

Bathing Bunnies

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In normal situations, rabbits generally tend to shy away from getting themselves wet. As a prey species, rabbits do not like to feel vulnerable, and a rabbit in water isn't a natural position for them to be in.

Rabbits also tend to panic when in water, and can easily fracture their spine or a limb if they thrash around whilst in water.

On top of this, when wet rabbit hair clumps together, making getting them completely dry a very difficult task, and rabbits who are left damp are potentially prone to respiratory infections and hypothermia.

When bathing a rabbit may be necessary

There may be certain situations when for health reasons it may be necessary to bath your rabbit to some degree, but often it is not necessary to wet the whole rabbit.

Rabbits who often have clagging of their back end with caecotrophs and/or urine, may require frequent bum washes to minimise the fly strike risk and ensure that urine scalding and sores do not become present.

These rabbits often have an underlying medical conditions (which may be numerous), as to why they are not keeping themselves clean. Potential reasons may include; dental problems, spinal and/or arthritic pain, excess weight, bladder stones/sludge, *E. cuniculi* or insufficient space to allow correct sanitation. A trip to the vet is necessary to try to isolate the underlying problem/s so the situation can be rectified.

Occasionally your vet may recommend a medicated shampoo for your rabbit if they are suffering from certain skin conditions. It isn't common to have to bath rabbits since there are normally other treatment options available, but if you do need to bath your rabbit then ensure the shampoo and water doesn't get in their eyes or ears and follow your vet's recommendations.

Routine bathing

This is totally unnecessary and potentially very harmful to rabbits.

Rabbits do not require routine bathing and in fact frequent washing, either with or without shampoo, strips the rabbits fur of its natural oils, which helps to keep the rabbits coat in good condition. Bathing is also extremely stressful for rabbits and has many potential and serious dangers.

Rabbits are clean animals and will groom and wash themselves. Companion rabbits will wash and groom each other too.

You will need to groom your rabbit frequently especially during a moult to remove all the hair they shed, but even during a moult you do not need to bath your rabbit.

How to bath a rabbit

If your vet recommends that for health reasons you need bath your rabbit, then get someone else to help you so one person can keep a firm hold of the rabbit whilst the other person does that bathing.

Make sure that you have a non-slip rubber mat or towel on the bottom of the bath/sink or bowl you are using as a bath. This helps the rabbit to grip so they are less likely to panic and thrash/scrabble around.

Use warm water and constantly check to ensure it isn't getting hotter or colder.

Showers can sometimes be noisy and too powerful, so using a jug of water instead is often preferable.

Start at the rabbits rump and work your way forward, wetting the hair to the skin. Do not wet their head unless told to do so by your vet, and ensure you do not get water or shampoo in their eyes or ears.

If you are using shampoo lather it in and rinse off thoroughly. When you are wetting the rabbit or rinsing shampoo off, ensure that you empty the bowl frequently of the water so the water level doesn't build up. The rabbit will not like sitting in too much water, which is why it may be easier to bath them in a bath or sink, so the water drains away all the time down the plug.

If you are only washing the rabbits back end, then after gently placing them into the sink/bowl/bath, get your assistant to lift their front end up by placing a hand under their chest and one on top, so only their back end is in the water, and then wash their back end. When finished, gently lift the rabbit out and wrap them in a warm towel. Bathing should be done as quickly as possible so the rabbit doesn't get too cold.

Drying your rabbit

When wet, rabbit hair clumps together, making drying it a thorough and lengthy job.

Rabbits who live outside, will need to stay in at least overnight, and longer if it is cold outside to ensure they are totally dry and don't go back outside when still damp. Therefore unless absolutely necessary it is not advised to bath an outdoor rabbit in the winter months. You can towel dry the rabbit, gently rubbing the hair to remove as much of the excess water as possible. Be very careful as rabbit skin tears very easily.

Use a hair dryer on a warm, but not hot and gentle setting to carefully dry the rabbit.

Extreme care must be taken to prevent burning the rabbit, so a constant check on the temperature of the heat from the dryer should be undertaken by keeping your hand also under it.

Take great care not to overheat the rabbit. Only use a hair dryer for a short while before giving the rabbit a break, ensuring they are kept in the warmth during breaks.

Dying your rabbits fur!

Although this may sound absurd to the vast majority of rabbit owners, there are always some people who feel the need to make themselves known and stand out from the crowd. It has been known for people to dye rabbit fur much like some breeds of dog (notably poodles) are.

Rabbits have delicate skin and digestive systems and therefore absorption of any dye either through ingestion through grooming or via the skin may cause serious health issues for the rabbit and is therefore very strongly discouraged and should never be recommended under any circumstances, since there is no benefit to the rabbit what-so-ever.