunny, including but not limited to: houseplants, candles, staples, and children's toys. Young bunnies usually want to chew, dig, and get into trouble. The good news: once your bunny is past adolescence, she will calm down!

Rabbit Care

Outdoor Housing ■ ...is not recommended.

Rabbits are prone to heat stroke (anything over 85 degrees is life-threatening) and can be killed by raccoons, hawks, dogs, feral cats, fly strike and other predators. Rabbits are great escape artists: they can burrow under backyard fences or squeeze out of very small openings, never to be seen again. If your rabbit must live outdoors in a large hutch or condo be sure he is off the ground, sheltered, and in the shade. Hutches should be a minimum of 2' x 4' per rabbit, and securely fastened with locks at the door and roof to protect bunnies against raccoon attacks. Outdoor housing must be enclosed on all sides—no open tops or dirt floors!

Exercise ■ If your bunny lives in a pen while you are at work, she will need "run time" several hours each day out of the pen, in a bunny-proofed room or hallway. Rabbits do not require outdoor exercise; if allowed outdoors, your rabbit must be in a predator-safe enclosure covered on all sides, and in the shade. Hutch bunnies also need supervised exercise time.

A Honey for Your Bunny ■

Rabbits are herd animals and like to have friends of the same species. If you're away all day at work, consider getting your rabbit a bunny friend for companionship. Neutered boy-girl pairs get along best, although neutered littermates of the same gender often stay friends. Bunny matchmaking can be dangerous, so always consult with a rabbit rescue group for tips on bonding, before you put one rabbit into another rabbit's territory.



Never Put Un-neutered Rabbits Together ■

Adult males will fight; adult females will fight; one of each will lead to an unwanted pregnancy.

Dogs, Cats and Other Animals ■ Never expect a dog, cat, or other animal to behave around a

rabbit. Gentle, indoor cats usually work out a good relationship with rabbits, but the introduction must be slow and supervised. Dogs must be quiet, obedience-trained, and well behaved for them to have a safe relationship with a rabbit. Most dogs cannot be left alone with a rabbit. The mere sight of a ferret or snake can cause a rabbit to have a heart attack. Always carefully supervise and protect your rabbit from other animals!

Veterinary Care ■ Finding a veterinarian who specializes in rabbits and knows how to treat them can be difficult. Consult a rabbit volunteer or go to www.rabbit.org for a referral. Be aware that rabbit veterinary care can be expensive.

Medical Emergencies ■ Rush your rabbit to the vet if you see: lack of appetite; diarrhea; few or no fecal pellets; listlessness; crusty ears; overgrown teeth, mucus around the eyes or nose; urine-soaked fur, straining to urinate; lump or swellings; head tilt; or any sudden behavior change. Rabbits don't show illness like cats and dogs, so any perceived problem should be treated as an emergency. One skipped meal could mean your rabbit is in grave danger.

Grooming ■ Trim rabbit nails, front and back, every six to eight weeks. Comb your bunny gently with a fine-toothed flea comb about once a week—more if he is shedding, to prevent fur balls. Rabbits cannot cough up fur balls like a cat. If your bunny gets fleas, carefully groom with a flea comb, dipping it in soapy water as needed. "Advantage" (but not necessarily other, similar products) has been used on rabbits with success; follow directions and keep bunnies separate until completely absorbed. NEVER use a flea dip or a flea collar—these are toxic to rabbits. Rabbits are clean animals and should generally not be bathed. Rough fur, "dandruff," or loss of fur can mean fur mites or ringworm—see your vet, as these conditions can easily be treated with medication.

To Buy for Bunny:

- ✓ Exercise pen, baby gate/pen, or predator-proof housing
- ✓ Hard plastic carrier for emergencies, trips to the vet
- ✓ Heavy crocks for food and water
- ✓ Wooden box or cardboard house to play and hide in
- ✓ Hamster brush, kitten flea comb, nail trimmers
- ✓ First aid kit (consult with a rabbit-savvy veterinarian)
- ✓ Plastic chair mat or linoleum to protect your carpet
- ✓ Hay (from a feed or pet store), veggies, pellets
- ✓ Bulk white vinegar to clean the litterbox
- ✓ Toys (from a rabbit supply company)
- ✓ Hand broom and dustpan; dust vacuum

Rabbit References ■ Read more on rabbit care! Check out www.rabbit.org and the following books: *The House Rabbit Handbook* by M. Harriman, and *Rabbits For Dummies* by A. Pavia

Dietary Recommendations

GENERAL: A rabbit's diet should be made up of high quality pellets, fresh hay (alfalfa, timothy or oat), water and fresh vegetables. Anything else is a treat and should be given in limited quantities.

IMPORTANT - all diet changes must be made gradually

- Pellets should be fresh and relatively high in fiber (18% minimum fiber). Do not purchase more than six weeks worth of food at a time, as it will become spoiled.
- Hay should be available 24 hours a day. Hay is essential to a rabbit's health. Hay provides roughage, which reduces the danger of hairballs and other blockages. Apple twigs also provide good roughage.
- Salt licks are NOT necessary.
- No nuts or seeds as these are bad for a bunny.
- Variety is key for vegetables. When shopping, look for both dark leafy vegetables and root vegetables. Also try different colors as these provide your rabbit with different essential vitamins. Stay away from beans and rhubarb, spinach, cabbage and kale. For a vegetable list, see the back of this sheet.

Babies and teenagers:

- birth to 3 weeks - mothers milk
- 3-4 weeks - mothers milk, nibbles of alfalfa hay and alfalfa pellets
- 4-7 weeks - mothers milk, access to alfalfa hay and alfalfa pellets
- 7 weeks to 7 months: unlimited alfalfa hay and alfalfa pellets (plus 12 weeks see below)
- 12 weeks - introduce vegetables (one at a time, quantities under 1/2 oz.)
- **NO FRUITS!**

Young adults: 7 month to 1 year

- introduce grass and oat hays, decrease alfalfa
- decrease pellets to 1/2 cup per 6 lbs. body weight
- increase daily vegetables gradually
- fruit rations no more than 1-2 oz. per 6 lbs. body weight (because of calories)

Mature adults: 1 to 5 years

- unlimited oat and timothy hay (no alfalfa)
- 1/4 to 1/2 cup pellets per 6 lb. body weight, preferably **timothy-based pellets**, such as Oxbow Bunny Basics T
- minimum 2 cups chopped vegetables per 6 lbs. body weight
- fruit only as treats!

Senior rabbits:

- if sufficient weight is maintained, continue adult diet
- frail or older rabbits may need unrestricted pellets to keep weight up. Alfalfa can be given to underweight rabbits, only if calcium levels are normal. Annual blood workups are highly recommended for geriatric rabbits.

Note: when you feed a lower quantity of pellets, you must replace the nutritional value without the calories, which is done by increasing the vegetables. Also, a variety of hay and straw must be encouraged all day long. We do this by offering fresh hay a couple of times per day.

Suggested Vegetables

Select at least three kinds of vegetables daily. A variety is necessary in order to obtain the necessary nutrients. Pick one each day that contains Vitamin A, (indicated by an *). Add one vegetable to the diet at a time. Eliminate if it causes soft stools or diarrhea.

Alfalfa, radish and clover sprouts
Basil
Beet Greens (tops) *
Bok Choy
Asian Broccoli (mostly leaves/stems)
Brussels Sprouts
Carrot and carrot tops*
Celery
Cilantro
Clover
Collard Greens*
Dandelion greens and flowers
Endive*
Escarole
Green Peppers
Kale(!)*
Mint
Mustard greens*
Parsley*
Pea pods (the flat edible kind)
Peppermint leaves
Raddichio
Radish tops
Raspberry tops
Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light-colored leaf)
Spinach(!)*
Watercress
Wheat grass

*contains Vitamin A

(!) Use sparingly. High in either oxalates or goitrogens and may be toxic in accumulated quantities over a period of time

Suggested Fruits

Sugary fruits such as bananas and grapes should be used only sparingly, as occasional treats. Bunnies have a sweet tooth and if left to their own devices will devour sugary foods to the exclusion of healthful ones.

Apple (remove stem and seeds)
Blueberries
Melon
Orange (including peel)
Papaya
Peach
Pear
Pineapple
Plums
Raspberries
Strawberries

HE'S NOT A CHILD'S TOY.

HE'S A REAL, LIVE, 10-YEAR COMMITMENT.

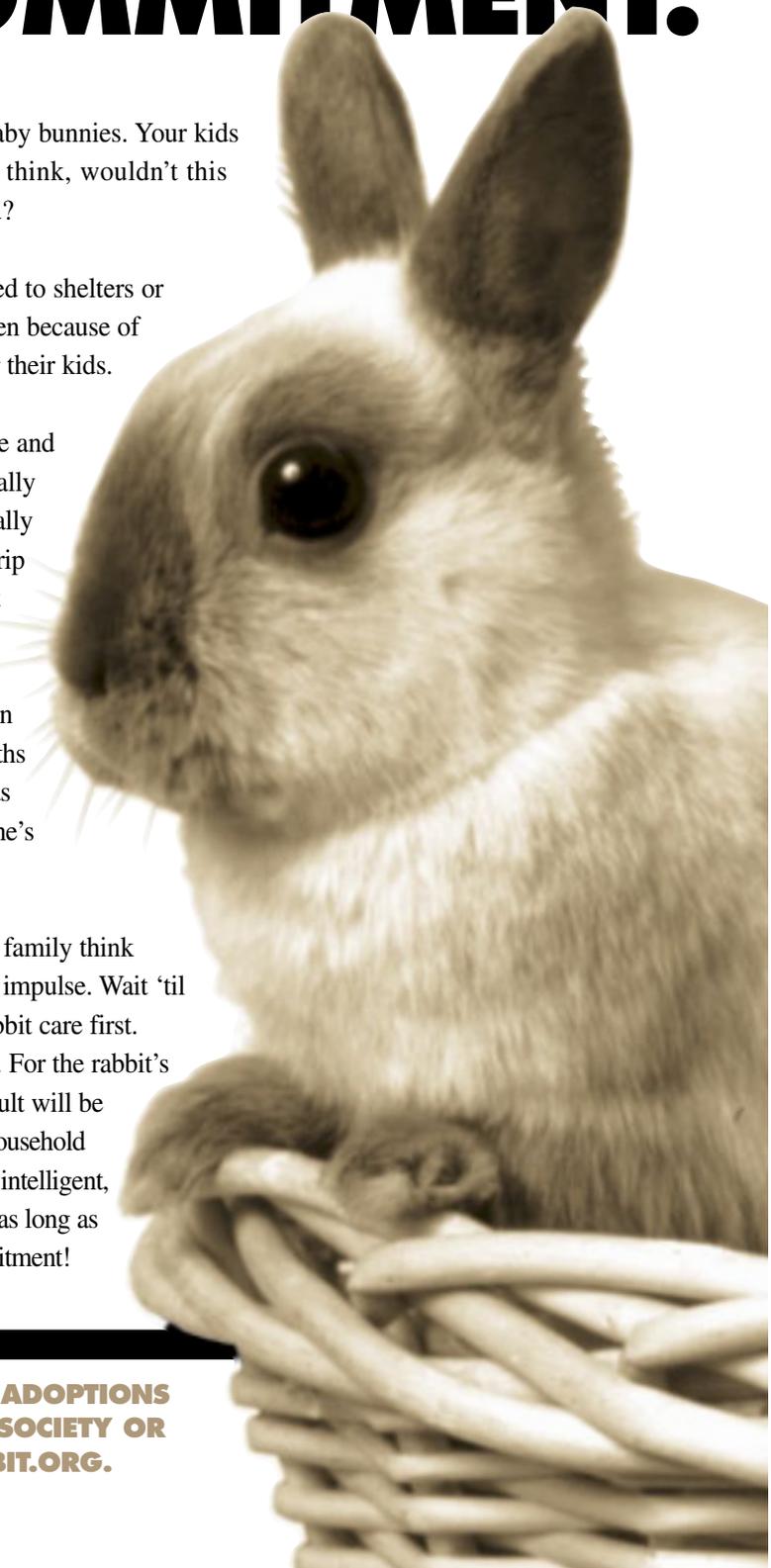
It's Easter time again. Pet store windows are filled with adorable baby bunnies. Your kids are begging you to buy one. It's so hard to resist. After all, you think, wouldn't this be the perfect, low-maintenance "starter pet" for a young child?

Think again! Every year, many thousands of rabbits are abandoned to shelters or released outdoors (a sure death sentence for a domestic rabbit) often because of misunderstandings on the part of the parents who bought them for their kids.

Rabbits are prey animals by nature. They are physically delicate and fragile, and require specialized veterinary care. Children are naturally energetic, exuberant, and loving. But "loving" to a small child usually means holding, cuddling, carrying an animal around in whatever grip their small hands can manage—precisely the kinds of things that make most rabbits feel insecure and frightened. Rabbits handled in this way will often start to scratch or bite simply out of fear. Many rabbits are accidentally dropped by small children, resulting in broken legs and backs. Those rabbits who survive the first few months quickly reach maturity. When they are no longer tiny and "cute," kids often lose interest, and the rabbit, who has no voice to remind you he's hungry or thirsty or needs his cage cleaned, is gradually neglected.

Parents, please help. If you're thinking about adding a rabbit to your family think about this: pet rabbits have a lifespan of 7-10 years. Don't buy on impulse. Wait 'til after the holiday. Make an informed decision by learning about rabbit care first. Consider adopting a rabbit from your local shelter or rescue group. For the rabbit's health and well-being (as well as for your child's) make sure an adult will be the primary caretaker and will always supervise any children in the household who are interacting with the rabbit. Domestic rabbits are inquisitive, intelligent, and very social by nature. A rabbit is a delightful companion animal as long as you remember: he's not a child's toy. He's a real, live, 10-year commitment!

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON RABBIT CARE AND ADOPTIONS
IN YOUR AREA, CONTACT YOUR LOCAL HUMANE SOCIETY OR
VISIT THE HOUSE RABBIT SOCIETY AT WWW.RABBIT.ORG.**



SETTING YOUR PET RABBIT LOOSE DOESN'T MAKE HER "FREE."



IT MAKES HER "FOOD."

Domestic rabbits lack the survival instincts wild rabbits use to fend for themselves. So they become food for everything from raccoons and dogs to crows and hawks. And the "lucky" ones who don't get eaten get run over by cars or die from heat or disease. Please, before getting a bunny – or abandoning one – contact your local humane society or visit the House Rabbit Society at www.rabbit.org.